

nature, had been preserved in the bosom of antiquity, among all nations, strangers to Greek civilisation. We may then conjecture, with much likelihood, that the genius of Socrates and Plato drew inspiration from that source.

As time hastens on its rapid course, the desire of the world manifests itself in a more energetic strain of utterance. "Some months before the birth of Augustus," says Suetonius, "a rumour, accredited by the oracles, was spread throughout Rome. It was announced on all sides, by the interpretation of a recent prodigy, that nature was about to bring forth a king for the Roman people. The Senate, in dismay, issues a violent decree, prohibiting the children to be reared who should be born during the year. It is to Julius Marthus we owe this historic detail." Augustus was born B.C. 63. Thirty years later he ascended the throne of the world, under the title of Emperor. To all appearances, the longing of the universe ought now to be satisfied. And yet we learn from Tacitus and Suetonius that the world still continued to look for a sovereign who was to come from the East. "It was the general conviction," says Tacitus, "that the ancient books of the priests announced that at this period the East would have the ascendancy, and that from out of Judea should go forth the masters of the world." "The entire East," says Suetonius, "looked eagerly for the fulfilment of an ancient and undoubted tradition, which promised the sceptre of the universe to rulers who should go forth out of Judea." Singular coincidence! While the Jews saw the last period of the seventy weeks of years, foretold by Daniel, drawing to a close, the Etruscan priests were announcing the approach of the great year, of the tenth age—prophetic era—in which universal happiness was to reign throughout the world. "Some months before the rupture between Marius and Sylla, which was destined to prove so fatal to the Romans," says Plutarch, "the pure and serene air became all at once disturbed by lugubrious and plaintive sounds re-echoing through the heavens. Consternation filled all hearts. The Etruscan priests were assembled in the temple of Bellona, and consulted officially by the Senate as to the meaning of the phenomenon. They replied, 'The celestial trumpet announces a new age which will change the face of the universe.'"

The beautiful verses of Virgil are well-known to all. "The last period of the Cumesan oracle," says the poet, "has at length arrived. The world's great age renews its finished course. Already the Virgin* appears, ushering in the blissful reign of Saturn. A new race descends from the heights of Heaven. A child is about to be born, whose birth will close the iron time, and bring back the golden age of Saturn. To thy consulate, illustrious Pollio, is reserved the glorious date of this happy advent of great months, which will roll on their course in joyous succession. Already are the ancient stains of our iniquities effaced, and the evils of the earth come to an end.† This child will be endowed with a divine life; he will rule the pacified world with a fostering strength and virtue. At thy feet, divine Infant, shall the earth pour out its first fruits spontaneously, the ivy-branches decked with clustering berries; the colicassia, twining with the graceful acanthus. For thee the mountain goat will bring its udder flowing with milk; the lion shall no longer affright the lamb; near thy cradle, overspread with flowers, the venomous serpent will expire, the noxious plants die out, and in their stead, the aromatic plants of Assyria shall spring up.‡ Such is the age, whose golden thread the Parææ, faithful weavers of Fate, are hastening to wind off their slender spindles. Son, beloved of the gods, august scion of Jehovah, haste thee to receive our presents which await thee! Behold, the world reels in its vast orbit, and the continents, the seas, the heavens, to the depths of their foundations. All nature thrills with gladness, in joyous expectation of this newly renovated age. Oh! may my life be still prolonged to see this happy day; may a parting breath still linger on my lips to celebrate thy exploits! Shew thyself, then, Little Infant, and recognise thy mother by her beaming smile!§

For some centuries past, it has been a matter of astonishment that the Church of Christ, in its liturgical language, should proclaim the harmony existing between the Pagan oracles and the hopes or fears of Israel. There is not a Protestant in the cities of Germany, England or Switzerland who does not sneer when he beholds under the vaulted roofs of the Gothic cathedrals, now transformed into Lutheran or Calvinist meeting houses, the sculptured figure of the Sibyl on the stalls of the ancient canons, side by side with the statues of the four great Prophets. The liturgical reaction of the seventeenth century in France, was the effect of a somewhat analogous inspiration. Men blushed to chant with the Roman Church the famous verse, "Teste David cum Sibyllâ." How is it that they were not struck with the sublimity of the Catholic idea of a universal world, proclaiming with one accord its belief in Jesus, Saviour and Judge! Upon their tripods—from out the depths of their grottoes—under the oaks sacred to Dodona—on the Druid's stone of sacrifice—in the forests of Gaul—through the vast plains of the East—on whatever spot of earth a human soul has thrilled to the breath of religious inspiration, the same faith in the coming of a Redeemer, who would teach and judge mortals, breaks out and overflows the ancient world. The promise made in Eden finds a perpetual echo along the sonorous vault of ages, and to the Catholic Church is refused the right to treasure up one of the most resplendent proofs of its divine origin! It has been said: The Sibyls are a monkish device, hatched amidst the darkness of the middle ages! Was Virgil a monk? It is he who has said, in the year 43 B.C.,

"Ultima Cumesi venit jam carminis ætas."

Did Cicero live in the middle ages? Hear what he wrote: "Let us consult the verses of the Sibyl, which, in her inspiration, she is said to east to the winds on scattered leaves. But lately it was noised through Rome that an interpreter of the Sibylline books was about to develop, in presence of the Senate, the doctrine he had read therein. According to his reading, if we wished to be saved, we should consent

to give the name of King to the Master who was coming to rule over us. If this sentence is in the Sibylline books, who is this man, and what is to be the time of his birth? Ah! let us all, augurs and soothsayers, combine with one accord to discover in these books anything but a king! Neither gods nor men would ever suffer such a title to usurp the Capitol." In spite of gods and men, is it not the Cross, the sceptre of an immortal King, that holds triumphant sway over the Capitol? Manifestly, Cicero's republican sympathies revolted against the Sibylline oracle. The orator-philosopher meets the prediction of the Sibyl with an emphatic denial, and thus only succeeds in proving to future ages his own error and the veracity of the prophetess. In a word, to justify from this moment, so as not to have to come back on it, the simultaneous mention of David and the Sibyl, in that portion of the liturgical chant, where the Church of Rome traces on the tombs of her children the final catastrophe which will reduce the world to ashes, it suffices to reproduce here another text from Cicero: "Futura presentium, ut deflagrationem futurum aliquando cæli atque terrarum." Truly, here is a confirmation of the liturgical text, if one would but reflect on it—

Solvat sæculum in favilla,
Teste David cum Sibylla.

The existence of the Sibyls has been recently demonstrated by a member of the Institute, who has devoted to this subject two volumes, which, by their erudition, impartiality, and judicious criticism, have won the suffrages of the learned. M. Alexandre has dealt the final blow to that narrow-minded, illiberal philosophy of the last century, which affected to resolve the gravest questions by a derisive burst of laughter. We refer those of our readers who might desire a more searching study of the question to this dogmatical work. For our part, even before the most authentic criticism had afforded us this unexceptional confirmation, we found in the testimonies of pagan antiquity evidence sufficient to resolve the difficulty. What? we said, Cicero attests that the Sibyl announced the advent of a king, whose sovereignty the Romans must recognise if they will be saved—*si salve esse vellemus*. At the very thought of a monarch setting up again the broken sceptre of Tarquin the Proud upon the Capitol, the republican orator is roused. He asks, Where is this king? Who has seen him? For what period of the world is he reserved? He adjures both gods and men to avert such a usurpation. And we, witnesses of the folly of these recriminations on the part of the Roman orator, and of the accomplishment, to the letter, of the Sibylline predictions, we could shut our eyes to the light, and not see the admirable harmony of the pagan traditions and the prophecies regarding the Messiah, verified in the person of Jesus Christ! Virgil extols the Sibyl of Cumæ, and unweaves her oracles in immortal verses; they will be held of no account!

Among the Sibylline oracles whose text has reached us, we find some which are subsequent to the Christian era. It must be so; since paganism did not perish definitely till three centuries after the birth of Jesus Christ. But what matters it to us whether the texts at present extant be more or less authentic? At the period in which Virgil and Cicero lived, Christianity was not yet in existence. Virgil and Cicero are not suspected of monotheism. In their time, the Sibyl announced the birth of a God in human form, the advent of a King who was to bring salvation to the world, and the final catastrophe of an universal conflagration, which was to be the end of time. Then, in the lifetime of Virgil and Cicero, the Sibyl spoke as Isaiah and David. Therefore, with the Catholic Church, we have a right to establish undeniably this unanimous movement of humanity, rushing, as it were, into the arms of their Redeemer.

It is not alone the holy old man Simeon, who, under the portico of the New Temple of Jerusalem, has been admonished that his old age would be consoled by the sight of the promised Messiah. It is not alone Anna, the Prophetess, who shares this ecstatic hope. Nor is it the Jews only who have calculated the time, and who await the dawn of the divine aurora. While the courtiers of Herod attempt to turn to the profit of their master this universal expectation, conferring upon the Idumean King the title of "Messias," the flatterers of Augustus are applying equally to the Cæsar of Rome, the predictions of the Sibylline Oracles. All nations are in expectation. The world seems to stop in its course—the points of the heavens are consulted—voices are hushed—hope alone breathes! The fulness of days is accomplished. Humanity, wrapt in contemplation at this solemn hour, assumes the garb of mystery. A silence reigns around, like that of the universe when first created, awaiting from the hands of God a future Master, at the epoch fixed by the Holy Trinity for the formation of man. What a deluge of blood, of crimes and iniquities, has flooded the human race since the moment it sprang forth radiant and pure in its first creation! The work of rehabilitation will be more prodigious still. The day, whose splendours are so soon to burst forth upon our gaze, is that one which will illustrate the triumph of a daughter of Eve over the ancient serpent; and realize the blessings which, through a child of Abraham, were to descend upon all the tribes of the earth. The Priest, according to the order of Melchisedec; the Isaac of Mount Moriah; the Expectation of the eternal hills, foretold by Jacob; the Prophet, raised up by God, like Moses; the Conqueror, the son of David; pacific, like Solomon; whose reign signifies peace; whose name is Emmanuel. God with us; whose mother was to be a virgin; who was to be born in Bethlehem; whose messengers were to go forth, even to the ends of the earth and the distant islands, to announce the Kingdom of Heaven; the Messiah, in fine, is about to appear. Already his star, announced by Balaam, has been pointed out by the Magi in the East. Come, Son of the Patriarchs, Inheritor of the Kings of Juda, Hope of the just, true Lamb of the Sacrifice, Ark of the immortal Covenant—realize all the figures, accomplish all the promises; consummate the world in unity! The Old Testament, with its train of venerable promises, surrounds your cradle. Humanity, bowed under the yoke of error, seated in the shadow of four thousand years, awaits the light of your countenance. It bounds, like the thirsty stag panting for the fountains; it longs to plunge itself in the streams of living water, opened by the Saviour, and springing up to eternal life.

* Isa. vii 14.

† Isa. xl. 2.

‡ Isa. xxv. 1, 2.

§ Virg. Æl. 2. iv.