

# VIRGIL'S FOURTH ELOGUE IN THE LIGHT OF DIVINE REVELATION.

"Augusto regnante, natus est Christus."

Many and various have been the criticisms written, at different times, upon that majestic and sublime ode of Virgil, called "*the fourth Eclogue*." It is now generally admitted that the prophecies herein enunciated were not originally delivered by Virgil, but by the Cumæan Sibyl; and that "the prince of Latin poets" adapted his prophetic imitations of those sacred books to the culminating events of his own time, drawing from Hesiod his inspiration of the golden age. Wearing by the desolation of the long protracted civil wars, and cheered by the dawn of returning peace, the popular mind would aspire to the speedy introduction of those halcyon days, (\*) while the ardent gratitude of our poet would ascribe the honour of its introduction to the consulate of his patron, Pollio; through whose influence his confiscated lands had been restored, and by whose agency a reconciliation was effected between Octavianus and Antony.

Insigne mæstis præsidium reis,  
Et consulenti, Pollio, curiæ.—*Horat.* 2, car. 1, v. 13, 14.

Commentators generally have adopted the hypothesis that allusion is made, in this remarkable poem, to a child then born, or to be born under the consulship of Pollio, and on whose birth the poet inaugurates the happy age. This is owing, perhaps, to the practice (after the manner of Severus, Delphin and others) of substituting *nascente* with "quo," in the fourth Sibylline verse: whereas the *epoch* is the grand event, and upon which looms the near approach of a prophecy cast in the poetic mould of a glowing enthusiasm. Let *sub* be understood before "quo," and the verse will read indefinitely, *in whose time*; and by no means imply that the child was then born, but that the epoch of the world's restoration—"redeunt Saturnia regna"—was immediately grafted on the reigning dynasty. A servile copying of commentators has led, no doubt, to diversity of criticism, in attaching these glorious prognostications, but without success, to several individuals of imperial or noble birth, then just born or in expectation. Pollio, whose infant son some have supposed the poet would gratefully exalt to divine honours, acted too subordinate a part, and can by no means be reconciled with the oracular predictions, and lofty descent, and final destiny, which the Sibyl, not Virgil, delineates. Julia, the daughter of Octavianus (afterwards Augustus), had higher pretensions, a pious credulity overlooking the sex, to be born to those distinguished honours; and this hope was supported by vaunted pride of the fabulous *Julian race*. Again, a promising youth, *Marcellus*, whose memory has been immortalized by Virgil, being son of Octavia—half-sister to Octavianus—and afterwards married to *Julia*, appeared to fulfill *all* the require-

(\*) Vide *Hor.* 1, car 2, v. 25 to the end.

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