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VIRGIL, PRIEST OF APOLLO?

NOTES ON MR. RAPER'S RECENT PAPER.

My old friend Mr. Raper will, I know, forgive me for these notes. Let me assure him that he gave me excellent employment during one of the many wet days of last February. He took me through a number of passages, none the less delightful for being familiar: and what better occupation can a man have than the leisurely contemplation of old friends' faces, even if he be unable to trace in them the expression that another feels sure he sees?

Mr. Raper thinks that Virgil had persuaded himself that he was the priest of Apollo in a double sense: first, the priest of the old well-worn deity of song, and secondly, the priest of the last new deity, Augustus, who posed as the new Apollo. What put this into the poet's head? Simply a line of the ninth *Odyssey*, in which is mentioned one Maron, son of Euanthes, priest of Apollo, protector of the Thracian Ismarus. Was not Virgil himself a Maro, and both by his devotion to poetry and his devotion to Augustus one meet to be also priest of Apollo? This idea possessed him, according to Mr. Raper's theory, and we find traces of it everywhere in his poems.

To begin with, we find him constantly referring to Thrace with special enthusiasm. Mr. Raper gives us several passages to prove this, but I am sorry that I cannot see more in them than the faintest suggestion of any *peculiar* fondness for that home of wine and verse. Take *Ecl.* 6. 30: 'Nec tantum Rhodope miratur et Ismarus Orphea!' Good, but why not quote also the previous line, 'Nec tantum Phoebus gaudet Parnasia rupes'? Parnassus and Delphi are here placed in front of Rhodope and Ismarus, and no special devotion to the latter is proved. So with the next passage quoted, *Ecl.* 4. 55-57, which is immediately followed by the two lines about Pan and Arcadia. Again, in *Ecl.* 6. 78-81, Mr. Raper claims that Tereus, Philomela, and Procne are 'happy movers in that high company,' *i.e.* among the great ones of

Thrace. But in the story of these three, as we have it in Ovid, there is hardly a mention of Thrace, and the scene is not laid there. Then in *Georg.* 2. 37, Virgil 'shows wild joy at the thought of re-arraying his ancestral Ismarian mountain-sides with the glory of the vine': 'iuvat Ismara Baccho Conserere' . . . but go on, and you read 'atque olea magnum vestire Taburnum.' Now Taburnus was not in Thrace, but in Campania, and if Virgil loved Thrace, he loved Campania at least as much. And if we are to believe in some special joy in Thrace, we must admit it also of Lacedaemon: for when Mr. Raper quotes *Georg.* 2. 488, 'O qui me gelidis convallibus Haemi Sistat,' he has forgotten the 'O ubi campi Spercheusque et virginibus bacchata Lacænis Taygeta' of lines 486 ff. In the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice we of course find frequent mention of Thrace. But does this imply any peculiar predilection for that country?

Next Mr. Raper goes on to show that quite apart from his belief in his Thracian ancestry Virgil took on himself the priesthood of Apollo in the double sense indicated above. For Augustus, in his view, seemed to pass into and become the Actian Apollo, and their deities to be merged in one: and Maro's task was thus complete. For this strange union of Augustus and Apollo he refers us to *Aen.* viii. 679: 'Hinc Augustus agens Italos in praelia Caesar, Cum patribus populoque, Penatibus et magnis dis, Stans celsa in puppi,' etc. There is here a plain reflection of Aeneas (iii. 12), who is the real prototype of Augustus in the *Aeneid*: but I can find nothing to suggest the notion of an identity of Augustus and Apollo, except line 720, about which I will add a word later on.

Mr. Raper next proceeds to take us through a number of passages in which he sees Virgil 'raising Augustus, the earthly Apollo, to heaven, or bringing down the heavenly Apollo to earth.' In the *Eclogues* he quotes 1. 6-8 and 5. 65 ff., in neither of which, so far as I can see, is there anything more than

what can be fully paralleled from Horace, of whom no one will say that he wished to be a priest either of Apollo or of Augustus. Of the fourth *Eclogue* I will say nothing, since every point in it is matter of controversy, and the share in it of Augustus and Apollo is very far from clear. Both in this *Eclogue*, and in the invocation at the beginning of the first *Georgic*, I do not see that we need find anything more than the poet's well-known gratitude and devotion to Augustus: he could only personify the new age, and the hopes of Italy in a member of the family of the Caesars. I can see nothing to suggest a priesthood: in the second of the two passages Apollo does not appear among the gods at all. If we ask why, the answer is simply that he was not a god of agriculture, the subject of the first *Georgic*. At the beginning of the third *Georgic* he is just mentioned, though not by name (Pastor ab Amphryso), because in the legend he had a share in the keeping of live stock; but on the whole I think it may be fairly said that one might read through the *Georgics* without ever guessing that there was any special connexion between the poet and the god. But the striking passage at the beginning of the third *Georgic* is Mr. Raper's best bit of evidence for Virgil's priesthood of Augustus. Yet I am almost sure that Virgil is here picturing himself not as a priest, but as the old Roman *victor* in the *ludi Romani* 'Tyrio conspectus in ostro,' i.e. in the purple robe of the triumphator, who presides at the chariot races (which belong in origin to this festival), and then deposits his spoils in the temple not of Apollo but of Jupiter, the deity who in Virgil's poetry always means the protecting power of Rome. The sacrifice of that day is the victim of the Jupiter-religion:

iam nunc sollemnis ducere pompas
ad delubra iuvat caesosque videre iuvenco.¹

That is the picture Virgil has in his

¹ Serv. *Aen.* iii. 21: 'ubique enim Iovi iuvenum legimus immolatum.' But it is fair to say that *iuvenco* were also sacrificed to Apollo (Macrob. iii. 10. 4), and that Virgil may have been thinking of the *ludi Apollinares*.

mind, but he mixes it up after his manner with the Olympic games, which are to be transferred from the banks of the Alpheus to those of the Mincius, and with the building there of a temple to Augustus which he himself will dedicate.

Et viridi in campo templum de marmore ponam
propter aquam, tardis ingens ubi flexibus errat
Mincius et tenera praetexit arundine ripas.
In medio mihi Caesar erit templumque tenebit:

but here, just when he had an admirable chance of painting himself as the priest of the new deity, he represents himself as *victor*, robed in purple (which surely does not mean the *toga praetexta* of the priest, but the wholly purple robe of the victorious consul), and as doing what no priest of Apollo would ever do, engaging in, or superintending chariot-races. Lastly, by a fine device used elsewhere by our poet, his vision passes to the glories of Augustus wrought on the temple walls. But in all this not a word of Augustus-Apollo!

Lastly, Mr. Raper invokes the three famous passages in the *Aeneid*, of which the theme is Rome, *illa incluta Roma*, with her *imperium* to be perfected by Augustus, *divi genus*: but in all the three passages (i. 257 ff., vi. 756 ff., viii. 626 ff.), Rome and the Romans come first, Augustus following in their wake. If each passage be read and thought of as a whole, I do not see how the reader can avoid the conclusion that their true theme is rather Rome than Augustus. But Mr. Raper characterises the finest of the three as 'a hymn of exultant salutation from the hereditary Ismarian priest of Apollo at the thought of the coming re-incarnation of his god.'

Let me remark on these words (1) that in two out of the three passages there is no mention of Apollo at all; (2) that in the third (viii. 720), on which Mr. Raper relies to prove that Augustus was in the poet's mind identical with Apollo (or Apollo incarnate in him?) because 'he takes his seat in the snowy temple of gleaming Phoebus, and reviews the offerings of all nations,—he has forgotten the word 'limine':

Ipsae sedens niveo candentis limine Phoebi
dona recognoscit populorum.

Augustus was not pictured as sitting in the temple, but in front of it, looking out on the great area Apollinis, and on the nations bringing their gifts. For a deity the proper place would have been the *cella* of the temple, certainly not the *limen*. And to say the truth, I doubt if there is a single passage in the *Aeneid* which can be taken as treating Augustus as a god: to do so would have been inconsistent with his treatment as the anti-type of Aeneas. On the contrary, he is expressly called a *man* in the 'Heldenschau' of the sixth book: 'Hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis.'

I confess, too, that I can see nothing in these magnificent passages to reconcile me to the idea that Virgil fancied himself a priest, or gave himself 'a sacerdotal programme,' either fancifully and half-humorously, or seriously and religiously. If the idea really occurred to him when reading the ninth *Odyssey*, why did he not take the opportunity in his third book, when he takes Aeneas to Thrace, of making some deft allusion (such as he knew so well how to make) to Maro, priest of Apollo? And as for Apollo himself, his rôle in the *Aeneid* is hardly weighty enough to support Mr. Raper's theory. I have been reading the *Aeneid* for the last half century and more, but it never occurred to me that Apollo played a very important part in it. But knowing how blind some mortals are—myself, as I know too well, among them—I open the book about Virgil nearest at hand on my shelves (Mr. Glover's *Studies in Virgil*) to convict myself if need be. The index gives me one reference only to Apollo, in which we are reminded that ancient critics thought that he was one of the Penates. As far as I can see, Apollo is only the oracle-deity, disclosing the will of Jupiter and the Fates, as may be seen in iv. 346. Jupiter is the great god of the *Aeneid*, and it is he who at the crucial moment of the whole poem, when Aeneas is about to succumb to Dido, comes to the rescue of the hero. Apollo is a god of pastoral song in the *Eclogues*: a

god of live stock (but faintly so) in the *Georgics*: in the *Aeneid* no more than a god of prophecy, presiding over various oracles.¹

Is it like Virgil to make so much of a deity who had never been a really important one at Rome, and who had been reduced by the literary allusion of the Hellenistic period to a symbol for the art of poetry? Owing to what may be called Augustus' Apollinism (in my opinion much exaggerated of late), of which the great feature was the building of the splendid temple on the Palatine, with its area and its library, the Greek god seems to recover something of his old vitality at this period. Augustus could get a little more tone than others out of the old string, but it had no permanent resonance. Apart from the fourth *Eclogue* and the *Carmen saeculare*, the Augustan poetry shows Apollo as a plaything only. 'Sic me servavit Apollo,' said Horace when he was his own self, before Augustus made him serve the cause of the religious revival—before the simultaneous exaltation of the deity and the *princeps*. And the very fact (if such it be), which I think must have first suggested Mr. Raper's theory, that Augustus once played the part of Apollo at a court dinner-party,² shows conclusively, to me at least, that as a real power for good or evil Apollo was dead. The Sun-god of the later Empire revived his memory: but Jupiter remained throughout the first two centuries the characteristic deity of Rome.

W. WARDE FOWLER.

¹ Such he is at the beginning of the sixth book, where (in ll. 69-70) Aeneas promises him and Diana a temple and *ludi* in the manner of a Roman consul making a *votum*.

² There are suspicious features about this story of Suetonius (Aug. 70). It is given as an example of the scandal spread about Augustus by Antonius; and then 'auxit cenae rumorem summa tunc in civitate penuria ac fames, adclamatumque est postridie, omne frumentum deos comedisse, et Caesarem esse plane Apollinem, sed Tortorem: quo cognomine is deus quadam in parte urbis colebatur.' What faith are we to put in all this?