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Literary Purposes of the Myth of the Golden Age

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LITERARY PURPOSES OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
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VITA

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. GENERAL CONSIDERATION OF THE SOURCES OF THE MYTH FOR BACKGROUND</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth found in most mythologies - The science of Mythology - The Allegorical Theory - The Euhemeristic Theory - The Theological Theory - The Philological Theory - The Anthropological Theory - Original Explanations - The theory accepted in this thesis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. GENERAL CONSIDERATION OF THE HISTORY OF THE MYTH FOR BACKGROUND</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE FOUR GREATEST VERSIONS OF THE MYTH: THEIR PURPOSES</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposes of Hesiod - Purpose of Aratus - The Fourth Eclogue of Vergil, most famous use of the myth - The myth in Vergil's other works - Purposes of Vergil - Purpose of Ovid in the Metamorphoses - Purposes in Ovid's other works - Summary.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE USE OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE FOR ENTERTAINMENT AND RHETORICAL EFFECT</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment first purpose of the myth - Rhetorical effect and its relation to entertainment - Claudian's use for entertainment - Transla-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
tions of Aratus - Use by Nigidius Figulus, Lucilius Jr. ⟨?⟩, author of the Aetna, and Martial for rhetorical effect.

VI. THE USE OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE FOR PRAISE AND FLATTERY.......................... 67
Varro's and Horace's use to praise agricultural life - Seneca's use to praise the hunter's life - Horace's use to praise Augustus - Seneca's use to praise Nero - Use by Calpurnius Siculus, the Carmina Einsidlensia, and Statius for flattery - Use by Plutarch to commend historical characters - Use by Claudian and Apollinaris Sidonius for flattery.

VII. THE USE OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE FOR CONTRAST AND ESCAPE........................ 76
The similarity of these two uses - Theognis, Propertius, and Juvenal use the myth for contrast - Horace, Tibullus, and the Octavia use it for escape.

VIII. THE USE OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE FOR PHILOSOPHIC AND MORAL PURPOSES............. 85
Empedocles - Plato - The Sibylline Oracles - Cicero - Strabo - Seneca - Statius - Maximus Tyrius - Porphyry - Lactantius - Macrobius.

IX. THE USE OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMEDY...................... 103
Our debt to Athenaeus - Comic uses of the myth to be found in his works - Two similar uses mentioned by Gilbert Norwood - Lucian.

X. THE USE OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE FOR HISTORICAL PURPOSES............................. 110
Historians who mention the myth in rejecting it - Plutarch's antiquarian use of the myth - Use by Justinius - Use by Aurelius Victor.

XI. MISCELLANEOUS AND DOUBTFUL USES OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE............................ 114

XII. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY.......................... 119
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Aurea securi quis nescit saecula regis?

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
Non cessit quiquam melius sua tempora nosse.1

"Who has not heard of the Golden Age of the king who was free of care? No one can know his own times any better".

Thus said the author of the Aetna in the first century of the Empire, rejecting it as too hackneyed a topic for the poem he was about to write. Yet this did not prevent him, too, from trying his hand at a description of the well-known theme in the very act of casting it aside. It did not prevent other authors, either, for a couple of centuries after, from picking up the familiar threads again and again to weave them anew, not always with the charm of their predecessors, but some with amazing ingenuity.

And what were these familiar threads? They were the simple, charming story of an ideal, golden time at the beginning of the world when men were just, loving one another and loved by the gods. Men did not then have to suffer death, for as in a dream

1 Lucilius Jr. (?), Aetna 9, 16. Robinson Ellis in Aetna, (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1901.), pp. xxii-xxiv, says that this poem was first ascribed to Vergil, then to Cornelius Severus, then, the present view, to Lucilius Jr., friend and correspondent of Seneca. It belongs to the Appendix Vergiliana.
at the end of earthly life they were transported to the blessed
d daemon state. They did not have to suffer labor, for the earth
of her own accord brought forth bounteous fruits for them. Their
life was one of perfect bliss.

Yes, these were the simple elements that formed a deathless
legend—a frame that authors dusted off century after century to
paint within such pictures as suited their purposes. These pur-
poses are the subject of this thesis.

The fact that such a statement as that quoted in the opening
lines was possible is a testimonial to the immense popularity of
the myth and its adaptability to many literary purposes. Surely
a story that lasted so long in two great literatures (and has
even passed on into the literature of modern languages\textsuperscript{2}) must
have had great appeal and great versatility. The interesting
inquiry into its uses takes the investigator from Hesiod, a writ-
er second in antiquity only to Homer (and if Homer, the man,
ever existed, the earliest classical author known to us), all
the way to Lactantius, a father of the Christian Church, and then
two centuries beyond him. During the intervening centuries,
genial authors entertain with it; comic authors amuse with it;
serious authors educate with it. It bobs up perennially with
almost as many different aims as authors.

This thesis is limited to the Golden Age itself. At times
when its use could not be understood without a consideration of
the Silver, Bronze, and Iron Ages so frequently associated with
\textsuperscript{2}See Wilmon Brewer, \textit{Ovid's Metamorphoses in European Culture},
it, they, too, have been introduced, but only incidentally.

Several other topics closely related to the Golden Age will likewise be considered beyond the scope of this paper. One of these is the general conception of the decline of man to which Horace has given such pithy and justly famous expression:

\[
\text{Aetas parentum, peior avis, tuit}\n\text{nos nequiores, mox daturos}\n\text{progeniem vitiosiorem.}^3
\]

Classical literature abounds in such laments, but since they are not clad in mythological garb, they do not properly belong to the subject of the Golden Age. Another closely related idea is that of other ideal states to be found after death or at some remote corner of the world in the present.\(^4\) Descriptions of all these so resemble the Golden Age that when a fragment is found out of context it is frequently impossible to say to which ideal state it refers. However, the connection does not bring them within the scope of this thesis. Two other rhetorical ideas that stem from early descriptions of the Golden Age are diatribes against "the first ship"\(^5\) and "the first sword"\(^6\), two evils of decadent

4 For example: The Isles of the Blest, The Elysian Fields, the Land of the Hyperboreans, Felix Arabia, the Land of the Phaeceans, the Gardens of Alcinous, the Fortunate Isles, Sertorius' Isles of the Western Ocean, and the Island of Iambulus; in latter times Avalon and the Isle of St. Brendan. For a good introduction to the topic see Kirby Flower Smith, "Ages of the World (Greek and Roman)", Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. Hastings, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908-1926, vol. 1, pp. 192-200), p. 194. Henceforth this reference will be cited as Smith, E. R. E.
5 See Seneca, Medea 301-363 for a typical harangue against navigation, where the simple life of the ancient Romans (not mythological) who stayed home, content with the produce of their little plots of ground, is contrasted with the avarice of those who brave the dangers and evils of the sea. Medēa, "greater evil than the sea", is called worthy to be the first ship's merchandise. For an additional list of references see Smith, E. R. E., p. 196, footnote †.
6 Ibid., p. 195 footnote †, p. 196, footnote †.
civilization that were happily absent from the days of primitive bliss. Where these are divorced from the parent idea of the ages, they have not been considered in this work.

The method of gathering material was as follows: first, general discussions of mythology were read with special attention to what they had to say about the Golden Age and Saturn, its ruler. A list of authors quoted in connection with the subject was made. Then general works on the religion of the Greeks and Romans were read but with little result. In the hope that information about the Golden Age would be given in connection with the Saturnalia, the festival of Saturn, a study of books on Roman social life was made. This also yielded little. Periodicals were consulted under the topics, "Golden Age, Ages of the World, Saturn, Kronos, and Saturnalia". Nothing was found of direct value to the topic of this paper. In fact, no work dealing with literary purposes of the myth could be found. However, all this reading furnished fine background material and made it clear that Hesiod, Aratus, Vergil, and Ovid had well-known versions of the myth. The works of these authors were then read, together with all commentaries to be found at the Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois. The commentaries yielded a valuable list of other authors who had been cited in connection with the Golden Age. To this list in turn an appreciable addition was made from the copious footnotes of Kirby Flower Smith's article in the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics entitled "Ages of the World (Greek and Roman". All the authors on the list were read, and they again yielded other references. In short, an attempt was made to
read all authors mentioned in accessible sources as having written of the Golden Age. This reading was done with a view to noting the purposes for which the myth was used.

Some authors whose works could not be found at the Newberry Library were consulted at the Classical Library of the University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, through the courtesy of the librarians there.

Since the emphasis of this thesis is on purpose, the division into chapters will be made on a basis of these. Only Hesiod, Aratus, Vergil, and Ovid, due to their great influence on the myth, will receive a separate chapter as authors. Their chapter will precede the others on various purposes. A chronological treatment of all the authors who dealt with our topic would have given but a confused idea of their collective literary purposes.

Naturally the chapter on Hesiod, Aratus, Vergil, and Ovid will necessarily foreshadow some of the purposes that will receive separate treatment in later chapters. For the sake of unity and completeness in the later chapters, a brief reiteration of use by these four authors will be given in the proper place.

This division by purposes cannot avoid being somewhat arbitrary at times. Purpose is such a vague, complicated thing, and the authors have left no diaries to tell exactly what they had in mind. It has been difficult to classify certain passages which seem to carry out several purposes simultaneously. In such cases it has been found best to select the predominant purpose. It must be kept in mind that this classification is merely an attempt to organize the topic for clarity of presentation. Many
times purposes blend into one another.

The aim of this thesis has not been to give a complete and detailed account of each mention of the Golden Age in classical literature. The purpose has been to give typical ways in which the myth has been used. It could never be thought that a positively complete list of writers who mentioned a subject like this had been given anyway unless some miracle should restore to us the immense body of classical literature that has been lost. It can be thought that from the authors here and now accessible a complete list of typical uses may be made—a list on which all those lost references, if restored, might find a place. Every human effort has been made for completeness, but if one author here or there has been missed, his purpose would undoubtedly fall into one of the classes to be described in the following pages.
CHAPTER II
GENERAL CONSIDERATION OF THE SOURCES OF THE MYTH - FOR BACKGROUND

During the long ages that followed the fall of our first parents, primitive man kept the tradition of a long-past age when his forefathers, people vastly superior to himself, had enjoyed an earthly paradise. Moses drew on this early tradition, the particular one kept by the Hebrews. They by divine grace had preserved it in its true form. Among peoples bereft of this supernatural guidance the tradition became warped and overlaid with varying mythological details and personages, but the germ of the true story was left.

This idea was so deeply imbedded in men's consciousness that we find some version of it in most mythologies. Frequently the degeneration was elaborated with the addition of ages successively worse between the first or best age and the current or worst. Such a degeneration happened to the Greek myth of the Golden Age. In Hindu mythology we find various cyclic ages named from the predominant color of Vishnu and parallel in idea to the Greek Golden Age, Silver Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. The Etruscans had eight ages in association with a cyclic theory which later
influenced the Greek myth. 1 Frank S. Dobbins gives an epitome of a perfect state, similar to the Golden Age, early in man's history, in the Persian Avesta. He also mentions a "Golden Age of Tezenco" in Mexican lore and a similar Peruvian myth about two children of the Sun who established a civilized country on the banks of Lake Titicaca. Furthermore he states that Chinese tradition points back to the beginnings of the human race as a time of happiness and perfection. 2 In Celtic literature is found Tuan McCarrell's narrative of his experiences in various Irish Ages. 3

This appearance of practically the same myth in widely scattered sections of the human race forms one of the main problems of the science of Mythology, while another equally baffling one is the origin of the myths in the first place. We shall now inquire into the origin of the myth of the Golden Age as it might be explained by the various theories of mythology. These may also cast some light on several developments such as the identification of certain gods with the Golden Age, the persistence of this myth when so many others were forgotten, and its possible re-birth at remote places where mankind had lost touch with the main current of tradition.

Let it first be understood, however, that if this myth and its type were the only myths, there would be no science of Myth-

ology. The science was invented to explain, or rather to explain away, the "silly, savage, and senseless element" in mythology, to use Max Muller's often-quoted words. In books on the subject such a story as that of Cronos swallowing his children receives a great deal of attention, while the beautiful story of the Golden Age under the rule of that same Cronos gets little. The study concentrates upon unnatural stories, not natural ones. No wonder there is little material on the Golden Age. What could be more natural than for man, hemmed in by the inexorable realities of labor, pain, sin, and death, to escape in imagination to a lovely wonderland where things were the exact antithesis of the stern conditions of primitive life? Such flights of fancy are so very true to human nature that even if there were not a basis of true tradition in the myth, we would not find a spontaneous origin hard to account for.

Ante-dating Christianity there were two theories according to whose principles the myth of the Golden Age might be interpreted. One was the Allegorical Theory associated with Theagenes of Rhegium (Sixth Century B.C.). According to this theory the story of the Golden Age and its successors, Silver, Bronze, and Iron, would be considered merely an allegorical way of saying that as time goes on men are getting worse and worse. The main purpose of the Allegorical Theory was to explain the shameful and irrational elements in other myths, and since there is nothing to be ashamed of in the beautiful story of the Golden Age, we do not find it dealt with by any specific writer of this school. The

other ancient theory was Euhemerism, named from its founder Euhemerus (Fourth Century B.C.), who said that the gods were deified kings and heroes. This theory offers an explanation for the origin of the Golden Age myth. It is quite plausible that some superior king might have taught his people agriculture and the other arts of civilization, thus building up his reign to a Golden Age and himself to a god on the lips of later exaggerators.

Andrew Lang says, "Very probably portions of the legends of real men have been attracted into the mythic accounts of gods of another character, and this is the element of truth at the bottom of Euhemerism". The legend of Saturn might conceivably have been affected like this. To speed the process, there was a custom among certain ancient kings of naming themselves after gods.

After the victory of Christianity, the Theological Theory became predominant. This is the theory that pagan mythology is a perversion of the true tradition to be found in the Bible. Such identifications as Deucalion with Noah and the Golden Age with Paradise were made. This theory still cannot be disproved for such obvious parallels as the above. Unfortunately, worthy but overzealous mythologists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (notably Abbe Banier, Gerard Vossius, and Jacob Bryant) went to the extremes of identifying as many as six and seven pagan gods with one Biblical character and linking nearly all

5 Ibid.
pagan legends to narratives from Bible History. This was carrying it too far; the immense vaugeness of the facts discountenances such pigeonholing. Extremes brought discredit to the theory, yet they could not mar its essential probability for the origin of a myth so strikingly parallel to the Bible as the one with which this paper deals.

Since materialistic philosophy has come to the fore, attempts have been made to explain mythology in a way agreeable to it. One has been the Philological Theory of Max Muller, which sees the origin of myth in a corruption from language to language of a natural force or object. This theory, too, fell into disrepute because of the wide discrepancies in the results of philological research. Furthermore, it adds nothing to our knowledge of the Golden Age, so these few words suffice here. Another theory important in the history of Mythology yet unimportant to the subject of the Golden Age, was that of Herbert Spencer. It explained the origin of myth in misunderstandings of originally sensible names and statements—misunderstandings that led the savage mind to believe in the personality of phenomena.

The currently accepted theory of Mythology is the Anthropological Theory, championed by Andrew Lang. It looks for the origin of myth in the psychology of savages. It is especially concerned with proving that the immoral and unnatural elements in the myths of a civilization are a survival from the early savage stages through which civilization has passed, stages when such

7 Jacob Bryant, A New System: or an Analysis of Antient Mythology, 3 (London, printed for J. Walker, W.J. and J. Richardson, etc., 1807: 6 volumes). In future references this work will be cited as "Bryant".
brutalities were not considered unnatural.

In the case of the Golden Age, the Anthropological Theory has much to offer. Even if ancient revalation had been forgotten, human psychology would have afforded a fruitful source for this myth. In fact several commentators found a psychological origin for it hundreds of years before a theory of Mythology was based on the psychological approach. If primitive man had the same tendency as we today, he glossed over the difficulties of the past and surrounded its happier side with an aura of idealism. This nostalgia state of mind has been dubbed "the Old-Oaken-Bucket delusion" in modern psychology. It is easy to see how the eternal human complaint, "What is the world coming to?" could have been exaggerated into the conception of a perfect time in the remote past. As Sanadon says in his notes on Horace:

64 Tempus Aureum. Le dérèglement de l'esprit humain a produit cette division des tems. Toujours mécontens du siècle où nous vivons, nous regrettons celui de nos peres, comme nos peres ont retreté celui de nos aieux. De-là les poètes ont partagé la durée du monde en quatre âges principaux, & ils ont embelli cette idée de fictions ingénieuses....

Heyne, the great editor of Vergil, inclined to a psychological explanation:

Quascunque autem in hoc genere descriptiones novae felicitatis habemus, sive in Orientis sive in Graecis ac Romanis poetis, omnes fere inter se similis sunt: ....Nullum in his phantasma est, quod non mens humana magno metu contacta concipere possit si ad vitae simplicitatem, a pestibus et malis magnarum urbium et magnorum imperiorum liberatam, cogitatione se retulerit. Haec eadem aetatis aureae, saeculi Saturnii, bona constituent. Translata ea partim ad Elysium, et ad Hyperboreos, ac similia commenta.


9 Chr. Gottlieb Heyne, P. Virgilius Maro,3 (Lipsiae, sumptibus Caspari Fritsch, MDCCCI: 6 volumes.), vol.1, pp. 96-97.
Campbell Bonner postulates a primitive parent myth of which the Golden Age, Isles of the Blest, and other utopias are but offspring. He gives a psychological explanation of its origin:

By careful examination of the remains of ancient Märchen and proverb-lore, these scholars (Zielinski and Crusius) have shown that there must have existed from very ancient times, probably long before Hesiod, various Greek folk-sayings about a time when, or a place where, man lived a life of luxurious ease, with food and drink ever ready at hand, and untroubled by the incubus of toil and penury. The notion of this Utopia sprang directly from the fancy of the people, (Italics not in original), and was without exact limitation in space or time. And, as is usually the case in genuinely ancient popular fancies, no moral element was involved in it....

Hays in his notes on Hesiod is another author who gives a psychological origin to the myth of the Golden Age.11

There are several original explanations by individual authors which merit citation here.

In a note on Vergil's statement that Jove took away fire from man at the close of the Golden Age,12 B. A. Gould offers the following interesting explanation:

Removit: not 'extinguished' but 'concealed'. This must point to some period in society, when, from great calamities, perhaps a combination of them, civilization had been retrograde: as the country became depopulated, wolves multiplied; the arts, may even the use of fire, were forgotten. The savage few, who remained, recounted and exaggerated their ancestors' wealth, till it seemed miraculous.13

W. Warde Fowler has another original explanation. After saying that the first inhabitants of Italy, as of Europe gen-

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12 Vergil, Georgics 1.131.
ly, were palaeolithic men, and that after them came a long line
of neolithic men who were pastoral folk who descended in time
from the hills into plains such as that of Latium to begin agri-
culture, he continues:

It is here, I think, that we must put Virgil's Golden Age,
which seems to belong to the later period of the indigenous
peoples, before the migrations began. I may just throw out the
suggestion that this charming myth of the Golden Age represents
ideally the earliest experiments in agriculture of a still pas-
toral people, in virgin soils, teeming with productive power,
which afterwards became weakened by a natural process of decay.14

Fox finds deference for ancestors the ultimate source of the
myth. Citing reasons for the perpetuation and sanction of the
myth, he says, "Again, conscious respect for the convictions and
opinions of former generations plays an important part. In its
ideal form this deference becomes a belief in a Golden Age in the
past, a period not merely of ease and bliss, but one in which the
wonders of legend were normal occurrences".15

P. H. Epps finds in a book called Cosmic Consciousness16 by
R. M. Bucke a possible explanation for "...the ubiquity of this
legend...plus the inability of the human spirit to let it die"
which has disposed him, "to wonder whether this story of a Golden
Age may not represent in dim outline some actual prehistoric con-
dition of the human family....". Bucke describes three stages in
the development of the human mind, (1) simple-consciousness, (2)
self-consciousness, and (3) cosmic-consciousness. For many

14 W. Warde Fowler, Aeneas at the Site of Rome2, (Oxford, B. H.
15 William Sherwood Fox, The Mythology of All Races, Vol. 1,
Greek and Roman, ed. L. H. Gray, (Boston, Marshall Jones Co.,
1916.), p. xlvii.
16 "Richard M. Bucke, Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolu-
tion of the Human Mind" (New York, E. P. Dutton Co., 1923.)."
milennia mankind remained in a state of simple-consciousness, much akin to that attained by the higher order of animals—ignorant of right and wrong and free of the acquisitive instinct. Mankind finally evolved to the present state of self-consciousness; the normal child reaches it at about three years of age. Self-consciousness is characterized by anxiety about self and the quality of being self-centered, "which all writers agree brought an end to the Golden Age....".

Epps concludes:

Now if Bucke has rightly described man's mental progress, it is easy to see that the legend of the Golden Age is really an idealized description of man's life when he was largely, at least, in the stage of simple-consciousness. Men lived as they did, not because of the fineness of their characters, feelings and emotions but because they did not know any better....

We need not here go into Bucke's dream of cosmic-consciousness.17

These, then, are the various explanations that can be found for the origin of the myth of the Golden Age.

The Theological Theory is the one accepted in this thesis. The story of the Golden Age is held to be a perverted form of the true account of man's early happiness, either in the Garden of Eden or immediately after the flood, when Noah and his just descendants held sway over the earth. It is not very popular at the present time, when most theories seek to find an explanation more in accord with the materialistic science and leave the Biblical account out of the picture, if indeed, they do not treat

the Bible as just another series of myths. However, scientifically one is still free to accept the Theological Theory for the origin of the myths that resemble the Bible stories. Even Andrew Lang, important exponent of the Anthropological Theory, says, "In the long history of mankind it is impossible to deny that stories may conceivably have spread from a single centre, and been handed on from races like the Indo-European and the Semitic to races as far removed from them in every way as the Zulus.... But, while the possibility of the diffusion of myths by borrowing and transmission must be allowed for,...".

\[\text{Italics not in original}\]

The real origin of the myth is so hidden in the mists of antiquity that no evidence may be found to prove one source to the exclusion of others, or for that matter to disprove any. The whole subject is hedged in with a huge "Perhaps", and if this account seems vague and contradictory, it is but a feeble reflection of the uncertainty that pervades the reading in the field. All is theory. No theory can exclude the possibility that an all-but-forgotten primitive revelation formed the skeleton to which Euhemerism and man's human longings have added a body of myth.


19 Andrew Lang, "Mythology", The Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed.
CHAPTER III

GENERAL CONSIDERATION OF THE HISTORY OF THE MYTH—FOR BACKGROUND

Whatever the origin of the myth of the Golden Age, most authorities agree that Hesiod did not invent it any more than Homer invented the Isles of the Blest.¹ Before the myth was ever written down, it is certain that generations of early men heard their bards tell it over and over again. One finds the adjective "charming" frequently applied to the myth; it is certainly a happy choice of word. There is something appealing in the thought of primitive men around their rude fires thus charming away the adamant realities of life.

The first author to give the story of the Golden Age in historic times is the Greek Hesiod (Eighth or Ninth Century B.C.)² In him it is fully developed. As far as extant writers go, he is the one source of the myth, and all other versions except that of Plato depend on him. It is the opinion of K. F. Smith that this first version in literature "still reflects with remarkable fidelity the old folk-tale of a Lost Paradise before

² Hesiod, Works and Days 109-126.
the simple beauty of the legend had been marred by the intrusion of moral lessons and specific philosophical doctrines...."\(^3\)

Since a translation of Hesiod's version will be given in the following chapter, a summary suffices here. His description of the other ages is so closely related to that of the Golden Age that they too will be summarized.\(^4\)

Hesiod credits the gods of Olympus with the creation of the golden race when Cronos ruled heaven. These first men lived free of sorrow, continually making merry, content with their lands and flocks and "many good things". They did not have to work, as the earth, of its own accord, provided for them abundantly. They never grew old. Their death was not a cause for dread, since it was a mere falling asleep. After death they became guardian daemons roaming the earth, clothed in mist, judging and rewarding. Hesiod does not say why this race passed away. The poet goes on to say that the gods of Olympus then made a second race of silver, less noble in body and spirit than the golden race. In the Silver Age, childhood was a hundred years long, but maturity was short and sorrowful. Men would neither sacrifice to the gods nor keep from sinning and wronging each other. For this reason Zeus, the son of Cronos, was angry and put them away. When they perished they became blessed spirits of the underworld, of a second order yet deserving of veneration.

When it comes to the third, the bronze race, Zeus is in the

\(^3\) Smith, E. R. E., p. 194.
role of creator. (This, together with the destruction of the Silver Age men by Zeus, implies that the dynastic change on Olympus had taken place. Zeus had overthrown and imprisoned his father, Cronos.) Hesiod says that the bronze race, worse than the silver race, terrible and strong, sprang from ash trees. He emphasizes their violence and strength and hardness of heart. Their armor, houses, and implements were of bronze. They ate no bread. The end of these came through mutual self-destruction. Death and Hades finished them.

Hesiod here interrupts the downward trend of the Ages to insert as a fourth age the Age of Heroes, or Demi-gods, the champions of Thebes and Troy, the race immediately prior to Hesiod's own. Those who were not destroyed in the heroic wars, Hesiod transports to the Isles of the Blest at the ends of the earth, where life is again lived under Golden Age conditions and where liberated Cronos reappears as ruler.

After the heroes have been taken care of, the downward trend continues. Hesiod introduces the last, fifth, most terrible Iron Age: his own. A diatribe against the evils of life follows—prototype of countless imitations in classical literature. It is not necessary to give all the details, as imagination and experience will supply them to any reader. Disagreement between father and children, friend and friend, host and guest, and brother and brother; labor; sorrow; death; the triumph of evil force; defiance of the gods; and the relegation of just men to the underdog's position are a few. The withdrawal of the goddesses Aidos and Nemesis from the earth is the most significant
thing in this passage. It implies the presence of these divinities on earth in the preceding ages, opening the way to the belief that in the Golden Age especially the gods associated with men, an idea that was taken up by later writers.

Elsewhere Hesiod describes the state of those who give just judgments. Some of the details of this description were imported into later versions of the Golden Age, notably the following ideas: that their fields were the only care of the men of the Golden Age, that their diet was supplemented by acorns and honey, and that, above all, their activities did not include travel on ships.

This, then, is the primary version of the myth. It is to be noted that Hesiod has five ages altogether. He is the only extant author who treats the Age of Heroes. All others mention four ages or less.

Hesiod's treatment is full of inconsistencies. In the first place, it is inconsistent to interrupt the decline with the Age of Heroes. In the second place, the gradual decline in the story of the Ages contradicts Hesiod's own story of Prometheus, wherein the fall of man from happiness to misery is accomplished in one stroke at the opening of the fateful cask by Pandora. Finally, in the Prometheus myth, the Golden Age is represented as the time when man enjoyed the use of fire, before Zeus took it away and, again, for a short time after Prometheus regained it. This puts it in the reign of Zeus and is inconsistent with placing it under the rule of Cronos in the Ages myth. Such ambiguity about the

5 Hesiod, Works and Days  225-237.
6 Ibid.  42-105
time of the Golden Age and inconsistency between various views about the beginning of the world in the same writer is a feature of the use of the myth throughout its history. But after all, especially in poets, a consistent scheme about a vague matter is too much to ask. Hesiod probably just reflects conflicts that existed between the various sayings and hymns in the vast storehouse of primitive myth upon which he drew.

In the myth of Hesiod, the Golden Age, the Heroic Age, and the Iron Age stand out with great individuality and distinctness, whereas his delineations of the Silver and Bronze Ages are rather weak. This has lead to the opinion that tradition gave Hesiod well-formed myths of the Golden and Heroic Ages and, perhaps, just the names of the Silver, Bronze, and Iron Ages, to which he was free to affix original descriptions, not notably successful in the case of the Silver and Bronze Ages, but naturally vivid because of experience with the current Iron Age.7

There is no moral lesson within the structure of the myth itself. The names of the ages suggest degeneration, but wickedness within an age is not given as the reason for the coming of an inferior age. That was a later addition. There is no direct descent; the appearances of the different races are independent acts of creation. Hesiod does not say that the men of the Golden Age were good; it is merely implied in the wickedness of the succeeding contrasted Ages. Some of the details Hesiod adds seem to be moral, but, if taken ethically, the story contradicts

itself. For instance, a warlike spirit, while treated as a fault in the men of the Silver and Bronze Ages, does not interfere with the righteousness of the heroes. Especially in the Golden Age myth, closest to the primitive folk-tale, is the moral element lacking. This points to its absence in the pre-historic form.

The considerable literature that has grown around Hesiod's work concerns itself mainly with the inconsistencies already mentioned, such as his introduction of the Age of Heroes and the discrepancy between the Ages myth and the Prometheus myth. Commentators seek to wrest meaning from such features as the century-long childhood of the men of the Silver Age and the ash-tree birth of the Bronze Age people. The Golden Age per se does not receive much discussion.

Hesiod's, then, was the original literary version of the myth. Let us briefly restate its elements: a merry life, free of sorrow; contentment with lands, flocks, and "many good things"; autonomy of the earth; perpetual youth; and death a mere falling-asleep, followed by a transfer to the blessed daemon state. We shall now see how the story was taken up and elaborated by succeeding authors and how different elements in it were stressed from time to time by different schools of thought.

The earliest known reference after Hesiod is a line quoted by Philodemus from the old epic Alcmaeon.9

During the Sixth Century B.C., Theognis, Greek poet of Megara, refers to the Golden Age.10 The holiness of it is

10 Theognis, Maxims 1133-1138
stressed; we see a decidedly more moral element growing in it. In the same century, we hear rumblings of another trend that was to continue down the centuries. From the works of Xenophanes comes evidence that Hesiod, with all his anthropomorphic gods, was doubted in toto. About the time of Theognis and Xenophanes, the elder Orphics, followed by the Pythagoreans, emphasized vegetarianism in the Golden Age as a result of their belief in reincarnation. Another development took place at the same time, when the Orphics began to look forward to a reward after death for a life of merit: "Naturally, therefore, not only among the Orphics and their disciples, but also among their opponents, the ideal of the Lost Paradise became more and more prominent. Discussion or description of the Golden Age, more especially of its analogue beyond the grave...continued to grow in importance and interest...."

During the next century, the Fifth B. C., Old Comedy, in ridiculing the above Orphic doctrine, gave rise to an interesting development in the history of the myth of the Golden Age. Cratinus (520-423 B. C.) was the first to make fun of the autonomous feature of the Paradise. He was followed by Crates, Pherecrates, Teleclides, Eupolis, Nicophon, and Metagenes. In their hands the Golden Age became the "Lost Paradise of the bonvivant, the votary of ease, and the irresponsible bachelor..." not to say glutton. It is likely that folk variations of this sort based on the story of the Golden Age had existed long before.

13 Ibid., p. 195.
the comedians put them to this use.

In the Fifth Century B.C. also we find added emphasis given to the vegetarian feature of the Golden Age. Empedocles (490-430 B.C.) gave the first extant expression to this Pythagorean theory.\(^{14}\) Hesiod had not said that the men of the Golden Age did not eat meat; however, vegetarian philosophers saw this implied in his statement that the earth brought forth their food.\(^{15}\)

Early in the Fifth Century B.C., Heraclitus (540-475 B.C.) had stated the beginnings of the cyclic theory that was to affect profoundly the Golden Age myth.\(^{16}\) Empedocles carried this theory, too, to new heights. He visualized Love and Strife alternately uniting and separating the elements of the universe, thus alternately ruling, with intervening half-and-half-ages between each of theirs. In line with this he made Kypris (Love) ruler of the Golden Age instead of Cronos.\(^{17}\) This idea that the Golden Age was a period of perfect love and peace, only implied in Hesiod, but stressed in Empedocles, bore much fruit in later versions of the myth. So did the idea that the universe moved in cycles, with its concurrent belief that the Golden Age was to come again in the next cycle.

In the Fourth Century B.C. Plato (427-347 B.C.) took Empedocles' cyclic theory and elaborated its relationship to the Golden Age in the most important and influential discussion of

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
\(^{15}\) Empedocles, Fragments 128D, 129D, and 130D.
\(^{16}\) See the account of Iaertios Diogenes quoted in John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, p. 147.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp. 224-225. Empedocles, Fragments 128D, 129D, 130D.
They will be more fully considered in the chapter on the uses of the myth in Philosophy. In Plato's writings the Golden Age was again the "Age of Cronos", though he was not dependent on Hesiod for his version of the myth. One feature he emphasized was the communism of the Golden Age. Another was its peace, a result of the only perfect government the Universe has ever had. He also brings out the idea that in that age men could talk with animals.

At the end of the Fourth Century B.C. and the beginning of the Third, Epicurus (342-270 B.C.) had a tremendous impact on the whole subject. He denied Hesiod completely, doing away with divine interference in human affairs, relegating the gods to some remote sphere, and giving an explanation of man's early days similar to that of modern evolution. He said that man should worship the deities from a great distance as ideals of perfect blessedness, but that they are not the rulers of man nor the makers or upholders of the world. He sought naturalistic causes to explain all the phenomena that had given rise to myths.

Subsequent to Epicurus we find two opposing lines of thought about man's history: Hesiod's, that man has degenerated; Epicurus', that man has progressed.

The Stoics, likewise at the end of the Fourth Century B.C., reiterated the cyclic possibilities of the Golden Age. They taught a doctrine of "great years" of the universe, each brought.


to an end by a universal conflagration, each repeating the former
down to the tiniest detail. It followed that the Golden Age
would come again. The late Orphics, too, are credited with vari-
ous cyclic theories revived to agree with Plato, the Stoics, and
the Orient, which had a well-formed theory of the magnus annus.
The accounts that have come down are of a much later date.20

It is interesting to see how very much the succession-of-
ages-idea changed as it flew into the nebulous stratosphere of
philosophical speculation. The old dynasty of rulers was gone.
In one Orphic version21 the Golden Age was said to be that of
Phanes, the Silver, that of Cronos, the third and last, the Ti-
tanic, that of Zeus. Another Orphic version, more closely re-
lated to the Stoic and Romanized in its terminology, has come
down to us. It boasts an even more elaborate division of reigns:
Saturn for the first; Juppiter for the second; Neptune for the
third; and Pluto for the fourth. These gods were regarded as
personifications of the four elements. By the Alexandrian Period
(Third and Second Centuries B. C.) formal identification of the
four ages with the four elements in parallel order, fire, air,
water, and earth was complete. The degeneration motif was still
there, but the coefficient of descent "is the ever increasing
distance from that to which the gods themselves owe their being..

In other words, we have the somewhat vague idea of a cyclic
theory of the Universe attached to a much more highly developed
doctrine of the rebirth of the soul and of the means whereby it

21 Ibid.
All these philosophical variations carried the ages idea so far away from Hesiod's simple, beautiful folk tale that they ceased to bear a resemblance to it and became even more remote ramifications than kindred ideal states such as the Land of the Hyperboreans and the Isles of the Blest. The main effect they did have on the myth of Hesiod, as it was to be used by certain later writers, was the addition of the happy thought that the Golden Age was again at hand, ready to be lived over again in the next cycle.

To return to the Stoics, besides the cyclic element, we find in their theory another feature that has had its effect on the Golden Age myth. This is an idea transmitted to them by their predecessors, the Cynics. The Cynics had emphasized moral responsibility. They had also decried the complexities of civilization, stressing simplicity of life and the wisdom of getting back to nature. Thus the Stoics found a way to reconcile Hesiod (decline of man) and Epicurus (progress of man). They granted that man had made progress in civilization and inventions, but that this progress was the cause of moral and physical deterioration in himself. In their ideology, the Golden Age became the ideal simple life of the past.

The Alexandrian poet, Aratus, (c. 315-c. 245) in the Third Century B.C. gave the most famous expression to this particular Cynic-Stoic revision of Hesiod's myth. He described three

22 Ibid., p. 199.
24 Aratus, Phaenomena 96-136.
ages, Gold, Silver, and Bronze. A notable feature of his version is his identification of Dike, Justice, daughter of Astraeus, with Hesiod's Nemesis, who left the earth in the Iron Age. During the Golden Age (according to Aratus) she freely associates with men; during the Silver Age she lives on hilltops but occasionally makes an appearance to lecture a group who have gathered; during the Bronze Age she withdraws completely from the earth to become the constellation Virgo. Emphasis is laid on the ethical element—man's relation to his fellow man, the world, and the state. There is less of the marvelous than there was in Hesiod. The decline in ages and the withdrawal of Dike are the results of the wrong doing of man. The separate races are not arbitrary individual creations by the gods. As a good feature of the Golden Age appears the absence of navigation. The peace of it is stressed as by Plato. In line with the Cynic-Stoic theory that inventions have brought the ruination of man, the fabrication of the first sword is laid to the men of the wicked Bronze Age. The vegetarian idea that the Bronze race was the first to eat the flesh of the ploughing ox is also included in Aratus' version.25

The scorn for navigation and the horror at the evil invention of "the first sword" are characteristic of the Alexandrian period. Detached from the parent myth this sort of diatribe becomes a commonplace in poetry.26

About the Second Century B. C. another influence began to intensify further the idea that there was a Golden Age to come again in the future.

This was the immense literary activity of Alexandrian Jews in composing spurious "oracles" purporting to be Sibylline. They inserted Jewish tradition (especially the hope of a Messiah to come to bring a Golden Age), clung to some cyclic theory of the ages, and produced a queer farrago of the Biblical and the mythi­cal. With the "Sibyl" is associated the further division of the "magnus annus", with the four ages corresponding to the four seasons, into ten great months, on the analogy of the solar year, each the length of a saeculum.27

It is impossible to say exactly when or why the next great development in the myth of the Golden Age took place. This was the identification of the Roman god, Saturn, with the Greek god, Cronos, as king of the Golden Age. The whole subject breathes with confusions.

The vague character of the ancient Italic deities--those shadowy numina who presided over the various functions of life--is well known. Saturn was one of these Italian gods of tremendous antiquity. The only clues to his original character are two: his name, which in spite of philological difficulties probably indicates a god of sowing, and the date of his festival, the Saturnalia in December, which suggests its origin as an ancient agricultural feast in a slack season of the year, having for its

27 Ibid., P. 200; J. B. Mayor, "Sources of the Fourth Eclogue", in Vergil's Messianic Eclogue, (London, John Murray, 1907.).
object the germination of the winter seed just sown. The wife of Saturn was Ops, goddess of harvest and plenty. Somewhere along the line Saturn's domain was extended from sowing alone to all agriculture. This is all we know of the true Saturn.

Various reasons have been advanced for the identification of Saturn with Cronos. Dyer says that it "seems to have arisen from his being the oldest of the Italian divinities...." Fox finds in the identification of Ops, Saturn's wife, with Rhea, Cronos' wife, the cause of Saturn's subsequent assumption of the character of that god. Gayley, on the contrary, claims that the confounding of Ops with Rhea took place after the identification of their husbands, and, he implies, because of it. Fowler says flatly, "and it is impossible to say why Saturnus became Kronos."

Perhaps it was a good thing for Saturn that he did become identified with Cronos. It rescued him from the limbo of forgotten gods. This happened so early in the contact of Greece with Rome that all the details about him in literature (with the exception of the few already given) are really attributes of his Cronos personality. The following quotation from Rose, though not about Saturn himself, is such a perfect analogy to what

happened in the case of Saturn that it is worth including here:

Now if we turn to a typical Roman deity, such as Vulcan, or to give him the more correct form of his name, Volkanus, we find that he was the god, or spirit, of destroying fire, and therefore was worshipped outside the city limits as a rule. When we have that, and described a few details of the ritual with which he was worshipped, we have told the whole story. He had no mythology at all; when a Roman poet says that Vulcan did this and that, and especially that he was married to Venus and made a shield for Aeneas or some other hero, he is talking of the Greek smith-god, Hephaistos, with whom Vulcan was identified, but with whom he had originally nothing whatever to do....33

Saturn's metamorphosis parallels this.

Once the identification was made, it was only natural to associate Saturn with the Golden Age, since Cronos had ruled over it and was also king of the Isles of the Blest. But how to get Cronos from Olympus to Italy? This was a problem for which the Greek imagination had no trouble in finding a fanciful solution. Saturn was said to have fled in a ship to Italy in order to escape the wrath of Juppiter, who had dethroned him. This "voyage" was thought to be commemorated in the device of a ship on ancient coins34, and the etymology of the name Latium (from laterе) was based on the god's having hidden there35. Janus, represented as an early king, welcomed Saturn to Italy. Saturn became a king also, and his reign, during which he taught the people agriculture, became known as the Golden Age. This is called by Bailey "a typical instance of the kind of legend which grew up in order to smooth over the awkward join between Greek and Italian elements in the new combined conception of a deity...."36

33 H. J. Rose, Primitive Culture in Italy, pp. 43-44.
34 Ovid, Fasti 1.229-240.
35 Ibid., 1.238; Vergil, Aeneid 8.322-323.
36 Cyril Bailey, Religion in Vergil, p. 106.
The Greeks taught the Romans, then, to think of Saturn, along with other gods, in human form, and, as far as details went, a Grecized human form. It became customary in art to represent the ruler of the Golden Age as an aged man with head covered. His agricultural sickle became the fatal weapon with which Cronos had attacked and overthrown his father, Uranus. The feet of his statues were swathed with wool in the Greek manner or wore chains to represent his bondage by his son. He was worshipped in his temple in the Forum with a Greek rite.

One of the most interesting effects of Greek influence on Saturn was the transformation of his festival, the Saturnalia. It lost its identity as an agricultural festival and became a reminiscence of the Golden Age by means of what Laing calls "legendary accretions". Though the subject of this thesis does not embrace a detailed consideration of the ceremonies and how they may be construed to represent a revival of the Golden Age, it is well to give a general idea in passing. This subject is worthy of a study in itself and represents one of the most fascinating effects of the myth of the Golden Age on the lives of the ancients.

37 Cyril Bailey, Phases in the Religion of Ancient Rome, p. 129.
39 Cyril Bailey, Religion in Vergil, p. 106.
Numa is credited with having instituted the Saturnalia, which gives an idea of the early date assigned to it. During the Saturnalia slaves were allowed the greatest license. They sat at the table with their masters, some say, were even served by their masters, to show that all men had been equal in Saturn's reign. To show that there had been an abundance of all good things then, gifts were freely exchanged during the festival. To show that all men possessed things in common, people unreservedly appropriated the belongings of others, even clothes. It was considered a crime to be reserved in manner when everyone was gay and unrestrained. Public business was postponed. Gambling was allowed. War could not be declared, probably because of the peace that had existed during the Golden Age. During the festival the chains were taken off Saturn's statue "to teach us that Liberty and Happiness had flourished in his Reign...."43

Several features connected with the worship of Saturn were also reminiscent of the Golden Age. For instance, Plutarch suggests what must have been a popular one, this explanation of Saturn's temple being the treasury: that there was no avarice or injustice among men while Saturn ruled and that he taught the agricultural arts which form the source of wealth.44 There was an ever-open gate called the Porta Pandana, reminiscent of Saturn's reign when doors were unnecessary because of universal honesty. Finally, in the middle of June the night soil was carried out of Saturn's gate, the Porta Stercoraria; this was to

42 Plutarch, Lives, Comparison between Numa and Lycurgus.
44 Plutarch, Quaestiones Romanae, 42.
Thus we see that by the time Latin literature mentions the
Golden Age, the simple story of Hesiod has undergone quite a few
modifications. The idea of vegetarianism as a virtue of the
first race has been imported into it by the Pythagoreans and re­
peated by Empedocles; the hope that the Golden Age will come
again has been fostered by the cyclic philosophers; the myth has
been given greater moral power by the Cynic-Stoics. The latter
have also been responsible for 1) the idealization of the Golden
Age as the simple, agricultural life of the past, and 2) an in­s­
tistence on the absence of man's inventions in the Golden Age,
notably such sources of evil as the "first sword" and the "first
ship". Moreover, Hesiod's Nemesis has been identified with
Justice, daughter of Astraeus; Cronos has been identified with
Saturn; and the Saturnalia has become a symbolic renewal of the
Golden Age. Its peace and love have been stressed.

Concurrent with the history of the myth has been the devel­
opment of an antagonistic idea that there never was a Golden Age.
This is associated mainly with the Epicureans. They deny crea­
tion, assign a natural, simple, caveman life to primitive men,
and stringently eliminate mythology from the subject. The career
of this school of thought is important to the subject because in
the subsequent literature there is a vacillation between the two
views of primitive life, sometimes even in the same author. The
presence of the opposite point of view tends to make delineations
of the Golden Age itself much more naturalistic in some details.

45 T. H. Dyer, The City of Rome: Its Vicissitudes and Monuments²,
p. 5.
One of the first great poets of Rome, Lucretius (98-55 B.C.), who had an incalculable effect on his successors, gives the sublime expression to this naturalistic view of early man. His picture is unforgettable and surprising in its similarity to modern thought upon the subject. Early man, in his pages, has a grim struggle with wild beasts for his existence, though his character is upright. Lucretius' underlying principle, that man has deteriorated morally and physically while painfully wresting improved living conditions from nature, is the same old story of the decline of humanity, but rather than being akin to the Golden Age, it is anti-mythological in tone.

The first Roman writer to refer to the Golden Age was Varro (116-27 B.C.), during whose lifetime Lucretius was born and died. Cicero, (106-43 B.C.), their contemporary, uses the myth also. Nigidius Figulus, (c. 98-45 B.C.), likewise in the early half of the First Century B.C., repeats the ideas of Aratus concerning the relation of Justice to the Golden Age and to the constellation of Virgo. Catullus (84-54 B.C.) has a doubtful reference to the myth. None of the foregoing add any new details to the story.

When we come to the latter part of the First Century B.C., to the literary Golden Age of the Empire, we see Vergil, (70-19 B.C.), its outstanding figure, referring to the lovely old story

46 Lucretius 5.783-836, 925-1027.
47 Varro, De Re Rustica 3.1.5.
48 Cicero, De Natura Deorum 2.63.
49 Nigidius Figulus, fragment on p. 27 of Alfredus Breysig, De P. Nigidii Figuli Fragmentis apud Scholiasten Germanici Servatis, (Berolini, Formis Gustavi Schade. Dissertation publicly defended at the university Frederica Guildma April 11, 1854).
50 Catullus, Marriage of Peleus and Thetis 384-408.
For him there are two ages. He offers an ingenious compromise between tradition, which he loves, and contemporary thought, which he cannot ignore. He keeps the traditional Golden Age of Saturn in ancient Italy and places the naturalistic, Lucretian, cave-man life at the beginning of the present Silver Age, under Juppiter's rule. Juppiter's motive in thus reducing man's condition is not the petty retributive jealousy toward Prometheus ascribed to the ruler of the gods by Hesiod, but the desire to make man surmount difficulties for his own good. **Vergil** is not at all times consistent when handling the subject, as will be shown in the fuller account of his version in the next chapter. The above compromise is his great contribution to the formation of the myth. He also contributes some original details, for instance, wine flowing in the streams (though for this he might have been indebted to the comic poets), and sheep naturally bearing purple and saffron wool. **Vergil** continues the stress on the idealization of the agricultural life, and, above all, he sees in Augustus another Saturn and views the Empire as the harbinger of the Golden Age to come.

**Horace** (65-8 B.C.) has surprisingly little to say about Saturn's Age; on the whole, he leans toward a naturalistic view of primitive life. However, one famous epode of his (the Sixteenth) depicts the Fortunate Islands as a bit of the Golden Age 252-254.

52 Vergil, Georgics 1.121-146.
53 Vergil, Georgics 1.132.
54 Vergil, Eclogues 4.42-45.
55 Vergil, Aeneid 6.791-794.
preserved on earth by Zeus. He also refers briefly to our subject in one other epode and one of his odes.56

The Elegiac Poets sing charmingly of the Golden Age. Tibullus (54-19 B.C.), draws a famous picture of it in which he sees as its counterpart the country life he loved so well.57 He stresses the chastity of the Golden Age. Propertius (fl. 30-15 B.C.) mentions it, too58 and in him, naturally, it stands for the days when maidens were true and chaste, and he is continually sighing after the "good old days" when simple gifts were enough for love. He introduces an original note—that heaven had its own Golden Age and subsequent deterioration to parallel that on earth. At about the same time as Tibullus and Propertius, Strabo the Geographer (c. 63 B.C. - ?) quotes the words of a philosopher about the Golden Age.59 Ovid (43 B.C. - 19 A.D.) added another great formative version to the history of the myth, one that ranks in fame and importance with those of Hesiod, Aratus, and Vergil. In his comprehensive scheme of the Metamorphoses, having started with a cosmogony, he must work out some way of reconciling the conflicting views about the early days of man. This he does remarkably well60—even putting the Flood Legend in a reasonable chronological place. First, Ovid leaves a doubt about whether man has been created by the "god who made all else" (unnamed) or by Prometheus. At any rate, the Golden Age follows creation; then come the Silver, Bronze, and Iron Ages in order.

57 Tibullus, 1.3.35-47.
58 Propertius, 2.32.51-56.
59 Strabo, 15.1.64
60 Ovid, Metamorphoses 1.78-415.
However, the Iron Age is not the present age as in Hesiod. The Flood brought that wicked age to a close. Our race has its beginning when Deucalion and Pyrrha, the only survivors of the catastrophe, throw stones over their shoulders according to the well-known story. Thus room is left subsequent to the Flood for Epicurean, cave-man primitive life. The Heroic Age, instead of interrupting the story of the other ages as in Hesiod, can be treated later as an episode in the history of our race after the Flood. Saturn is kept as ruler of the Golden Age and Zeus of the other ages. Saturn's voyage to Italy after his dethronement and the continuation of the Golden Age there, as depicted in the Fasti, also fit logically into this version of man's early life. Thus Ovid makes a masterly synthesis of all the hitherto conflicting elements in the conception of primitive life. He has other references to the Golden Age besides the two already mentioned.

Ovid is outstanding, too, for giving the Silver Age a definite personality, characterizing it as the time when Jove divided the years into seasons, making it necessary for men to build houses and plant their own food. He is also original in stressing something that had been implicit in earlier versions of the Golden Age but not emphasized, namely, absence of laws. He likewise introduces streams of milk and nectar into the picture, though in this he might have been indebted to the comic

61 Ovid, Fasti 1.233-253.
63 Ovid, Metamorphoses 1.90-93
64 Ibid. III.
The first extant association of balmy eternal spring-time with the Golden Age likewise occurs in Ovid. After him the myth had undergone all its great revisions. The subsequent history is just a list of authors who used it, a few adding relatively unimportant details.

A contemporary of Ovid, the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, treated the Golden Age as a Cretan myth, giving a typical summary. His own opinion was that Saturn was a man.

Under the name of Hyginus, freedman of Augustus, a school treatise on myth has come down to us called the De Astronomica. This offered a rehashing of Aratus' work on the same subject. Caesar Germanicus (15 B.C. - 19 A.D.) not long afterwards made a translation of Aratus from Greek into Latin, thus also perpetuating Aratus' version of the myth of the Golden Age.

The authors of the Silver Imperial Age of Latin literature made extensive use of the myth. Seneca the Philosopher (3 B.C. - 65 A.D.) employed it time and time again in his philosophical works and in his plays. An obscure poet of the time, Calpurnius Siculus, used it in his verses and so did the author of the contemporary Carmina Einsidlensia. The epic poet, Statius, (45-96 A.D.) used it, too, and added another virtue to the life of the Golden Age, the absence of prophesy and divination.

Martial (38 or 41-102 or 103 A.D.) used the myth, and so did

65 Ibid. 107-108.
66 Diodorus Siculus, Historical Library 3.61.
68 Calpurnius Siculus 1.42-47, 63-64, 4.5-11.
69 Carmina Einsidlensia 2.21-24.
70 Statius, Silvae 1.6.35-48: Thebaid 3.793-804.
Juvenal.\textsuperscript{72} Plutarch (46-120 A. D.), the Greek biographer, found many occasions to refer to the Golden Age.\textsuperscript{73} The disputed author of the Aetna wrote the lines quoted in the opening paragraph of this thesis. To his description of the felicity of the age he added streams of olive-oil, that sine qua non of Roman comfort.\textsuperscript{74} The author of another disputed work in the Appendix Vergiliana, the Lydia, extolled the Golden Age with more originality than good taste, as the era of free love.\textsuperscript{75}

One would think that Pliny The Elder (23-79 A. D.) would have used the myth somewhere in his voluminous works, but he did not. He dismissed as mythical the story of Saturn,\textsuperscript{76} and in places where it was customary to use the Golden Age he substituted the times of the Trojan War. Tacitus (55-120 A. D.), another great writer of this era, gave a naturalistic view of primitive life in which the mythical element was non-existent, though in a few details, such as eternal springtime at the beginning of the world, he reflects the influence of more mythical conceptions.

In the next, the Second Century A. D., Justinius in his abridgement of Trogus' history, mentioned the Golden Age.\textsuperscript{77} Censorinus in his De Die Natali mentioned it only to say it would be disregarded in his work.\textsuperscript{78} Two Greek authors, the satirist

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} Juvenal 6.1-20, 13.28-70.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Plutarch, Life of Cimon: Life of Aristides: Comparison of Numa with Lycurgus: Roman Questions 12, 42. An incidental reference occurs in the Life Of Coriolanus.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Lucilius Jr. (?), Aetna 9-16.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Appendix Vergiliana, Lydia 74-78.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Pliny, Naturalis Historia 3.1.8.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Justinius, Historiae Philippicae 43.1.3, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Censorinus, De Die Natali 5.(16).
\end{itemize}
Lucian, 79 (120-180 A. D.), and the Neo-Platonist, Maximus Tyrius, 80 used our story. The latter laid renewed stress upon the vegetarianism of the Golden Age.

Porphyry, (233-304 A. D.), another Greek Neo-Platonist, also sang the praises of vegetarianism in the next century, the Third Century A. D. He likewise brought in the Golden Age. 81 Toward the end of this century and the beginning of the next, Lactantius (260-340 A. D.), the Christian apologist, saw the possibility of a Golden Age before the pagan polytheistic gods had been invented and preached that Christ had brought that happy time back, but only for those who believe in and live up to His words. 82

Aurelius Victor, historian of the Fourth Century A. D., dealt with the Golden Age as an episode in the history of Italy. 83 Late in the same century and at the beginning of the Fifth, Claudian, (fl. 395), Roman court poet, made extensive use of the myth. 84 An opulent detail he added was the idea of precious jewels sparkling common as pebbles on the sea shores. Slightly later Macrobius (395-423 A. D.), Roman grammarian and philosopher, composed a learned miscellany of dialogues called the Saturnalia. He introduced an explanation of the festival that has become a treasury of information on the subject. It is in another work, however, a commentary in Somnium Scipionis that he refers to the Golden Age. 85 Later in the Fifth Century A. D.,

79 Lucian, Saturnalia 7-8.
80 Maximus Tyrius 1.13, 20.
81 Porphyry, De Abstinentia 2.20-21, 3.27, 4.2.
82 Lactantius, Divinae Institutiones 1.11, 5.5-8, 7.2.
83 Aurelius Victor, Origo Gentis Romanae 1, 3.
84 Claudian, De Raptu Proserpinae 3.19-30; Laus Serenae 70-82: De Consulatu Stilichonis 422-466: In Rufinum 1.380-387.
85 Macrobius, In Somnium Scipionis 2.10.15.
Apollinaris Sidonius, Saint and Bishop, also uses the myth, but not in the edifying connection one would expect. 86

The chronologically last author to refer to the myth of the Golden Age is Lactantius Placidus, a mythographer of the Sixth Century A. D. (?). 87

Thus ends the long history of the myth of the Golden Age. It played its part on the stage of literature for roughly fifteen-hundred years—from Hesiod (8th or 9th Century B. C.) to Lactantius Placidus (6th Century A. D.). During that time we find it mentioned by forty-three extant authors on eighty-nine different occasions. From the number of authors who used the myth and the great variety of their works, one can gauge its perennial importance in Classical Literature. Its great versatility is thus reflected, too.

We have seen this remarkable myth start as a simple folk-tale and go on to be taken up and elaborated by author after author. It is like a snowball, growing and growing as it rolls down the hill of literature, sometimes imbedding in its surface fantastic foreign objects, yet always retaining its original essence, form, and beauty.

It remains to examine more closely this remarkable career. The following chapters will investigate the purposes for which so many authors introduced the story of the Golden Age into their works over such a long period of time.

86 Apollinaris Sidonius, Panegyric on Avitus 600-602: Panegyric on Anthemius 105-115.
87 Lactantius Placidus 3, 4.
CHAPTER IV

THE FOUR GREATEST VERSIONS OF THE MYTH:
THEIR PURPOSES

It was apparent in the previous chapter that the four greatest formative versions of the myth of the Golden Age are Hesiod's, Aratus', Vergil's and Ovid's. This chapter will seek to explain the purposes for which these authors introduced it into their works.

As we have seen, Hesiod, ancient Greek peasant, was first to use the myth. This he did in a didactic poem called Works and Days. It was written by the hard-working farmer-poet to his brother Perses in an effort to teach him how to live. Perses was a wastrel and spendthrift who had bribed judges into awarding him an unfair portion of their father's estate. In the particular section where he uses the Golden Age myth, Hesiod is trying to sell Perses the idea of the necessity of labor.

"For the gods keep hidden from men the means of life", ¹ he tells his lazy brother, then proceeds to give the series of events through which this obligation to work for one's daily bread has come about. He cites first the stories of Prometheus and Pandora. Then, to further elaborate the idea, he tells the ¹ Hesiod, Works and Days 42.
famous story of the four Ages. The succession offers a history of how gradually injustice and wickedness came into the world until such injustice as the bribing of judges could exist. Only in the Golden Age could men live free of care and labor; now men must work.

Hesiod's purpose in introducing the myth is moral. It teaches that the Golden Age is a thing of the past and that labor is one of the necessary conditions of life in the present Iron Age. There is a possibility, too, that the story may have appealed to Hesiod's simple muse as a likely chance to do some of his best versifying and to add a bit of poetic charm to the piece.

The inconsistency between the Pandora myth, wherein troubles and wickedness were said to have come to men all at once when Pandora opened the box, and the Ages myth, wherein they are said to have come gradually, has already been noted.

The following is a translation of this all-important parent description of the Golden Age. ² Observe its simplicity in the light of all the later details we have seen added to it in the previous chapter:

First of all the deathless gods who dwell on Olympus made a golden race of mortal men who lived in the time of Cronos when he was reigning in heaven. And they lived like gods without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief: miserable age rested not on them; but with legs and arms never failing they made merry with feasting beyond the reach of all evils. When they died, it was as though they were overcome with sleep, and they had all good things; for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint. They dwelt in ease and peace upon their lands with many good things, rich in flocks and loved by the blessed gods.

² Hesiod, Works and Days 109-126.
But after the earth had covered this generation - they are called pure spirits dwelling on the earth, and are kindly, delivering from harm, and guardians of mortal men; for they roam everywhere over the earth, clothed in mist and keep watch on judgements and cruel deeds, givers of wealth; for this royal right also they received;....

How much this reflects the conception of earthly bliss of a simple, peasant people! Flocks and fruits and lands are wealth; joy of spirit and strength of body are the summa bona. Escape from work, from strife, and from death complete the picture of happiness.

When Hesiod says that the golden race, transformed into earth-wandering guardian daemons, "keep watch on judgements and cruel deeds", he seems to be pointing a warning finger at his brother.

To summarize, Hesiod's purpose in using the myth of the Golden Age is mainly moral, with a possible secondary motive of poetic embellishment or rhetorical effect.

The purpose of Aratus, Alexandrian poet of the Third Century B. C., in introducing the story of the Golden Age is very obvious. His Phaenomena describes the various constellations. The constellation Virgo is identified with the Nemesis who, according to Hesiod, had been on earth in the first ages of man but left with Aidos in the Iron Age. The varying relationship of this goddess toward man becomes in Aratus the main characteristic of each of his three ages. Myth is mixed with astronomy for the purpose of rhetorical embellishment or a touch of lighter-vein entertainment in the midst of a didactic work.4

3 Hugh S. Evelyn-White, Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homerica, P. 11.
4 Aratus, Phaenomena 96-115.
The following is a translation of Aratus' words about the Golden Age:

Beneath both feet of Boötes mark the Maiden, who in her hands bears the gleaming Ear of Corn. Whether she be daughter of Astraus, who, men say, was of old the father of the stars, or child of other sire, untroubled be her course! But another tale is current among men, how of old she dwelt on earth and met men face to face, nor ever disdained in olden time the tribes of men and women, but mingling with them took her seat, immortal though she was. Her men called Justice; but she assembling the elders, it might be in the marketplace or in the wide-wayed streets, uttered her voice, ever urging on them judgements kinder to the people. Not yet in that age had men knowledge of hateful strife, or carping contention, or din of battle, but a simple life they lived. Far from them was the cruel sea and not yet from afar did ships bring their livelihood, but the oxen and the plough and Justice herself, queen of the peoples, giver of things just, abundantly supplied their every need. Even so long as the earth still nurtured the Golden Race, she had her dwelling on earth. But with the Silver Race...

In the Silver Age she lived in the hills, only occasionally talking to man; in the Bronze Age she left the earth (to become the constellation Virgo) because the people of that age were first to forge the sword of the highwayman and the first to eat the flesh of the ploughing ox.

Notice how the old element of the miraculous is omitted from this Stoic version; there is no wondrous autonomy of the earth; there is no talk of the gods interfering to create the successive races; the men of the Golden Race are not said to have become spirits after death. This emphasis on the moral side, in other words, taking the increasing wickedness of men to be the cause of degenerate ages, is typically Stoic. So is the idealization of the simple agricultural life and the condemnation of invention.

6 Ibid., p. 391.
tions such as the first ship and the first sword.

We have thus far seen two uses of the myth of the Golden Age in the works of these two authors. Hesiod used it to teach a moral lesson. Aratus used it for the sake of rhetorical embellishment, to relieve the tedium of his astronomical writing with the pleasantly entertaining literary episode. We may suspect Hesiod, too, of this as an underlying motive.

Vergil's uses of the myth are not so simple. He uses it in several different connections and for several different purposes.

First let us examine the great general aims of all Vergil's works. They were 1) of course, to give pleasure or entertainment; 2) to cast an aura of mythical greatness around the origin and history of the Roman people; 3) to glorify the destiny of Rome as mistress of the world in the conviction that the Empire and the Emperor had the blessing of the gods; and 4) to eulogize the type of life that Augustus was attempting to foster by his reforms. Especially in his earlier works, Vergil has the motive of praising Pollio, his patron, also.

We shall see that the myth of the Golden Age fits in remarkably with all these purposes. Perhaps it would be well to start with the celebrated Fourth Eclogue which is "the most famous literary work ever inspired by any aspect of our theme...."7

Vergil commences his Fourth Eclogue by saying that he will elevate the woodland strain of his Eclogues to a dignity worthy of a consul (Pollio), and indeed he does. His woodland becomes the Golden Age. But as the Eclogue goes on it rises above its

mere dedication to a sublime prophecy of the Golden Age to come. Since the time of Sulla a rumor had been circulating that the last saeculum of the Sibyl was coming to an end and that the Golden Age of the next cycle was at hand. Vergil gives expression to this deep hope for an era of peace—a hope that had already been held forth by the treaty of Brundisium.

Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas.

The whole idea is linked up with the birth and life of some mysterious child. It is not within the province of this thesis to discuss the knotty question of the identity of the child. It suffices to say that a great factor in the fame of this Eclogue has been the belief that Vergil was giving an inspired prophecy of the coming of Christ. J. B. Mayor presents a very good case for Vergil's having been familiar with some Sibylline prophecy of Jewish origin, now lost, into which some version of Isaiah's prophecy had been inserted.

At any rate, the birth of the child in the consulship of Pollio is to usher in a Golden Age:

...ac toto surget gens aurea mundo....

In lovely light-hearted dactyls addressed to the boy, ("tibi..., puer"), the picture of the Golden Age is drawn in stages that correspond to the boy's growth. Tenderly Vergil

10 Vergil, Eclogues 4.4.
11 J. B. Mayor, "Sources of the Fourth Eclogue", Vergil's Messianic Eclogue, (London, John Murray, 1907.).
12 Vergil, Eclogues 4.9.
13 Ibid., 18.
pictures the child's infancy thus:

puer,
At tibi prima, nullo munuscula cultu errantis hederas passim cum baccare tellus mixtaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho ipsae lacte domum referent distenta capellae ubera, nec magnos metuent armenta leones; ipsa tibi blandos fundent cunabula flores. occidet et serpens, et fallax herba veneni occidet; Assyrium volgo nascetur amomum. 14

Thus the earth will bring forth of its own accord beautiful munuscula of flowers for the baby's delight. His milk will be furnished by goats who come of their own volition. All things die that might harm the child or the animals who supply his food. Wild beasts, serpents, and poison plants perish.

When the boy grows old enough to read and to know what virtus is, the earth will bring forth food suitable to his age, such as corn, grapes, and honey distilled from oaks:

molli paulatim flavescet campus arista, incultisque rubens pendebit sentibus uva et durae quercus sudabunt roscida mella. 15

Though a few traces of wickedness will remain in the boy's youth, when he comes to manhood the perfection of the Golden Age will be complete:

Hinc ubi iam firmata virum te fecerit astas, cedet et ipse mari vector, nec nautica pinus mutabit mercies; omnis ferit omnia tellus. non rostros patietur humus, non vinea folcem; robustus quoque iam taurus iuga solvet arator; nec varios discet mentiri lana colores, ipse sed in pratis aries iam suave rubenti murice, iam croceo mutabit vellera luto; sponte sua sandyx pascentis vestiet agnos. 16

To the conventional picture of no navigation or trading and

14 Ibid., 18-25.
15 Ibid., 28-30.
16 Ibid., 37-45.
no necessity for agriculture, Vergil adds the original thought of vari-colored sheep to eliminate the labor of dyeing wool.

In this, the most famous use of the myth, the purpose is glorification of the future of Rome. There is a secondary motive of praise of Pollio, but the poem soon transcends this aim, and the main idea shining forth is that of the Empire's bringing a new golden era to the world.

In the Aeneid Vergil again uses the myth for the same purpose. However, here personal praise of the Emperor Augustus becomes more predominant. The passage occurs in Book Six where Anchises is showing to Aeneas the famous procession of his future descendants. Speaking of Augustus he says:

hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promittì saepius audis
Augustus Caesar, Divi genus, aurea condet
saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva
Saturno quondam, super et Garamantas et Indos
proferet imperium.... (Italics not in the original) 17

Elsewhere in the Aeneid Vergil turns back from the glorious future destiny of Rome and the present Emperor to touch his country's past with the glittering wand of his imagination. When Aeneas, later in the course of his adventures, has reached Latium, he contacts King Latinus, who is represented as a descendant of Saturn in a mythical genealogy.18 Latinus, welcoming the Trojans, puts all doubts of his people's character aside when he says that they are the "race of Saturn, not just because of laws or fear of punishment, but voluntarily living according to

17 Vergil, Aeneid 6.791-795.
18 Ibid., 7.45-49.
the custom of their old-time god...."

> ne fugite hospitium neve ignoranté Latinos
> Saturni gentem, haud vinclo nec legibus aequam
> sponte sua veterisque dei se more tenentem.19

Elsewhere Diomede, refusing to join King Latinus' people as an ally, appeals to this feeling when he says:

> 0 fortunatae gentes, Saturnia regna
> Antiqui Ausonii, quae vos fortuna quietos
> sollicitat suadetque ignota lassessere bella?20

When Aeneas is seeking the aid of the Arcadian King Evander in the war against Turnus, he visits Evander's citadel on the actual site of Rome. Having met each other outside the town, Aeneas and Evander approach it together, the aged Evander hospitably conversing to make the way seem shorter ("varioque viam sermone levebat").21 He tells the history of the region and thus brings in the Golden Age under Saturn:

> Haec nemora indigenae Fauni Nymphæaque tenebant
gensque virum truncis et duro robore nata
quis neque mos neque cultus erat, nec iungere tauros
aut componere opes norant aut parcere parto,
sed rami atque asper victu venatus alebat.
primus ab aetherio venit Saturnus Olympo,
arma Iovis fugiens et regnis exsul ademptis.
is genus indocile ac dispersum montibus altis
composuit legesque dedit, Latiumque vocari
maluit, his quoniam latuisset tutus in oris
aurea quae perhibent illo sub rege fuere
saecula: sic placida populos in pace regebat,
deterior donee paulatim ac decolor aetas
et bellis rabies et amor successit habendi.22

This account with its touch of Euhemerism does not agree so well with Vergil's more mythical pictures elsewhere. He is one of those authors who veer back and forth from the Hesiodic to the

19 Ibid., 7.202-204.
20 Ibid., 11.252-254.
21 Ibid., 8.309.
22 Ibid., 8.314-327.
Lucretian view of primitive man.\textsuperscript{23}

In the above passage it is interesting to see how he stresses the peace of the Golden Age under Saturn, peace, such a prominent blessing in men's minds now that Augustus has restored it. His ushering in the inferior age with madness for war and for money is also significant, because they were two faults that had caused much unhappiness in the history of Rome.

In general, when Vergil brings the Golden Age into the last six books of his Aeneid, it is to stress the distinction enjoyed by Italy in having once been Saturn's realm. Thus he bestows a glamorous legendary pedigree on his beloved country. It is the same feeling that makes him call it "Saturnia" in such a passage as this great salutation:

\begin{quote}
Salve, magna parens frugum, Saturnia tellus
magna virum: tibi res antiquae laudis et artis
ingredior, sanctos ausus recludere fontis,\textsuperscript{24}
Ascraeumque cano Romana per oppida carmen.
\end{quote}

This loving use of the myth in praise of Italy is peculiar to Vergil. We find it used in quite this way by none except the great national poet.

In the Georgics, Vergil's use of the Golden Age takes on a more moral tone. His purpose is to praise the beauty and teach the necessity of the agricultural life. This fits in with the general aim of the Georgics and with the policy of Augustus' new government:

It is stated that Maecenas, acting on the principle of em-

\textsuperscript{23} See Georgics 2.336-345 where the "ferrea progenies virum" spring first into being in the springtime of the world. Again in Eclogues 4.21-22 goats coming to be milked of their own accord is treated as a miraculous event, whereas in Georgics 3.316-317 the same thing is treated as a natural occurrence.
ploying the poets of the time in favor of the conservative and restorative policy of the new government, directed the genius of Vergil to the subject of the *Georgics*. No object could be of more consequence in the eyes of a statesman whose master inherited the policy of the popular leaders than the revival of the great national industry, associated with happier memories of Rome, which had fallen into abeyance owing to the long unsettlement of the revolutionary era as well as to other causes.\footnote{25 Vergil, *Georgics* 1.121-135}

The following passage from the First *Georgic* is on the dignity and necessity of agricultural labor. It is a similar use to that of Hesiod, who brings the Golden Age myth in to tell why labor is a feature of our present life, too. However, there is a difference. Hesiod said labor was sent to man as a punishment. Vergil says that labor and difficulties are sent by a benign Jove purposely to improve the character of men and sharpen their minds.

\begin{quote}
...pater ipse colendi

haud faciлем esse viam voluit, primusque per artem
movit agros, curis acuens mortalia corda,
nec torpore gravi passus sua regna veterno.
Ante Iovem nulli subigebant arva coloni;
ne signare quidem Aut partiri limite campum
fas erat: in medium quaerebant, ipsaque tellus
omnia liberius, nullo poscente, ferebat.
ille malum virus serpentibus addidit atri,
praedarique lupos iussit pontumque moveri,
mellaque decussit foliis, ignemque removit,
et passim rivis currentia vina repressit,
ut varias usus meditando extenderet artis
paulatim et sulcis frumenti quaeret herbam
et silicis venis abstrusum excuderet ignem.\footnote{26 Vergil, *Georgics* 2.173-176.}
\end{quote}

Undoubtedly, in this description of the Golden Age, Vergil saw a chance to add a charming and entertaining interlude to his poem. This adds a rhetorical motive to the moral one already mentioned.

He here adds communism and streams of wine to the usual

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{24 Vergil, *Georgics* 2.173-176.}
\footnote{25 "Vergil", *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Edition.}
\footnote{26 Vergil, *Georgics* 1.121-135}
\end{footnotes}
conception of the subject. Plato had used the idea of communism before Vergil, but Vergil is first to import the idea into the real Hesiodic myth. Streams of wine, too, had been mentioned by comic authors and the Sibylline Oracles, but Vergil's is the first setting of it into the true traditional myth.

At the close of the second Georgic there is a sincerely beautiful eulogy of the rustic life. The simple joys and upright character of country people are described, and to praise them Vergil says that Justice departing from the earth left them last of all:

...extrema per illos
Justitia excedens terris vestigia fecit. 27

He continues, contrasting the madness, follies, and wickedness of commercial, military, and public life with the sanity and happiness of rural ways. Then he says that the farmer's life was the life of the old Sabines, of Remus and his brother, and (highest praise of all) of the people under Saturn's reign. Again as its characteristic, peace is stressed:

ante etiam sceptrum Dictaei regis et ante
impia quam caesis gens est epulata iuvencis,
aureus hanc vitam in terris Saturnus agebat;
necdum etiam audierant inflari classica necdum
impositos duris crepitare incudibus ensis. 28

Vergil mentions the myth incidentally in one other way. This mention occurs in the sixth Eclogue when Silenus is playfully forced by Chromis and Mnasyllos to sing for them. He gives first a recital of the beginning of things according to the Epicurean cosmogony then drifts to other subjects, one of which is

27 Ibid., 2.473-474.
28 Ibid., 2.536-540.
the Golden Age:

Hinc lapides Pyrrhae iactos, Saturnia regna,
Caucasiasque refert volucre volvuntque Promethei.

It became common to list the Golden Age thus as a typical subject for bards as was done by the author of the Aetna in the lines quoted in the introduction to this thesis.

Before leaving Vergil it might be well to discuss a unique use of the myth in the Appendix Vergiliana. The poem in which it occurs is the Lydia, sometimes affixed without a separate title to the Dirae. The poet (almost certainly not Vergil) is bemoaning separation from his lady love. To his frenzied mind occurs the happiness of animals with their mates and the gods with their loves. He likens the condition of love in the Golden Age to the untrammeled freedom of the celestials and bemoans his tardy birth:

talia caelicolae numquid minis aurea proles
ergo quod deus atque heros, cur non minor aetas?
Infelix ego, non illo qui tempore natus
quo facilis natura fuit, sors et mea laeva
nascendi miserumque genus, quo sera libido est.

The purpose is unique—to seek justification for a forbidden thing on the assumption of the author that it was done in the Golden Age.

The consideration of Vergil has added to our list of purposes. From Hesiod and Aratus we had two—1) moral and 2) rhetorical effect. Vergil, besides repeating these two purposes, used the myth 3) to praise, a) his country, b) an individual (Augustus), and c) a way of life (the farmer's). He also 4) used

29 Vergil, Eclogues 6.41-42.
30 Appendix Vergiliana, Lydia 74-78.
it incidentally as a typical subject for poets. From the *Lydia*
of the *Appendix Vergiliana* we get another use, 5) as a standard
of perfection, in this case, to justify a forbidden course of
action.

Ovid is the entertainer *par excellence*. It is not strange
that he uses our myth for the sheer joy of repeating a good story
to entertain his literary audience.

His great version of the myth occurs in the first book of
his *Metamorphoses*. He has begun with an invocation to the gods
to help him and,

...primaque ab origine mundi
ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen!31

Naturally, in this all-inclusive scheme the Golden Age makes
its appearance as the first after creation. Ovid masterfully
synthesizes many of the details invented by his predecessors:

*Aurea prima sata est aetas, quae vindice nullo,
sponte sua, sine lege fidem rectumque colebat.*

*poena metusque aberant, nec verba minantia fixo
aere legebantur, nec supplex turba timebat
judicis ora sui, sed erant sine iudice tuti.*

*nondum caesa suis, peregrinum ut viseret orbem
montibus in liquidas pinus descenderat undas,*

*nulleque mortales praeter sua litora norant;*  

*nondum praecipites cingebant oppida fossae;*  

*non tuba directi, non aeris cornua flexi,*  

*non galeae, non ensis erant: sine militis usu*

*mollia securae peragebant otia gentes.*  

*ipsa quoque inmunis rastroque intacta nec ullis*

*saucia vomeribus per se dabet omnia tellus,*  

*contentique cibis nullo cogente creatis*

*arbuteos fetus montanaque fraga legebant*

*cornaque et in duris haerentia mora rubetis*

*et quae deciderant patula Iovis arbore glandes.*  

*ver erat aeternum, placidique tepentibus auris*

*mulcebant zephyri natas sine semine flores;*

*mox etiam fruges tellus inarata ferebat,*  

*nec renovatus ager gravidis canebat aristis;*

---

31 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.3-4.
Here ver aeternum and streams of milk and nectar appear first specifically associated with the Golden Age. The stress on the peace of the Golden Age and its freedom from laws are typical of Ovid's time. As a matter of style to be noted, his tendency to repeat many facets of the same idea, as in the foregoing passage, is also typical of his age.

His masterful organization of all four ages and his placing of our own age after the flood have already been discussed.

Like Vergil, Ovid is at times a little inconsistent in his ideas about the Golden Age. When describing the games of Ceres in the Fasti, after speaking in a deprecating way of the food of the first mortals, he says:

\[
\text{prima Ceres homine ad meliora alimenta vocato}
\]
\[
\text{mutavit glandes utiliore cibo.} \quad 33
\]

Yet in the above passage from the Metamorphoses those same acorns are described as a feature of the happiness of the age—a feature which elsewhere he thanks Ceres for getting rid of!

Much later in the Metamorphoses we find the Golden Age again referred to in connection with the story of Pythagoras. Ovid puts the following speech into the mouth of Pythagoras:

\[
\text{at vetus illa aetas, cui fecimus aurea nomen,}
\]
\[
\text{fetibus arboreis et, quas humus educat, herbis}
\]
\[
\text{fortunata fuit nec polluit ora cruore.}
\]
\[
\text{Tunc et aves tutae movere per aera pennas,}
\]
\[
\text{et lepus inpavidus mediis erravit in arvis,}
\]
\[
\text{nec sua credulitas piscem suspenderat hamo:}
\]
\[
\text{cuncta sine insidiis nullamque timentia fraudem}
\]
\[
\text{plenaque pacis erant. postquam non ultilis auctor}
\]
\[
\text{victibus invidit quis fuit ille, leonum}
\]

32 Ibid., 1.89-112.
33 Ovid, Fasti 4.401-402.
Pythagoras' purpose in thus stressing the Golden Age as a time of vegetarianism and blaming the eating of meat for the evils of the Iron Age is moral and philosophical. Ovid's in putting this moral speech into the mouth of Pythagoras is to delineate a character.

In the pseudo-didactic Fasti, whose basic purpose is entertainment through the recital of stories associated with various dates, Ovid likewise refers to the Golden Age.

During an imaginary conversation with Janus, Ovid asks the god why the figure of a ship is stamped on the back of his coin. Janus explains that Saturn came to Italy during his reign in a ship which thus is commemorated. Then in a few lines he describes those times:

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tunc ego regnabam, patiens cum terra deorum esset, et humanis numina mixta locis. nondum Iustitiam facinus mortale fugarat (ultima de superis illa reliquit humum), proque metu populum sine vi pudor ipse regebat; nullus erat iustis reddere iura labor. nil mihi cum bello: pacem postesque tuebar....
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The purpose of this is to tell a good story, in other words, entertainment. The association of gods with men is stressed.

A little earlier in the same conversation occurs a use of the myth which is hard to classify. When Ovid asks Janus why the people offer him the gift of a little cash along with sweets, Janus laughs and says,

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...'o quam te fallunt tua saecula'...
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34 Ibid., 15.96-103.
This usage resembles that of the author of the *Lydia* who said in effect that the Golden Age was perfect, so we can have what people had then, even if it is free love. In the above, too, the Golden Age is adopted as a standard of perfection, and Janus' saying that even then people loved money in secret is supposed to convince Ovid of the ingrained avarice of humanity.

Another similar use occurs in the *Heroides*. Phaedra, outpouring her sinful love for Hippolytus, her stepson, says the fact that she is his stepmother should not deter him, for

\[
\text{'ista vetus pietas, aevo moritura futuro, rustica Saturno regna tenente fuit'.}^{37}\]

The Golden Age is again assumed to be a standard of excellence, and if even then old reverence was outmoded now it can be completely disregarded.

In the *Amores* we find a use for the myth that has not yet been considered, that of contrast. Ovid uses the Golden Age to make his picture of the avarice of his own age darker. It seems he has been flouted by his lady love for a rich but uncouth soldier-knight, and, enraged, he writes a diatribe against gold, bringing in the Golden Age, when gold still lay hidden in the earth, as a contrast:

\[
\text{At cum regna senex caeli Saturnus haberet omne lucrum tenebris alta premebat humus}^{38}\]

To this statement that gold and other metals were hidden

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36 Ibid., 1.191-194.
38 Ovid, *Amores* 3.8.35-44.
in the ground in the Golden Age he adds the details that there were better gifts than such as honey and fruit, that the earth did not have to be cultivated then, that there was no private ownership of land, and that the seas were not traversed for gain.

These, then, are the uses to which the four great formative authors of the myth put it. In the consideration of these uses it was impossible to avoid anticipating some of the uses that will receive separate consideration in subsequent chapters.

We have thus far seen the myth of the Golden Age used 1) for moral purposes, 2) for entertainment or rhetorical embellishment, 3) for praise (or flattery) of an individual, country, or way of life, 4) for use as a standard of perfection, 5) for incidental mention as a typical subject for story-tellers, and 6) for contrast. Of these uses all will be found in other authors except Vergil's characteristic use for praise and glorification of his country. We shall again see the Golden Age used as a standard of perfection, but only incidentally and in more favorable connections, not to justify sin, as in the Lydia and Heroides 4, or to satirize man's failings, as in Fasti 1.

It now remains to be seen how other authors used the myth of the Golden Age for moral purposes, for entertainment and rhetorical effect, for praise and flattery, for contrast, for incidental reference, and for other aims not already mentioned. From now on the chapters will be divided not by authors but by purpose.
CHAPTER V

THE USE OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE FOR
ENTERTAINMENT AND RHETORICAL EFFECT

The thing that kept the primitive tradition of a Golden Age alive through countless prehistoric centuries was probably its entertainment value. It is reasonable to assume that pleasure-giving was its original purpose. For this reason, not for its relative importance, the purpose of entertainment is first to receive separate consideration here.

It is rather surprising to see how seldom in the later career of the myth this primary entertainment aim is predominant. It dwindles in importance. Most authors have some other "axe to grind" when they bring the story into their work. Perhaps this is because to be truly entertaining an idea must have some novelty. The story of the Golden Age was so ancient that it had lost its story value per se. Perhaps it is because books were so expensive that the labor of their manufacture was reserved for literary works of more pretentious aim than the mere spinning of tales, which remained an oral activity. Perhaps it was thought that it had already been told to perfection by Hesiod, Vergil, and Ovid.

Of course, the underlying aim of most poetry and much liter-
ature is to entertain by pleasing expression of thought and emotion. Most of the passages, especially poetic, that will be considered in subsequent chapters under other purposes have a basic intention of entertainment or rhetorical effect that must be kept in mind along with the more specific purposes under which they are classified. For instance, who would not admit that a poem of flattery is superb entertainment for the person flattered?

It has been thought well to class with entertainment rhetorical episodes using the myth. They afford a light and pleasing touch in the midst of more serious matters. In such cases the entertainment lies not in the story value of the myth itself but in the expression. It offers opportunity for a "purple passage", a momentary, relaxing digression from the main subject. May it be repeated that this desire for a change of subject and a freer flight of poetic fancy underlies many usages whose primary purpose is a moral, historical, or other equally serious one.

Wide reading in the field revealed only two literary occasions whereon the myth of the Golden Age was told solely to entertain. The first is in Ovid's Metamorphoses which has been already considered.¹ This great poem retells many familiar myths, that of the Golden Age in its proper place along with all the others. Ovid is the entertainer par excellence in the literary history of the myth.

Four centuries after Ovid, Claudian, court poet of Honorius, "the last poet of Classical Rome",² also uses the myth for the

¹ Ovid, Metamorphoses I.78-415.
sheer purpose of entertainment. He introduces it into a situation with an original enough twist to make it interesting. In his de luxe retelling of the myth of Ceres and Proserpina, entitled De Raptu Proserpinae, he has Jove call a conference of all the gods after the kidnapping to see what should be done about the state of the world now that Ceres no longer attends to her duties as goddess of growing things. Jove, reminiscing, refers to the Golden Age:

Once more the affairs of men have won care from me, affairs long neglected since I looked upon the repose of Saturn's reign and knew the torpor of that stagnant age, when I had fain urged the race of man, long sunk in lethargy by reason of my sire's sluggish rule, with the goads of anxious life, whereby their crops should no more grow to maturity of their own accord in the untilled fields nor yet the forest trees drip with honey nor wine flow from springs nor every stream course sounding into cups. 'Twas not that I grudged their blessings - gods may not envy nor hurt - but because luxury is a foe to a godly life, and plenty dulls the mind of men; therefore I bade necessity, invention's mother, provoke their sluggish spirits....

Prevailed upon by personified Nature, who points out the miserable state of men, he graciously decrees that Ceres, when she is overjoyed at finding traces of her daughter, will bestow upon mankind the gift of corn. After this reference to the Golden Age the poem goes on in its grandiloquent way to tell the rest of the story of Ceres. (However, the story is never quite finished, as the poem remains incomplete.)

The myth of the Golden Age is introduced solely for rhetorical effect hardly more frequently.

Aratus, we have seen, introduced it as a rhetorical episode in connection with the constellation Virgo. 4

4 Aratus, Phaenomena 96-115
Cicero, Hyginus, (freedman of Augustus), and Germanicus Caesar translated the *Phaenomena* of Aratus into Latin, thus making it available to a wide circle of Roman readers. In their translations the myth has the same purpose it had in the original work.

Nigidius Figulus, c. 98-45 B.C., next to Varro the most learned Roman of the age, author of *De Diis*, also in connection with the constellation Virgo refers to the days when men associated with Justice and life was without care. He repeats Aratus' ideas. From the fragmentary nature of his remains it is difficult to say whether he had a rhetorical motive or was merely factually transmitting the tradition associated with the constellation. However, since his use is so parallel to that of Aratus, it is considered here:

Nigidius de uirgine ita refert: uirginem Iustitian dici siue Aequitatem, quae ab hominibus recesserit at ad immortales merito perueniret. cum inter mortales conueniret, omnibus locis conciliabulisque solitam consistere et praecipere hominibus, ne temere ab aequitate atque iustitia discederent: quamdiu mortales monitis obedissent, tamdiu uitam sine cura ac sollicitudine futuram. sed, cum neglegentius aequitatem obscurerent in insidiasque declinarent, cupiditate et avaritia alter alterum deciperent, ab hominibus discessisse....

The author of the *Aetna* from which the introductory lines of this thesis were quoted, dismissed the Golden Age as too trite a subject for his poem. Such a mention—as a typical subject of poetry—became a common incidental use of the myth. However, in merely rejecting it the author of the *Aetna* did not have to give a seven-line description of it. Therefore, we may assign a

5 Alfredus Breysig, *De P. Nigidii Figuli Fragmentis apud Scholiasten Servatis*, (Berolini, formis Gustavi Schade), p. 27. (Dissertation publicly defended April 11, 1854 at the university Friderica Guilelma).
rhetorical motive to him in the passage in question. The follow-
ing is a complete quotation:

Who but has heard of the Golden Age of the king that knew
not care? when no one ploughed the fields to throw in the grain,
or kept noisome weeds from the crops that were to come, but over-
flowing harvests filled the barns for every year, Bacchus ran in-
to wine by no foot but his own, honeys distilled from the clammy
leaves, Pallas set flowing her own separate streams of rich
olive-oil. Then was the true graciousness of the country; never
has it been allotted to any to have a happier knowledge of his
time.... 6

Martial, sophisticated epigrammist of the Silver Imperial
Age, had occasion to celebrate the return of his patron's son to
Spain. His celebration took the form of a prayer to Saturn, an-
cient king of the Golden Age, on whose feast the young man re-
turned. In connection with Saturn a few lines about his reign
are introduced for rhetorical effect:

Great king of the ancient heaven and a by-gone world, under
whose reign was lazy rest and no toil, nor over-tyrannous thunder-
bolt, nor men that deserved the bolt, when earth was not cleft
to its nether deeps but kept her riches for herself, gladly and
graciously come thou to Priscus' festival of joy.... 7

These, then, are the few occasions on which the myth was in-
troduced solely for entertainment or solely for rhetorical effect
--twice for the former and four times for the latter. Even the
very first author who ever committed it to writing, Hesiod had a
more important moral purpose than the mere telling of a story.
In the same way, most of his successors, though the remote gener-
al raison d'etre of their works was entertainment, had some more

6 Lucilius Jr. (?), Aetna 9-16. Translation from Aetna,
pp. 2, 4.
7 Martial, Epigrams 12.62.1-6. Translation from the Loeb
Heinemann, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920: 2 volumes.),
vol. 2, p. 365.
specific purpose such as tucking in a moral lesson or flattering some emperor or making darker by contrast their pictures of a decadent age. These other specific purposes will form the subject of the following chapters.
CHAPTER VI

THE USE OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE FOR

PRAISE AND FLATTERY

One purpose to which the myth of the Golden Age was admirably adapted was that of praise and flattery. There it was, a ready-made picture of perfection. Enthusiasts had only to say that something had been characteristic of the Golden Age to give it the highest praise and approbation. In flattering an emperor, what more pleasing blandishment could be offered than to say his reign was a return of the Golden Age? Authors who wanted to praise something or some person were quick to see the possibilities of the myth, and we find it employed many times in such connections. This chapter will consider first its use in praising certain ways of life and next its use in praising or flattering persons.

We have already seen how Vergil used the myth in praise of the agricultural life, saying that thus the men of Saturn's day lived.¹

Long before Vergil, Varro (116-27 B.C.) had expressed a similar idea in his De Re Rustica, "It was not without reason that they [our ancestors] called the same earth 'mother' and ¹Vergil, Georgics 2.473-540.
Ceres'; and thought that those who tilled her lived a pious and useful life, and that they were the only survivors of the stock of King Saturnus...."² This is given as the opinion of "our ancestors"; Varro himself inclined to a naturalistic view of primitive man.

Horace, Vergil's contemporary, mentioned the Golden Age in one of his famous eulogies of rustic life, "Happy the man who, far away from business cares, like the pristine race of mortals, works his ancestral acres with his steers, from all money-lending free [italics not in original] ...."³ The advantages of rural life are then sung.

The Golden Age is used to praise another form of life, the hunter's, in Seneca's drama, Hippolytus. When the young woman-hating prince is urged to give up his outdoor life by the nurse of his sinful stepmother, Phaedra, he refuses, and in so doing eulogizes the life of a hunter by likening it to that of the Golden Age. The details are conventional, as is to be expected of Seneca:

'Twas in such wise, methinks, they lived whom the primal age produced, in friendly intercourse with gods. They had no blind love of gold; no sacred boundary-stone, judging betwixt peoples, separated fields on the spreading plain; nor yet did rash vessels plough the sea; each man knew only his native waters. Then cities were not surrounded with massive walls, set with many towers; no soldier applied his fierce hand to arms, nor did hurling engines burst through closed gates with heavy stones. Not yet did earth, suffering a master's rule, endure the hard toil of the

yoked ox; but the fields, fruitful of themselves, fed nations who asked nothing more; the woods gave men their natural wealth, and shady caves afforded natural homes.4

The young hunter goes on to describe the decline to the Iron Age and ends with the final thrust that the source of all wickedness is woman.

When it comes to the use of the myth of the Golden Age to praise persons, we find that this aim, too, has been already exemplified in the works of Vergil. As would be expected, this angle of personal praise had its floreat under the emperors. Vergil used it to praise Augustus, saying that he was the man who would bring the Golden Age again to the Latin fields where once Saturn reigned.5 He also had a secondary motive of praise of Pollio in writing his celebrated Fourth Eclogue.

Horace also heightened his praises of Augustus with a few gleams from the untarnished beauty of the ancient Age of Gold. Jullus Antonius had suggested that Horace celebrate in Pindaric odes the exploits of Augustus in the Western Provinces. The poet replied with a eulogy of Pindar, declining to tackle Pindar's province, but promising that both he and his friend, Antonius, would sing Augustus' praises with all the rest of the people on the occasion of the latter's triumphal return, than which, says the poet:

...nihil maius meliusve terris
fata donavere bonique divi
nec dabunt, quamvis redeant in aurum
tempora priscum.6

5 Vergil, Aeneid 6.791-795.
Lucius Annaeus Seneca uses the myth in judicious praise of Nero in his moral essay *De Clementia*. The essay on the whole has a moral tone, but the introduction of the myth occurs in a passage specifically laudatory in aim. When told to inscribe the names of two brigands for execution Nero had said, "Would that I had not learned to write!" Seneca, commenting on this, says:

> What an utterance! Worthy of the universal innocence of mankind, in favour whereof that long past age should be renewed. Now assuredly it were fitting that men, thrusting out covetousness from which springs every evil of the heart, should conspire for righteousness and goodness, that piety and uprightness along with honour and temperance should rise again, and that vice, having misused its long reign, should at length give place to an age of happiness and purity.

One cannot help but sense the ironic, sad contrast between what Seneca hoped for in this passage and what the later reign of Nero actually brought forth.

A lesser literary light of the same reign, Calpurnius Siculus, gives us in his *Bucolica* a taste of the unabashed flattery for whose ends our myth came to be employed. Garnett says, "ingenious flattery is his real purpose". Through the lips of Faunus the poet prophesies:

> Aurea secura cum pace renascitur aetas
> et redit ad terras tandem squalore situque
> alma Themis posito iuvenemque beata sequenter
> saecula, maternis causam qui vicit Iulis.
> dum populos deus ipse reget, gabi impia vinctas
> post tergum bellona manus....
> plena quies aderit, quae stricti nescia ferri

9 Calpurnius Siculus 1.42-47.
Nero is called a god himself ("deus ipse") ruling the people; the peace of the Golden Age is stressed. In the last line of the poem, the poet hopes that his patron (under the pseudonym Meliboeus) will show the poem to Nero:

\[ \text{forsitan Augustas feret haec Meliboeus ad aures}^{11} \]

In another poem Calpurnius says his purpose is not to celebrate sylvan affairs but to sing the Golden Ages and the god himself who rules peoples and cities in peace (Nero), saying this "god" is not unlike Apollo himself in appearance.\(^{12}\)

A humbler contemporary poet, whose name has been lost in the shuffle of centuries, also sang the Emperor's praises in the same vein. His few poems are known as the *Carmina Einsidlensia*.\(^{13}\)

\[ \text{ergo num dubio pugnant discrimine nati et negat huic aevos stolidum pecus aurea regna? Saturni rediere dies Astraeeaque virgo, totaque in antiquos redierunt saecula mores.}^{14} \]

Statius during the reign of Domitian repeated this type of flattery. Thrilled at having been invited to dine with the Emperor, he "emotes" thus:

\[ \text{The circle of noble and grave and the clans that wear the gown thou feastest alike..... Go to now hoary Eld; compare with our day the days of Jove's youth, and the golden time! Wine flowed not so freely then; crops forestalled not the tardy autumn. At one board feast all ranks..... Thou too, moreover - what God would brook to find such leisure or grant such pledge? - thou,} \]

10 Ibid., 1.63-64.
11 Ibid., 1.94.
12 Ibid., 4.5-11.
13 Giarratano says, "...neque enim dubium est quin iis carminibus *Carmina Einsidlensia* Neronea aetat ut aurea celebretur et Nero ipse cum Jove et Apolline conferatur.....". Caesar Giarratano, Calpurnii et Nemesisiani Bucolica, (Mediolani etc., in aedibus Paraviae et Soc., 1924.), preface, XXXII, viii.
14 *Carmina Einsidlensia* 2.21-24.
The great Greek contemporary of Statius, Plutarch, brought into his *Lives* the myth of the Golden Age to give greater point to his approbations of certain praiseworthy men. In his biography of Cimon he praises Cimon's hospitality thus:

"...yet Cimon, by keeping open house for his fellow-citizens, and giving travellers liberty to eat the fruits which the several seasons produced in his land, seemed to restore to the world that community of goods, which mythology says existed in the reign of Saturn...."\(^15\)

Elsewhere, in the life of Aristides, he praises Aristides and his just taxation in the same way. He says that Aristides, went out poor, and returned poorer; laying the tax not only without corruption and injustice, but to the satisfaction and convenience of all. For as the ancients celebrated the age of Saturn, so did the confederates of Athens Aristides's taxation, terming it the happy time of Greece;....\(^17\)

Returning from praise of the dead to flattery of the living, we come three centuries later to Claudian, a panegyricist who carried flattery to its highest, most fulsome peak. His *Rape of Proserpina* was considered in the previous chapter.

He lived in fateful times, the afterglow of the Empire when it was in the last throes of the struggle with the Goths. It was only six years after his death that Alaric sacked Rome in 410 A. D. Claudian's great hero, whose praises he sang over and over again, was Stilicho the Vandal, a general of Emperor Theodosius and of his successor as Emperor of the West, Honorius.

Stilicho's wife was Serena, niece and adopted daughter of Theodosius. As court poet it was Claudian's job to compose panegyrics in honor of these celebrities. In so doing he had opportunity to compose invective against Rufinus, Stilicho's arch-enemy.

Claudian is fond of setting an elaborate mythological machinery in motion in heaven as a background for the earthly events he is trying to immortalize. On several occasions the Golden Age figures in such effusions. Claudian showed an immense amount of ingenuity in inventing new, more grandiose details and is to be given sincere credit for originality in the panegyric, a monotonous type of composition.

In his poem *Laus Serenae* he says that at Serena's birth the Tagus overflowed with gold and the Cantaprian Main cast jewels on the shore, then continues to describe a conjured-up Golden Age befitting the occasion.\(^18\)

Another of his poems was written to describe the joy of Rome when Stilicho became consul. Herein he likens the assembling of Stilicho's veterans to a gathering of eagles to do homage to the Phoenix. Then he goes on to say that the Sun himself bedecks his chariot with flowers to go to prepare a year worthy of Stilicho.\(^19\)

Then follows a fanciful description of how Phoebus goes to an immense far-off cavern, "hoary mother of the years", cradle and tomb of time.\(^20\) At his approach the doors, swinging open of

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18 Claudian, \(30\), *Laus Serenae* 70-82.
19 Claudian, \(22\), *De Consulatu Stilichonis* 422-423. Summary based on the Loeb Edition: Claudian, Maurice Platnauer, trans., vol. 2, p. 33. This translation will be referred to as "Platnauer" in the following footnotes.
their own accord, reveal the ages piled according to type—iron, brass, and silver. The Golden Ages are there, too:

In a fairer part of the cave, shy of contact with the earth, stood the group of golden years; of these Phoebus chooses the one of richest substance to be marked with the name of Stilicho. Then, bidding the rest follow behind him, he addresses them thus as they pass. "Lo! the consul is at hand for whom we have delayed an age of nobler ore. Go ye, years long prayed for by man, bring back virtue;..." 21

The Sun in his exhortation continues to address the various constellations, asking them to bring perfect weather for the fruits of Ceres and Bacchus during the blessed time. 22

In his long invective poem, In Rufinum, when it comes to describing Stilicho's war against Rufinus, Claudian introduces an imaginative dialogue between Megaera the Fury and Justice, whom she has come to taunt. In response to Megaera's saying that Justice should go back to her empty place in the sky, she, Justice, retorts that war and the furies have come to the end of their power, that Honorius is coming. A typical description of the Golden Age follows:

Then the world shall be owned by all in common, no field marked off from another by any dividing boundary, no furrow cleft with bended ploughshare; for the husbandman shall rejoice in corn that springs untended. Oak groves shall drip with honey, streams of wine well up on every side, lakes of oil abound. No price shall be asked for fleeces dyed scarlet, but of themselves shall the flocks grow red to the astonishment of the shepherd, and in every sea the green seaweed will laugh with flashing jewels. 23

Surely, praise of a mere man cannot go much further than this.

A later, Christian panegyricist echoed these rhapsodies for

the delectation of other emperors. This was Apollinaris Sidonius (c. 430-487/488 A. D.). He closed a panegyric in honor of his father-in-law, the Emperor Avitus, with the following reference to our subject: "The fateful Sisters spun out a happy time for thy rule, Augustus, and for thy consular year they drew out with their whirling spindles a golden age".²⁴

Apollinaris was rewarded with the post of prefect of Rome and the dignity of patrician and senator by another emperor, Anthemius, for a panegyric in his honor. In this, too, Apollinaris found it advantageous to introduce our myth. He says to Anthemius:

Thy cradle gleamed with tokens of imperial power, and the prophetic earth, altering her progeny, gave promise of a golden age. They tell how, at thy birth, honey appeared, making rivers flow tardily with sweetened waters, and oil ran through the amazed mills while the olive-berry still hung upon the bough. The plain brought forth without seed a waving crop and the vine-branch looked grudgingly on the grapes brought into being without her. Roses blushed red in winter and lilies scorning the cold mocked the surrounding frosts. When Lucina is bringing such a birth to fulfilment the order of the elements gives way and a changed world gives assurance of coming sovereignty. Thus does nature declare that blessed gods have arrived....²⁵

Was the myth of the Golden Age used for praise and flattery? Indeed, one is more than convinced by the foregoing examples (four to praise ways of life; fourteen to praise persons) that it formed an ideal vehicle for the well known commodity that in a later age and other clime came to be known as "blarney".

CHAPTER VII

THE USE OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE FOR

CONTRAST AND ESCAPE

The converse of the use of our myth for praise is its use for contrast. Again the Golden Age is the standard of perfection but instead of praising an era by saying it is like the Golden Age, the author condemns an era by saying it is the opposite of the Golden Age. Thus he heightens by contrast the effect of criticism. This is one of the most frequent and effective uses of the myth. Satirists found it invaluable in their diatribes against the evils of their age. In fact, contrast is the only use of which Henry A. Burd is conscious. His article, incidentally, contains the sole statement that was found during the reading for this thesis on the general literary aims of the myth.¹

In this particular use of the myth there is always a strong element of escape, and so along with the other Utopias the Golden Age takes its place in the great humanity-wide "literature of escape". The two factors, contrast and escape, so dovetail that it is almost impossible to separate them. The former usage is

¹ Henry A. Burd, "The Golden Age Idea in Eighteenth Century Poetry", Sewanee Review Quarterly 23 (April, 1915), pp. 172-185, p. 175. "Second, the motive for writing of the Golden Age. The contrast suggested in the names Iron and Golden seems ever to have been in the minds of the poets...."
The writer is dilating on the evils of his own age. He portrays the Age of Gold (and frequently the decline from it) in order to bring out the more forcibly the description of his own time. The escape usage is one in which the writer seems to sigh for the perfection of the Golden Age, and in its delineation to release himself for a while from the odious present. We can frequently read in such descriptions a reverse picture of that from which he wants to escape.

But, to repeat, the two are necessarily similar; there would be no escape if there were no contrast, because what would be the point to escaping to something that was not decidedly different? None, so escape implies contrast. Conversely, contrast implies escape for a while if only while the description of the happier time is going on.

In view of this interrelationship, any division must appear somewhat arbitrary. Nevertheless an attempt will be made to consider the two separately. In a given passage, if the author's attention is fixed mainly on present evils, and the bright gold of the ancient age is introduced only to make the darkness of the present even darker, it will be classed as a use for contrast. If on the other hand the stress is put wistfully on the happy time, and the writer sighs after it, momentarily forgetful of the depressing picture of his own age, the use has been called escape.

The earliest author who introduced the Golden Age for the sake of contrast was Theognis of Megaera, Greek elegiac poet (Sixth Century B.C.). His Maxims are so fragmentary and the
context so incomplete that it is difficult to analyze his purposes. The passage in question is one of advice to men to worship Hope. The Golden Age is brought in by contrast to tell why Hope is the only goddess left to man. The desperate state of his own time is accentuated by this reference to a previous better time before the exodus of the gods from earth, typical sign of the end of the Golden Age:

Hope alone remains a kind of goddess among mortals, the rest having abandoned us, and gone to Olympus.

Gone is Faith, a mighty goddess: gone from men is Temperance: the Graces too, my friend, have quitted earth, and just oaths are no more to be relied on among men, neither does any-one reverence the immortal gods. But the race of holy men hath waned, nor are they any longer sensible of ordinances, no, nor holy lives. Yet so long as a man lives, and beholds the light of the sun, acting-piously as regard the gods, let him wait on Hope....

The next similar utilization of the myth occurs in the works of another much later elegiac poet, the Roman Propertius. Depressed by the wickedness of his own age and the faithlessness of Cynthia, he bewails the lack of chastity in the world since the days of Saturn:

...nolint peccare puellae:
   hic mos Saturno regna tenente fuit,
   et cum Deucalionis aquae fluxere per orbem;
   at post antiquas Deucalionis aquas,
   dic mihi, quis potuit lectum servare pudicum,
   quae dea cum solo vivere sola deo?

Propertius also in the same spirit, but not specifically mentioning the Golden Age, sighs for the passing "good old days" when inexpensive gifts of nature won chaste love from girls.

3 Propertius 2.32.51-56.
We now come to that master-painter of dark canvasses, Juvenal. He did not pass up the opportunity to use the Golden Age as a foil for the black times he satirized. The idea of a deterioration in heaven to parallel that on earth is also expressed by him, as by Propertius. It uniquely suits their excessive pessimism.

To Juvenal, as to Propertius, the Golden Age was above all the Age of Chastity, in contrast to the sad immorality of his own time. In the sixth satire Pudicitia, personified, is Astraea's companion in her withdrawal from mankind at the end of the aurea aetas. The point of the passage in which he describes the Golden Age is that immorality is ancient and hackneyed vice. The opening lines of this famous satire state that only in the Golden Age were people chaste:

Credo Pudicitiam Saturno rege moratam
in terris visamque diu...  

In the Silver Age adultery appeared. The Iron Age produced all other species of iniquity, but the Silver Age saw the first adulterers. This opening passage serves as an introduction to the subject of his satire, Roman immorality, and by contrast emphasizes the gloom of the picture he is about to draw.

As far as details of the primitive life go, they are very naturalistic and Epicurean. The autonomy of the earth, balmy climate, and other wondrous details are omitted. Juvenal has his Golden Age people living with their cattle in chill caverns. The bed consists of leaves, straw and skins of wild animals. These

6 Ibid. 6.1-2.
people, born of oak or moulded of clay, are portrayed as huge and uncivilized—"acorn-belching" is one word he uses to characterize them. The purity and simplicity of their lives Juvenal emphasizes as the main attribute of the people of the Golden Age.

In satire thirteen on "Consolation for Loss of Property through Fraud", Juvenal carries the Theory of Decline to an awesome and effective stage. He says that his was the ninth age, an age so wicked Nature has no metal base enough to give it a name. By way of consoling Calvinus for loss of money through a lying "friend", Juvenal tells him that his experience is not unusual, that there are very many unjust men at Rome. To emphasize this by contrast he introduces a description of the Golden Age when a villainous man was a rarity among his just neighbors. Bitterly he goes on to sketch the present opposite state of affairs, when a just man is as an unheard-of monster amid his wicked contemporaries.

Juvenal carries further Propertius' fancy about a Golden Age of simplicity in heaven with a later decline to parallel that on earth. In the Golden Age, he says, each god dined alone. There were no sumptuous banquets. No one had jurisdiction over the wicked sea. No crowd of foreign gods had trooped into heaven to add to the weight on poor Atlas' shoulders:

nulla super nubes convivia caelicolarum
nec puer Iliacus formosa nec Herculis uxor
ad cyathos, etiam siccato nectare tegens
bracchia Vulcanus Liparaea nigro taberna;
prandebat sibi quisque deus, nec turba deorum
talis est ut hodie, contentaque sidera paucis

7 Ibid. 13.28-70.
huminibus migerum urgebant Atlanta minori pondere;...8

These are the occasions on which Juvenal refers directly to the Golden Age. Throughout his satires, however, runs the bitter hopeless lament that the Rome of his time had fallen so far from the standards of early Rome. He hates the foreign influences and luxuriousness that are constant reminders of that fall. On many occasions he will contrast the actual, historic "good old days" of Rome with the evil present as in satire three where he calls happy the days of kings and tribunes long ago when Rome was content with a single jail.9 In his most striking contrast passages, however, he makes use of the myth of the Golden Age.10

The first extant use of the Golden Age in which the author seems more to be escaping from the evils of the present than concentrating upon them is Horace's epode sixteen. Of course, there is contrast in it, too.11

This is probably the first of Horace's political poems, written long before the praises of Augustus considered in the previous chapter. Clement L. Smith says:

It belongs to the first years after his return from Philippi, before his introduction to Maecenas,...when he was still the mourner for a lost cause, and could see no hope for his country in any of the contending factions, and no prospect but the wasting away of her strength in civil strife that could end

8 Ibid., 13.42-49.
9 Ibid., 3.312-314.
11 J. Duncombe, tr., in The Works of Horace in English Verse, (London, R. and J. Dodsley, 1759: 2 volumes), vol. 2, p. 45,note, says, "...he gives a beautiful Description of the Fortunate Islands, to show, in a more lively manner, by this Contrast, (italics not in original) the desperate State of Rome and Italy".
only in her falling prey to some foreign invader....

The poem beckons the melior pars of the Roman people to come to the Fortunate Islands to escape from the intolerable situation. First it appears to be just another of the numerous descriptions of far-away Utopias, but toward the end he says that these islands are a little fragment of the Golden Age which had been left on earth for the solace of such as they:

Iuppiter illa piae secrevit litora genti,  
ut inquinavit aere tempus aureum;  
aere, dehinc ferro duravit saecula, quorum  
piis secunda vate me datur fuga.13

The preceding description of the Fortunate Isles is one of typical Golden Age details: earth fruitful without cultivation, honey dripping from oaks, flocks without need of a shepherd and goats coming to be milked of their own accord, climate balmy, and ships (with the attendant evils of commerce) nonexistent.14

Horace is fond of seeking escape from the present degeneracy in some happier period of the past. In Odes 3.6 he uses the simple life of Rome's heroic age in this way, closing with the famous statement of the decline of man that was quoted in Chapter One of this thesis.15 However, since it does not deal with the Golden Age a detailed consideration is not warranted.

How Tibullus, Horace's contemporary, wished he had been born in the Golden Age, particularly at that time in his life when Messalla's expedition to the East had left him behind, ill, on the island of Corcyra! He finds surcease from his fears of death

14 Ibid., 41-50.  
in a contemplation of the Golden Age. Regretting that he had ever started the unhappy journey, he ponders the happy state of mankind before roads or ships existed:

quam bene Saturno vivebant rege, prius quam tellus in longas est petefacta vias!
nondum caeruleas pinus contemserat undas,
   effusum ventis praebueratque sinum,
   nec vagus ignotis repetens compendia terris
   presserat externa navita merce ratem.
illo non validus subiit iuga tempore taurus,
   non domito frenos ore momordit equus,
   non domus ulla fores habuit, non fixus in agris,
   qui regeret certis finibus arva, lapis.
   ipsae mella dabant quercus, ultroque ferebant
   obvia securis ubera lactis oves.
   non acies, non ira fuit, non bella, nec ensem
   inmiti saevus duxerat arte faber.
nunc Iove sub domino caedes et vulnera semper
   nunc mare, nunc leti mille repente viae.16

The above has become one of the standard descriptions of the Golden Age. It is often quoted. It contains the typical characteristics beautifully expressed.

Elsewhere in his elegies Tibullus gives expression to the same sort of longing for escape to the past, but the Golden Age is not specifically mentioned. Going unwillingly to war, he lays its cause to gold and says that "there were no wars when men ate from wooden dishes and that a better faith was kept when the god in his narrow shrine was worshipped paupere cultu".17

The last use of the myth for escape implying contrast occurs in the Octavia, the only extant fabula praetexta, formerly attributed to Seneca and to be found with his works. Seneca is one of the characters in this tragedy about the horrors of Nero's reign. The chorus has just told him of Agrippina's death.

16 Tibullus 1.3.35-50.
17 Tibullus 1.10.7-20.
Despairingly he wonders why he was raised to this pinnacle amid such fear. He exclaims that he would rather be observing nature in Corsica; then, implying that the troublous times herald the near approach of a universal disaster which shall bring an end to the Iron Age, he finds comfort in the thought of a Golden Age to follow and brings in a description of the former time of bliss:

If this sky is growing old, doomed wholly once more to fall into blind nothingness, then for the universe is that last day at hand which shall crush sinful man beneath heaven's ruin, that so once more a reborn and better world may bring forth a new race such as she bore in youth, when Saturn held the kingdoms of the sky. Then did that virgin, Justice, goddess of mighty sway, from heaven sent down with holy Faith to earth, rule with mild sway the race of men. No wars the nations knew, no trumpet's threatening blasts, no arms, nor were they used to surround their cities with a wall: open to all was the way, in common was the use of every thing; and the glad Earth herself willingly laid bare her fruitful breast, a mother happy and safe amid such duteous nurslings.

But another race arose which proved less gentle;.....18

From the foregoing it is clear that the Golden Age was well adapted to the two closely intertwined purposes of contrast and escape. There are four instances where the contrast dominates and three where the escape idea is most prominent. In addition to this it must be realized that any description of the Golden Age where the Iron Age also appears, no matter what the primary purpose, there is a decided element of contrast. When this contrast forms the main purpose, it is one of the most forceful and characteristic uses of the myth of the Golden Age.

CHAPTER VIII

THE USE OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE FOR
PHILOSOPHIC AND MORAL PURPOSES

The very first appearance of the myth of the Golden Age in literature was for a moral end. Hesiod was trying to teach his brother, Perses, how the necessity for labor had become a condition of life in the present age. After Hesiod's time the myth was not only used to teach moral lessons, but it appeared in works of eminent philosophers as well.

The first philosopher to treat of the Age of Gold was Empedocles (490-430 B.C.). From the fragments remaining he appears to describe it as a fact, not a myth. The thing he stresses is the vegetarianism of those times, and his description is the earliest extant expression of this idea, though it had its birth among the Elder Orphics and Pythagoreans.

The following is Empedocles' famous fragment as translated by the late William Ellery Leonard. He entitles it "The Golden Age":

Nor unto them
Was any Ares god, nor Kydoimos,
Nor Zeus, the King of Gods, nor Kronos, nor Poseidon then, but only Kypris queen...
Whom they with holy gifts were wont to appease,
With painted images of living things,
With costly unguents of rich fragrancy,
With gentle sacrifice of taintless myrrh
With redolent fumes of frankincense, of old
Pouring libations out upon the ground
Of yellow honey; not then with unmixed blood
Of many bulls was ever an altar stained;
But among men 'twas a sacrifice most vile
To reave of life and eat the goodly limbs.

Another fragment (129) describes a Sage of those times. Yet another very short one (130) tells of the tameness and friendli-
ness of all living creatures toward man.

It is significant that Empedocles makes Kypris (Love) queen of the Golden Age, rejecting Cronos. For this reason he is famous for stressing the peace of the Golden Age as well as its vegetarianism—two features that received much reiteration in the long later career of the myth.

The next philosopher to use the myth was Plato. Of Plato's use of myth in general Jowett says:

...another trait, by which Plato's literary individuality is marked with special clearness. This is his employment of myths, which he loves to combine with philosophic inquiry,... Here however, another motive comes into play. On the one side, the mythus is the expression of the religious and poetical character of the Platonic philosophy. Plato makes use of the traditions of the popular faith... for the artistic representation of his ideas; he also extends and multiplies them by original inventions,... But, on the other side, the mythus is not a mere garment, thrown over a thought that had previously existed in a purely scientific shape; in many cases it is for Plato a positive necessity, and his masterly use of it is a consequence of the fact,... that the mythus does not reiterate that which the author has elsewhere dialectically expressed, but seizes by anticipation, as with a presentiment, that for which logical expression is still wanting. The Platonic myths, in short, almost always point to a gap in scientific knowledge: they are introduced where something has to be set forth, which the philosopher indeed acknowledges as true, but which he has no means of establishing scientifically. This takes place chiefly in two cases: (1) when it is required to explain the origin of material things,... and (2) when circum-

stances are to be described which have no analogy with our present experience, and which can not be more exactly delineated. ...the second (is found) in the narrations concerning the future life and the primeval history of man; for the essential purport of these latter is also the determination of the state in which human society would find itself under altered, ideal conditions. When Plato in these cases adopts the mythical representation, he indirectly confesses that his ordinary style would be impossible to him. His myths are consequently not only a proof of his artistic ability, and an effect of the intimate relation still subsisting between his philosophy and his poetry, but they also betray the boundaries of his methodical thought....

Plato's most extensive treatment of the myth of the Golden Age is in the dialogue entitled The Statesman. In fact, the idea of the Golden Age is here so prominent that Jowett subtitles his translation of this dialogue The Reign of Cronos. The myth is introduced into The Statesman when Socrates Junior and a Stranger are pursuing the definition of a true king and statesman. The king has been first defined as a herd-tender or shepherd of man. By means of the myth of the Golden Age the Stranger shows that this definition would only hold of a divine ruler, such as the god who had control of the world in those times. Then only did true government exist, when man was governed by a being superior to himself. After this truth has been demonstrated by means of the myth, the word "superintendent" or "guardian" is substituted for that of herd-tender or shepherd, as more applicable to human statesmen who are no better than those they govern.

Plato's version of the Golden Age is not dependent upon Hesiod's. The following is an attempt to set the myth forth

4 Ibid., vol. 4, p. 349.
briefly as the great philosopher uses it.

The Stranger or Guest in the course of the dialogue mentions the kingdom over which Kronos ruled, when men were earth-born, then remarks that no one has yet given the cause for these things, and that it must be told, "for being told it will be something conspicuous for showing forth the king".

He continues to say that the movement of the universe is sometimes carried on in a circle in one direction, as at present, and at other times in the opposite. At times of change there is a great destruction of all living things. The Golden Age under the rule of Saturn flourished when the universe was revolving in the opposite direction from that in which it now tends. In those times everything was different.

Here, through the medium of the Guest, Plato sketches his idea of the Golden Age. It has no sensuous details. All was at peace—men with one another, animals with men and with each other. There were no forms of state nor private property, even in women and children. The earth gave the men of Saturn's reign the fruit of trees (the oak specifically mentioned) spontaneously in abundance. No clothes were necessary due to the mild temperature. Couches were formed of soft grass. Men had the ability to converse with brutes, and if they used this privilege for the purpose of philosophical inquiry, they were supremely happier than men of the present revolution.

The happy equilibrium was due to the fact that Kronos as helmsman steered the world and that each department of animal and vegetable life was under the guardianship of a divine daemon
especially fitted for his task.

The Guest then tells how when it is time for a change the divine helmsman leaves his post. The world left to itself works out another destruction of all kinds of animals, then, revolving in an opposite direction, first tries to rule itself as the gods had ruled it. Yet, as the correct example fades from memory, the evil inherent in matter comes to the fore until just at the imminent approach of total destruction, the god takes over again and rescues the universe.

The Guest tells why he has introduced the myth:

On this account we have brought forward the story, in order that (one) might show, with respect to the herd-tending, not only that all contend about it with the person now sought for; but that we might more clearly perceive him, whom alone it is fitting ....to have tending of the human herd, and alone worthy to be called by that name.

Again, in conclusion he says:

...in order that we might show both quickly and splendidly, that we erred in the former part of our digression, through thinking that great patterns should be employed in the case of a king, have brought in a marvellous mass of a myth, and been compelled to use a greater portion of it than was proper....

Jowett sees in this myth also Plato's way of setting forth poetically the answer to the problem of evil and also his version of the growth of human society. Evil is said to be inherent in matter and apt to come to the fore when matter is left without divine guidance. Human civilization is said to have received a great many set-backs due to great periodic destructions. After these, a handful of men are forced to wrest anew from nature the comforts of civilized life.

Plato again brings in the Golden Age as the time when men were perfectly governed because governed by superior beings. This usage occurs in the *Laws.* He says that a long time before the foundation of cities there existed in the time of Saturn a government so happy that the best now is but an imitation of it. We have all heard of the happy life of that time when all was produced spontaneously without stint:

Of this state of things the cause is said to have been something of this kind. Saturn, well knowing, as we have already detailed, that no human nature, when administering with absolute power the affairs of man, is so sufficient, as not to be filled with insolence and injustice, did, from reflecting upon this, place over our cities, as kings and rulers, not men, but Daemons of a more divine and excellent race;... For we do not make oxen rulers of oxen, nor goats of goats; but we ourselves rule over them, as being of a better race than them. The same thing does the god, who being a lover of mankind has placed over us the race of Daemons, as being better than us; which...rendered the human race exempt from sedition, and happy....we ought, by every contrivance, to imitate the life, said to have been under Saturn; and, as far as immortality is in us, by being obedient to it, to administer both publicly and privately our houses and cities, calling law the distribution of mind....

The above two passages comprise Plato's most significant uses of the Golden Age. They display his conception of it, in which peace, communism, and the cyclic element are stressed and in which the reason for all the felicity is said to be the government of the world by a being higher than man. There are a few more instances where he mentions it incidentally.

In the *Republic,* speaking of rewards for really brave youths, he claims that those who die with glory on a campaign are of the golden race. Quoting Hesiod to the effect that the golden

9 Plato, *Republic* 5.15.
race became daemons after death, he advises that the tombs of
these brave warriors should be venerated as those of demigods;
furthermore, the tombs of any men who die even of old age, after
good having been esteemed remarkably during life, should be venerated
in the same way. 10

In the Cratylus, dealing with the science of language:

...he was playing his usual part of an ironical philosopher.
For the etymologies are not only at variance with all the well
ascertained principles of the Greek language, but they are sup­
ported by arguments one can hardly believe to be other than...the
broadest caricature of those brought forward by the persons, whom
it was Plato's intention to ridicule. 11

The Encyclopedia Britannica refers also to the "tissue of
wild etymologies" 12 contained in this dialogue.

One of these satirical etymologies derives Hesiod's term
"daemons" from the word for prudent and learned. In connection
with this Plato says that the daemons had been the golden race
but gold first created, that they were not literally of gold, metaphorically,
as being beautiful and good, and that (as in the Republic) when a good man dies he becomes a daemon because he has been of
the golden race. 13

Plato touches the subject lightly a few more times, but
these do not merit citation here, and will be considered in Chap­
ter Eleven among other incidental and doubtful uses.

Quite a decided contrast to the sublime works of Plato is
the next philosophical use of the myth—in the spurious Sibylline

10 Translation from ibid., vol. 2, p. 154. (trans. Davis)
13 Plato, Cratylus 32-33. Summary based on The Works of Plato,
Oracles of the Second Century B.C. Their position in the history of the myth has been already explained in Chapter Three. Here it suffices to reiterate briefly that they were the compositions of Alexandrian Jews who inserted much Biblical matter into traditional pagan delineations of the remote past and future. The Golden Age reappears as the Messianic Age to come. Spontaneity of the earth, fountains of milk, absence of war, and other "props" of the Golden Age are brought into the prophetic picture of the wonderful age to come.

In a picture of creation and subsequent events, a description of the successive races, obviously based on Hesiod, is given, without, however, the epithets Gold, Silver, Bronze and Iron. It seems strange to read of Noah and the flood, then immediately to have "Sibyl" assume the character of a daughter-in-law of Noah to speak as an eyewitness of the sixth, best, Golden Age after the flood. "And afterwards the royal power and sway shall Cronos have", she says, identifying Cronos with one of the sons of Noah.

Such mixtures of the Bible and pagan mythology are characteristic of the so-called Sibylline Oracles. They stress the futurity of the Golden Age. They are rather interesting but not-too-significant manifestations of how the Golden Age myth was used in philosophy. Perhaps their only claim to fame is the fact

16 Ibid., 1.356.
that they might have influenced Vergil in composing his famous fourth eclogue.

Cicero, in expounding Stoic theories on the care of Providence for man, brings forth the idea of how things have been so aptly created for man's use. As an example, he gives oxen: "The very shape of their backs makes it clear that they were not destined to carry burdens, whereas their necks were born for the yoke and their broad powerful shoulders for drawing the plough. .." In this connection he remarks that it was because they first helped to bring the earth under tillage that, poets say, it was deemed a crime to eat their flesh in the Golden Age. He quotes three lines from his own translation of Aratus to this effect.17

Strabo, the geographer, (c. 63 B. C. - ?) does not himself use the myth philosophically, but in his treatment of India and its sophists he has occasion to bring in the words of a philosopher who does. He quotes Onesicritus on the journey of Alexander through India. Discussing the wise men or philosophers in whom Alexander was interested, Strabo says:

Onesicritus says that he conversed with one of these sophists, Calanus.... He says that Calanus happened to be lying on stones when he first saw him; that he therefore approached him and greeted him; and told him that he had been sent by the king to learn the wisdom of the sophists and report it to him, and that if there was no objection he was ready to hear his teachings; and that when Calanus saw the mantle and broad-brimmed hat and boots he wore, he laughed at him and said: "In olden times the world was full of barley-meal and wheaten-meal, as now of dust; and fountains then flowed, some with water, others with milk and likewise with honey, and others with wine, and some with olive oil; but, by reason of his gluttony and luxury, man fell into

arrogance beyond bounds. But Zeus, hating this state of things, destroyed everything and appointed for man a life of toil. And when self-control and the other virtues in general reappeared there came again an abundance of blessings. But the condition of man is already close to satiety and arrogance, and there is danger of destruction of everything in existence". And Onesicritus adds that Calanus, after saying this, bade him, if he wished to learn, to take off his clothes, to lie down naked on the same stones, and thus to hear his teachings;...18

Perhaps we might remind ourselves in passing that Ovid had a use of the myth somewhat similar to Strabo's. Though Ovid's primary purpose was entertainment, he put a fictional philosophical use of the Golden Age onto the lips of Pythagoras.19

Seneca, who has used effectively the myth of the Golden Age for praise of Nero in his moral essay, De Clementia, for praise of the hunter's life in his drama, Hippolytus, and for escape and contrast in Octavia (ascribed to him), does not fail to make use of it in his letters. In Epistle Ninety, "On the Part Played by Philosophy in the Progress of Man", he quotes Posidonius as saying that in the Golden Age the government was under the jurisdiction of the wise, and that it was the wise who framed the laws needed when vice stole in. However, in Stoic horror he recoils from Posidonius' further statement that philosophy discovered the useful arts: "...nor will I ascribe to it an artisan's glory.. .."20 He ascribes inventions and civilized arts not to philosophy but to luxury and avarice. He dwells at length on the simplicity of life in the Golden Age, as contrasted with the superfluity of comforts in the present and the difficulties that

19 Ovid, Metamorphoses 15.96-103.
20 Seneca, Epistles 90.7.
are endured to get them: "Beneath such dwellings (wooden, tent-like houses) they lived, but they lived in peace. A thatched roof once covered free men; under marble and gold dwells slavery". 21

He goes on to describe a second age akin to the Golden Age (as a matter of fact he elaborates the description with a quotation from Vergil's first Georgic). Seneca says it was "when the bounties of nature lay open to all, for men's indiscriminate use, before avarice and luxury had broken the bonds which held mortals together...." 22 But in conclusion he denies that these men, no matter how excellent and guileless they were, had virtue: "It was by reason of their ignorance of things that the men of those days were innocent; and it makes a great deal of difference whether on wills not to sin or has not the knowledge to sin..." 23 He says that virtue must be attained by means of philosophy. Men must earn it. No one receives it as a free gift, not even men of the Golden Age. 24

Again, in Epistle Ninety-five, "On the Usefulness of Basic Principles", Seneca defends his beloved philosophy against the charge that men of former days, 25 who had only precepts to guide

21 Ibid., 90.10.
22 Ibid., 90.35.
23 Ibid., 90.46.
25 Seneca does not expressly state that these "former days" were the Golden Age. However, this passage is included on the strength of a note by Gummere calling it a "Golden Age reminiscence" and referring the reader back to Epistle 90. Ibid, vol. 3, p. 69.
them, were better by far than men of the present, who have an elaborate theoretical philosophy, and consequently that philosophy does no good. Seneca answers that in those days simple wisdom was enough to deal with simple vices. As a parallel he cites the elaborate medical paraphernalia now necessary to cure those ill of a surfeit of complicated food. He contrasts the men of early times who "for plain reasons...enjoyed plain health". Likewise, as wickedness has become more complex and widespread, wisdom to contend with it has had to become more complex, too. 26

Seneca's last use of the myth occurs in Epistle One Hundred Fifteen. Here it is used as no other author has used it. The purpose is uniquely moral; Seneca finds fault with the name of the myth itself. He says in this epistle that once we are able to perceive virtue we will understand how contemptible are the things we admire such as gold. He bewails the fact that admiration for wealth is instilled by parents, encouraged by public opinion, and even whetted by the verses of poets, who say that the immortal gods cannot impart, or even themselves possess, anything better than wealth. He cites from Ovid descriptions of the Sun-god's palace (all gold) and his chariot (silver and gold). In final condemnation of the versifiers Seneca says, "And finally, when they would praise an epoch as the best, they call it the 'Golden Age'." 27

Statius, (45-96 A. D.), who used the Golden Age motif to

rhetorical advantage in one of the poems of his *Silvae*, also used it in his epic, the *Thebaid*. This occasion is also a unique moral use of the myth. It enters into a diatribe against the art of divination. The men of the Golden Age are said to be above prying into the future:

"Yet were these arts unknown in days of old, 
When Time was seen to fly on wings of gold. 
The gods reserv'd them for this impious age, 
When conscience threatens their impending rage. 
Our virtuous sires confin'd their harmless toil 
To thin the woods, or break the stubborn soil. 
The depths of fate involv'd in errors lie, 
Impervious, and remote from mortal eye: 
Those only, who have forfeited his love, 
Explore the counsels of almighty Jove. 
Hence falsehood, discontent, and impious rage, 
Hence ev'ry vice that stains the present age.‖

Statius himself avows his moral aim at the end of the *Thebaid*:

...the studious youth
From thy chaste page imbibles the moral truth
With fiction temper'd..."29

The Greek philosopher and rhetorician, Maximus Tyrius, who flourished in the times of the Antonines (Second Century A. D.), referred to our myth twice in his dissertations. In one on the subject of whether soldiers or husbandmen are more useful to a city, the fact that in the Golden Age there was no need for husbandry is advanced as an argument against the usefulness of husbandmen:

If, likewise, we direct our attention to the kingdom of

Saturn, what shall we find said of agriculture? But indeed even now there is no need of agriculture. For the earth does not neglect to bear spontaneous fruits, since she bears peach and pear-trees. She also bears spontaneously drink, the Nile...and other fountains of perpetually pure and sober streams....

Into another dissertation, on whether the life of a Cynic is to be preferred, Maximus Tyrius introduces a description of the first men, who lived without difficulty due to the earth's generosity when she is not disturbed by husbandmen. Pure water and bland warmth from the sun are other circumstances he allots to their life—a life free of hostility because everyone had an abundant supply of spontaneous good. Then he continues:

Poets appear to me to be very near to this our fable, who obscurely signify that there was a life of this kind under Saturn, the king of the gods; a life without war, without iron, without a guard, peaceful, healthful, unindigent: and Hesiod, as it seems, (strenuously alluding to such a life as this) calls it the golden age....

A diatribe against the inferiority of the present age follows. It is made clear that anyone would choose to have lived in the early age rather than the present. Then it is implied that the life of the Cynic, who has given up the superfluous comforts of blind civilization, approximates that enlightened life of the Golden Age before such unnecessary luxuries ever existed.

The Greek Neo-Platonist Porphyry, (233-304 A. D.) in his De Abstinentia also mentions the Golden Age, mainly in connection with praises of vegetarianism and more specifically to advocate simple sacrifices of fruit rather than that of animals. To this he quotes the passage from Empedocles at the beginning of this

31 Maximus Tyrius 1.20. Translation from ibid., p. 198.
Chapter. 32

Later he exhorts thus:

Do you therefore ask, O man, what we should do? We should imitate those that lived in the golden age, we should imitate those of that period who were [truly] free. For with them modesty, Nemesis, and Justice associated, because they were satisfied with the fruits of the earth. <A quotation from Hesiod follows> ....33

Toward the end of his work, in refuting the assertion that no wise man nor any nation has rejected animal food, again he brings forth the example of primitive man. He quotes Dicaearchus on the manners of the early Greeks who, "compared to us of the present day, who consist of an adulterated and most vile matter, ...were thought to be a golden race". This, he says, is testified to by the poets. Again Hesiod is quoted. In short, to this ardent vegetarian, abstinence from animal food was a great factor in the felicity of the Golden Age, and the eating of it is the concomitant of other great injustices in inferior ages.34

The next great employer of the myth was unique in his use of it, namely, to attack the pagan gods.35 This ardent Christian writer, called "the Christian Cicero" was Lactantius, (c. 260 - c. 340 A.D.).

At first thought one might wonder how the Golden Age could possibly be used as a point of attack against paganism. Even

32 Porphyry, De Abstinentia 2.20-21.
34 Ibid., 4.2. Summary based on ibid., pp. 131-134.
35 One might think that if one writer used it thus, the rest of the school of anti-pagan apologists would have done so, too. However, Minucius Felix (Octavius 21.4-8), Tertullian (Apologeticus 10.6, 7) and St Augustine (De Civitate Dei 18.15.) contented themselves with arguing that Saturn was merely a man, sans any mention of the Golden Age. St Augustine quotes Vergil, Aeneid 8. 321-325 in which the Golden Age is mentioned.
Lactantius himself, discussing Saturn, says:

Let us see what there was in him worthy of a god, especially that he is related to have had the golden age, because in his reign there was justice in the earth.... For what is so befitting the character of a god, as a just government and an age of piety?....36

After admitting this, Lactantius mercilessly attacks all the weak points in the "theology" of Saturn--his mutilation of his father, the impermanence of his reign, his banishment, and so forth. He eagerly quotes all the pagan writers who claimed Saturn was a man (e.g. Diodorus Siculus and Varro).

Later in his work, Lactantius deals specifically with the subject of the Golden Age, which, he says, "is not to be regarded as a poetic fiction, but as the truth....". He goes on to say that the time when the man Saturn ruled was previous to the extollment of him and his pernicious family as gods, and, obviously, that the true God was worshipped then. His ingenious explanation of the Golden Age is that it existed before the invention of the pagan gods.

He describes the happy time, giving a typical picture of the peace and plenty that existed before mankind wickedly rejected the true God to worship men and before avarice had dammed up the flow of God's bounty to man. He freely quotes Aratus and Vergil for details of his description. Then, after a burning chastisement of the evils that the reign of Jove has brought into the world, he says that Christ has brought the return of Justice and the Golden Age to the world again, but only for a few. "Lay
aside every evil thought from your hearts, and the golden age will at once return to you, which you cannot attain to by any other means than by beginning to worship the true god....", he exhorts his readers. He closes with a fine description of the Golden Age that would ensue if God were only worshipped by everyone.37

In one other passage he refers again briefly yet hopefully to the Golden Age to come under the rule of God Himself.38

It would be very fitting to close this chapter on the philosophical use of the myth of the Golden Age with these gloriously hopeful writings of such an eminent writer as Lactantius. However, there was one subsequent writer who used the myth, and it is with a slight feeling of anti-climax that we turn to him. He was Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, Roman grammarian and philosopher who flourished during the reigns of Honorius and Arcadius, 395-423 A. D. His most important work was the _Saturnalia_, giving valuable information about the feast. He also wrote a commentary (more famous for having preserved the fragment of Cicero until a palimpsest was discovered, than for any intrinsic value) that he mentions the Golden Age.

He gives a physical explanation of his belief that the world is periodically destroyed by fire or flood. He says that after such destruction there are a few survivors, and, "fitque primum inter eos mali nescia et adhuc astutiae inexperta simplicitas,

37 Lactantius, _Divinae Institutiones_ 5.5-8. Translation from _ibid._, vol. 1, p. 308. Summary based on pp. 302-308. 38 Lactantius, _Divinae Institutiones_ 7.2.
With Macrobius ends the distinguished procession of philosophers and moralists who dignified the myth of the Golden Age by including it in their works. We find it has been used for moral purposes by Hesiod, Statius, and Seneca; for philosophical purposes by Seneca, the Sibylline Oracle composers, and eight other philosophers. They use it on seventeen different occasions.

The fact that the myth could be and was used so often as a medium for expressing abstruse thought and imparting moral lessons forms not the least glorious episode in its literary history.

38 Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis* 2.10.15.
CHAPTER IX

THE USE OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMEDY

If Athenæus, a certain wordy Greek rhetorician who flourished at the end of the Third Century A. D., had not written his long, involved Deipnosophistae, we might have been left in ignorance concerning one of the most interesting uses of the myth of the Golden Age—its reducio ad absurdum, or comic use. Smith says, "The comedy is usually produced by pushing the automatous element, occasionally too, the theory of Communism, to its perfectly logical, and yet, at the same time, its utterly absurd conclusion. . . ." ¹ The Deipnosophistae (translated Dinner Table Philosophers) in its dialogues, which extend through fifteen cumbrous books, touches nearly every topic under the sun, and one is this very question in which we are interested. ² Of little literary value in itself, the lengthy work is studded with quotations that make it an invaluable storehouse of fragments of authors whose works are now lost. Some of the quotations are from ancient Greek comedians who ridiculed the Golden Age.

The deipnosophistae are discussing slavery when quotations

² Athenæus, Deipnosophistae 6.267-270.
from Old Comedy are brought in to prove that slavery was unnecessary in the Golden Age. Why? Every thing was autonomous. Athenaeus says that Cratinus (520-423 B.C.) in his Riches was first to give one of these descriptions of a Golden Age of fantastic material prosperity, which became a favorite topic for comedy. He quotes this epoch-making passage. Here it is in the admirable translation of Gilbert Norwood:

'A among whom Cronos was king of yore, when they used loaves for dice and the wrestling-schools were strewn with Aeginetan cakes that fell from the trees and blossomed out of the sods'. Not only did Heaven send them up blessings (crops, etc.) without their labour...but the most exquisite fish swam (or walked?) up, introducing themselves by name to the pampered lieges of Cronos....

The next writer of Old Comedy to be quoted by Athenaeus is Crates (fl. c. 470 B.C.). The passage is from the Beasts, in which the following dispute takes place:

'What, shall no one possess a male or female slave? Shall an aged man have to wait on himself? 'Certainly not; I will cause everything to walk.' 'And what good will that do them?' 'Each of the utensils will come up of itself when he calls it. "Get into position, Table. Come now, lay yourself. Trough, begin kneading. Pour in, Ladle." Where is the cup? "Be off and rinse yourself. Cake, climb on the table." The Jug ought to have poured out the beetroot. "Fish, come along! "But I'm not fried on the other side yet.' Well, turn yourself over and sprinkle yourself with salt and oil."'

Next the speaker's rival is heard:

'Now mark the contrast. I for my part will first bring my friends the hot bath-water itself into the tank on pillars as at the hospital, so that it shall flow into the bath-tub for each person; and the water shall say "when!" Next, a jar of ointment shall instantly arrive of itself, accompanied by the sponge and slippers.'

Athenaeus considers the version of Telecleides (Periclean Age) the best of all. The passage occurs in the Amphictyons:

4 Ibid., pp. 148-149. (Fragments 14 and 15 Kock).
'Come, I will describe in full the life that I bestowed upon mankind. Peace, first of all, was regularly on tap. The earth bore no terror or diseases, but necessaries came spontaneously. Wine flowed down all the gullies; cakes fought with loaves at peoples mouths, crying, "Please swallow us, if you like the best quality". Fish came into the house, frying themselves and lying down ready on the tables. A river of soup flowed beside the dining-couches in eddies of stewed meat, and runlets of sauce were at the disposal of those so inclined; there was plenty of choice where to soak your morsel before swallowing it. On plates were cakes sprinkled with seasoning. Roast thrushes with their pastry flew into your mouth, and the buns made an uproar as they jostled round your teeth. The boys played knuckle-bones with slices of haggis and tit-bits. Men were fat in those days and stalwart giants....

After quoting Telecleides, Democritus, the character into whose mouth Athenaeus puts all this, briefly apologizing for the risk of boring his audience, goes on to cite all the other works in which such fantastic descriptions of the glutton's Golden Age figure. Next in his series comes the Miners, attributed by Athenaeus to Pherecrates, contemporary of Cratinus. Norwood, in commenting on this fragment, calls attention to its "sensational" length of thirty-four lines, but does not quote it, saying, "it is like a poor copy of the passage in Telecleides...."

Indeed, sensuous details are added ad nauseam--mainly, added lists of dainties such as black broth, lumps of cheese cakes, blood-puddings, hot slices of sausage, polentos, ox-guts and pork-ribs most daintily browned. The dining-couch becomes a bed of myrtles and anemones; apples float in the air; young maidens in sheer draperies serve the finest wine; dishes and pitchers miraculously refill themselves. This Golden Age is discovered

5 Ibid., pp. 20-21. (Fragment 1 Kock).
6 Norwood quotes Eratosthenes as saying this was written by one Nicomachus. Ibid., p. 162.
7 Ibid., p. 162.
8 Added details from the translation in the Loeb Edition:
in the land of the dead by some silver-miners who fall through into the Lower World.

These passages soon lose their humor for the modern reader and become tiresome. It is enough to say that in the Persians, another doubtful work of Pherecrates, next quoted by Athenaeus, a similar description of a gastronomic paradise is found. 9

Even Athenaeus appears to grow weary of quoting these repetitious descriptions, for he merely mentions, without quotation, Masters of the Frying Pan by Aristophanes in the same connection and scornfully and briefly quotes only the following short passage from Nicophon's Sirens: 10 "Let it snow barley-meal, sprinkle wheat-loaves, rain pease-porridge; let broth roll its lumps of meat through the streets, let a flat-cake give orders to be eaten ...." 11 However, he revives to close this section of his dialogue with a lengthly quotation from Metagenes' Thurio Persians, mentioning it last, he says, because it was never produced. There are no striking differences between it and the better passages already quoted.

This, then, is the invaluable fund of information to be found in Athenaeus concerning the burlesque of the Golden Age.

Authors seem pretty well agreed that such a comic version was well-developed in primitive folk-lore even before Hesiod put

9 Gilbert Norwood, Greek Comedy, pp. 162-163.
10 Attributed by Norwood to Epicharmus.
Norwood has a passage from the *Savages* of Pherecrates in which the Golden Age is satirized somewhat differently. He introduces it thus:

Apparently certain Athenians,...grown disgusted with their own country, set out to find the alleged noble race of savages, among whom existed that primitive simplicity of life described in one of the fragments:

'For in those days no one had any Old Joe or Mary Ann: the women had to do all the housework themselves. Yes, and they used to grind the flour early in the morning, till the village resounded with the millstones.'

Evidently they find things far from idyllic. A fragment from the chorus warns the expedition that the savages have, 'to live on pig-nuts, berries, and wild olives; but, when downright hungry, to gnaw their own fingers at night as cuttle-fish do....'

From the fragments there is evidence of a comic struggle between the expedition and the savages who greet it with dubious hostility. After that there seems to have been a truce, as traces of a conversation exist. For instance, the savages asking the Athenians, 'Don't you even clean your faces with beans?' and the answer, 'O dear no!....'

The purpose of these comic descriptions was not only to satirize the myth itself but also to satirize some philosophical theory, such as that of the Orphics, or a political regime. The lost *Golden Age* of Eupolis "appears to have been a sarcastic eulogy of the Cleonian regime".

Much later than the times of Old Comedy, Lucian of Samosata, (120-180 A. D.), also satirized the Golden Age. His satire is not so apparent in what he says of the Golden Age itself; it lies in the flippant context. In a dialogue between Cronus and his priest, Cronus is irreverently revealed as a gouty, out-of-date deity who has just alibi'd his way out of all the unfavorable things in his legend and whose chief province seems to be the gaming board. The god says that he voluntarily retired from the rule of heaven because the men of latter days were getting out of hand and giving him too much exercise with the thunderbolt.

Concerning the Saturnalia he says:

But it occurred to me to reserve these few days for the employments I have mentioned; during them I resume my authority, that men may remember what life was like in my days, when all things grew without sowing or ploughing of theirs - no ears of corn, but loaves complete and meat ready cooked - , when wine flowed in rivers, and there were fountains of milk and honey; all men were good and all men were gold. Such is the purpose of this my brief reign; therefore the merry noise on every side, the song and the games; therefore the slave and the free as one. When I was king slavery was not.

The priest then asks if the men gambled in Cronus' time. He receives the reply that they did but for nuts, not for money. The priest agrees that of course there would not be much point in their gambling for money, since they were solid gold themselves. Ironically, the priest reflects on what would happen if someone brought one of Cronus' subjects into the present age:

...suppose any one were to import one of your solid gold men into our age and exhibit him, what sort of reception would the poor thing get? They would tear him to pieces, not a doubt of it. I see them rushing him like the Maenads at Pentheus,....

The foregoing suffices to show how lightly the myth was treated by Lucian.

In the *Satyricon* of Petronius there is an obscure allusion to that Comic Golden Age treated by the Comedians: "Oh, don't be so gloomy", said Echion, the old clothes dealer. "I engage you could not name a better country to call your own, if only the men in it had sense.... If you were anywhere else, you would say that roast pork walked in the streets here...."¹⁷ (Italics not in the original). In other words, he implies that his hearer would think of it as the Golden Age of the comedians in comparison to any other place.

This is indeed an interesting ramification of the literary purposes of the Golden Age. As we have seen, most of our knowledge is contained in the *Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus. Though fragmentary, it gives us a complete idea of how the myth was satirized. Disregarding the incidental use by Petronius, we find eleven instances of the use of the myth of the Golden Age for comic purposes--Lucian's, two cited by Norwood only (one quoted), and eight by Athenaeus (seven quoted).

CHAPTER X

THE USE OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE FOR HISTORICAL PURPOSES

The myth of the Golden Age was taken so seriously that on occasion it appears in the writings of historians and antiquarians.

Naturally, some authors writing with a historical purpose mention it only to dismiss it. Pliny says, "The stories related of Hercules, Pyrene or Saturn I regard as absolutely mythical". However, he reflects the influence of the myth regarding the men of early times as immensely superior to those of his own age. Diodorus Siculus, the Greek historian of the times of Caesar and Augustus, dismisses it as a Cretan myth, calling Saturn a notorious for his impiety. However, he takes the time to find a Euhemeristic origin for the story and to re-tell it at some length. He even quotes ten lines of Hesiod's version. Censorinus likewise dismisses it with the following words:

...in the examination which I am going to make of past cycles and for the designation of the present age, leaving aside those times which the poets have named the Golden Age, the Age of Silver, and others, I will take as my point of departure Rome,

2 Ibid., 33.3.6.
our common country. 4

Herodotus and Xenophon did not refer to the Golden Age, though Xenophon mentioned a far-off time when men talked with animals. 5

It did not suit the temperament of Tacitus to engage in any mythological fantasies; however he believed in the moral superiority of early man. This is shown in a passage concerning the origin of laws, wherein he mentions an ancient time when laws were unnecessary. 6

The fact remains, however, that a few authors did treat the Golden Age as a matter of history.

Plutarch in giving Numa credit for instituting the Saturnalia, brings in the Golden Age: "Others will have it to be in remembrance of the age of Saturn, when there was no distinction between master and slave, but all lived as brothers and as equals in a condition of equality". 7

In his Roman Questions he offers as a probable explanation for the use of Saturn's temple as the treasury the fact that, "this saying hath obtained credit, that there was no avarice or injustice among men while Saturn ruled, but faith and righteousness...." 8

3 Diodorus Siculus, Historical Library 3.61.
5 Xenophon 2.7.13.
8 Plutarch, Roman Questions 42. Translation from "Roman
Along the same line, but less historically in tone, he says that Saturn is esteemed the father of truth, "is it for that which was fabled of Saturn's age, that it was most just and most likely to participate of truth?..." 9

More definitely historical is the citation of our myth by Justinius, historian of the Second Century A.D. His work was an abridgement of a longer history by Trogus Pompeius. Justinius says that Trogus, like a traveler returning to his own land, turns to the subject of Rome's history after giving that of the Orientals and the whole world. Then follows a typical Euhemeristic version of the early history of Rome that stresses the communism of early times:

3. Italiae cultores primum Aborigines fuerunt, quorum rex Saturnus tantae justitiae fuisse traditur, ut neque servierit sub illo quisquam, neque quicquam privatae rei habuerit: sed omnium communia et indivisa omnibus fuerint, veluti unum cunctis patrimonio esset. 4. Ob cujus exempli memoriae cautum est, ut Saturnalis est, exaequato omnium jure, passim in conviviis servi cum dominis recumbant.... 10

Then he goes on to tell of Italy's being called Saturnia and of the kings subsequent to Saturn--Faunus, Evander, and their successors.

Again in the Fourth Century A.D. we find the myth masquerading as history in true Euhemeristic style. This occurs in the Origo Gentis Romanae of Sextus Aurelius Victor. Though the word "gold" is not mentioned the idea is unmistakably there. Aurelius Victor first mentions the simplicity of those early times in

9 Ibid., 12. Translation from ibid., p. 211.
10 Justinius, Historiae Philippicae 43.1.3, 4.
discussing whether Saturn or Janus came first to Italy:

Tanta autem usque id tempus antiquorum hominum traditur fuisse simplicitas, ut venientes ad se advenas, qui modo consilio ac sapientia praediti, ad instruendam vitam formandosque mores aliquid conferent, quod eorum parentes atque originem ignorabant, Coelo et Terra editos non solum ipsi crederent, verum etiam posteris affirmarent; veluti hunc ipsum Saturnum... Quod quum ita existimetur, certum tamen est, priorem Janum in Italiam devenisse, ab eoque postea venientem exceptum esse Saturnum...11

Igitur Jano regnante apud indigenas rudes incultosque, Saturnus, regno profugus, quum in Italian venisset, benigno exceptus hospitio est;... Isque primus agriculturam edocuit, ferosque homines et rapto vivere assuetos ad compositam vitam eduxit. Unde Virgilius in octavo sic ait:

"Haec nemora indignae...."12

These two (of Justinius and Aurelius Victor) are the definite historical uses of the myth of the Golden Age. Plutarch rather dubiously uses it to give the answer to a few antiquarian questions. It appears in the history of Diodorus Siculus, though in its true status of a myth.

The historical usage is probably the least important of all purposes for which our myth was used. As a matter of fact, it is strange that a myth appeared even to this extent in history.

11 Aurelius Victor, Origo Gentis Romanae 1.
12 Ibid., 3.
CHAPTER XI
MISCELLANEOUS AND DOUBTFUL USES OF THE
MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE

There are in classical literature references to the Golden Age so slight that they do not merit consideration among the more important purposes. However, they reflect a little more light on how the myth was used, and should not be ignored completely. For that reason they are to be briefly mentioned in this chapter.

There are some other ambiguous passages in which the Golden Age might or might not have been in the mind of the author. A few such will be cited in this chapter in order to let the reader decide for himself and in order that they may represent to him a whole class of doubtful passages in which the Golden Age myth might be implied.

However, before discussing either of the above categories, one use of the myth of the Golden Age that does not fit into any classification remains to be disposed of. That is its use by Lactantius Placidus, a mythographer of the Sixth Century A. D. He wrote a summary of the Metamorphoses of Ovid in which the Golden Age figures. However, since Lactantius Placidus was approaching the subject as a student of myth, his purpose was not 1 Lactantius Placidus, 3, 4.

114
exactly entertainment, neither was it exactly any other purpose that has been considered in this thesis. It would not be worthwhile to quote what he has to say. The *Biographie Universelle* dismisses him with the following remark, "Lactantius n'a rien d'important qui ne soit ailleurs et en meilleurs termes, surtout avec plus d'autorité...."²

One way in which the Golden Age was introduced incidentally was as the general standard of a typically good, happy time. In a way, it is a usage of praise and could have been considered in Chapter Six, but it was thought better not to weaken the more forceful examples given therein with such fleeting references as these.

In the *Hipparchus*, a spurious dialogue listed among Plato's works, Socrates refers to the tyranny after Hipparchus' death under the reign of his brother Hippias and says, "only during those years did there exist a tyranny at Athens, and that during all the other period, the Athenians lived nearly as when Saturn reigned..."³ (Italics not in the original). It is just another way of saying that they lived under excellent conditions.

Again he makes a similar remark about another government: "But when I saw these men proving in a short time that the previous form of government had been (as it were) gold,...I felt indignant, and withdrew myself from the evil men of that period".⁴

Plato also uses "the golden race in us" to characterize the

Plutarch is fond of using the idea of the Golden Age in this general way. In Timoleon, describing the treacherous conduct of Calippus, an Athenian, and Pharax, a Lacedaemonian captain, he says, "both..., after giving out that the design of their coming was to introduce liberty and depose tyrants, so tyrannized themselves, that the reign of former oppressors seemed to be a golden age in comparison...."  

Again, in Sertorius he similarly condemns another reign of terror, "but those about Cinna and Marius committing all manner of insolence and cruelty, made the Romans think the evils of war a golden time in comparison...."

Another way in which the myth of the Golden Age was referred to incidentally was as a standard of antiquity. Instead of saying "very long ago" writers would say, "in Saturn's day". For instance, Nicander is quoted as having placed the birth of the bees in Crete in the days of Saturn. Plato also used the same device; when he wanted to give a locale far-away in time to his myth about the judging of souls in the Gorgias, he set it in the time of Saturn. Plutarch quotes this myth in his De Consolatione ad Apollonium. Plutarch in Coriolanus, telling of the

5 Plato, Laws 1.13. Ibid., vol. 5, p. 33.
6 Plutarch, Life of Timoleon. Translation from Plutarch's Lives: The Translation Called Dryden's, A. H. Clough, ed., vol. 2, p. 120.
9 Plato, Gorgias 166, 167.
10 Plutarch, De Consolatione ad Apollonium 36.
antiquity of bribery in Athens says that Anytus was guilty of this crime, "in a period while the pure and golden race of men were still in possession of the Roman forum".11

As far as ambiguous references are concerned, let us recall that many authors such as Lucretius and Varro and Tacitus and Pliny, in describing non-mythical "good old days" of reality, transfer to the more scientific picture of early man many familiar details from the ancient myth, such as the balmy eternal springtime and the piety of primitive man. Insofar as more mundane descriptions borrow these mythical details they may be called ambiguous or doubtful references to the myth. It would be almost impossible to trace them through classical literature—and well beyond the scope of this paper.

There are a few passages, nevertheless, which seem to imply more directly the Golden Age mythology.

Catullus, in the Marriage of Peleus and Thetis, having described the marriage of a mortal and a nymph, sighs for the happy days when such could be:

For in bodily presence of old, before religion was despised, the heavenly ones were wont to visit pious homes of heroes.... But when the earth was dyed with hideous crime, and all men banished justice from their greedy souls...then all right and wrong, confounded in impious madness, turned from us the righteous will of the gods. Wherefore they deign not to visit such companies, nor endure the torch of clear daylight.12

In view of the well-known association of gods with men during the Golden Age, the flight of Justice in Aratus' version of the Ages, and the typical lament at the decline of man, does there not seem to be an implied reference to the Golden Age here? The purpose would be entertainment and rhetorical effect.

In the Carmen Saeculare of Horace he says:

\begin{verbatim}
Iam Fides et Pax et Honor Pudorque
priscus et neglecta redire Virtus
audet, adparetque beata pleno
Copia cornu.\end{verbatim}

He seems to have the Golden Age in mind, especially in using the word "priscus" and asking these goddesses to return, since he implies that they were once here (Golden Age) and have left (Iron Age). The purpose is praise of Augustus and the new era in line with Vergil's fourth Eclogue.

The foregoing are just a few of the doubtful references which prove how thoroughly the idea of a Golden Age had permeated the Greek and Latin literary subconscious.

13 Ibid., 22-23.
14 Horace, Carmen Saeculare 57-60.
CHAPTER XII
CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

The myth of the Golden Age tells of an ideal time at the beginning of the world when all men were good and lived in an earthly Paradise. Some form of this myth exists in most mythologies. It started so long ago as a pre-historic folk-tale that it is impossible to trace its origin. Various explanations may be offered, but its strong resemblance to the Bible story leads one to believe that it is a perverted form of the story of Paradise. Strong psychological reasons, and probably physical ones, too, explain why this tradition flourished after separation from the true body of primitive revelation.

The classical form of the myth of the Golden Age makes its first appearance in literature in the works of Hesiod. In his Works and Days, associated with the Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages, it is a simple, beautiful story closely reflecting the primitive folk tale. During the course of its manipulation by various Greek authors, many details were added to the story, and many ideas only implied in Hesiod were emphasized out of all proportion. By the time Latin literature mentioned the myth, vegetarianism had become a virtue of the Golden Age, and its peace and love had been stressed. The Cyclic idea that the Golden Age
would come back again had grown. There was a tendency to regard
the Golden Age as an idealization of the agricultural life and to
stress its freedom from man's evil inventions such as swords and
ships. Somewhere along the line, no one knows exactly why, the
Greek Kronos, ruler of the Golden Age, became identified with the
Italian god, Saturn. The latter's feast, the Saturnalia, became
a symbolic renewal of the Age of Gold.

The Latin authors added new details to the story, such as
many-colored sheep and rivers of wine and lakes of oil, and made
their great contribution (notably Vergil and Ovid) in harmonizing
various conflicting ideas about the four first Ages, the Flood,
and the beginning of the world in general.

The literary history of the myth extended roughly over fif­
ten centuries--from Hesiod (8th or 9th Century B. C.) to Lactan­
tius Placidus, mythographer of the 6th Century A. D. (>). During
that long time we find it mentioned on eighty-nine different
occasions by forty-three authors (see Table I). This excludes
translations, doubtful references, and three occasions whereon
second-hand information (without quotation) is given by one
author that the myth had been used by another. Counting the lat­
ter categories we find it mentioned a possible one hundred
ninety-nine times in classical literature.

The myth was used most frequently by Vergil--and most effec­
tively, too. In his works he used it on eight occasions, of
which only one is an incidental reference. It also appears in
the Lydia, once ascribed to him. His characteristic purpose in
employing it is praise. His fourth Eclogue, the most sublime and
outstanding use of the story in literature, glorifies the destiny of his beloved Empire. In the *Aeneid* the Golden Age of Saturn is brought into the history of Italy to give it an aura of greatness. Besides praising his country, Vergil also employs the myth to praise Augustus personally and to praise the agricultural life. His incidental use occurs in the sixth Eclogue, when the myth is merely mentioned as a typical subject for poets.

Hesiod used the story of the Golden Age for moral purposes. Aratus and Ovid, the two other artificers of the myth, used it for rhetorical effect and entertainment respectively. Ovid in all used the myth six times, mostly for entertainment but with a sprinkling of other purposes, too.

Some other authors who mentioned the myth frequently were four Plato, four times, plus three incidental references; Plutarch, five times, plus three incidental mentions; Seneca, five times; and Claudian, four times.

We find the myth used for seven purposes altogether:

1) for praise and flattery,
2) for entertainment and rhetorical effect,
3) for contrast and escape,
4) for philosophical and moral purposes,
5) for the purpose of comedy
6) for historical purposes,
7) for incidental purposes,
   a) as a subject for poets,
   b) as a standard of antiquity,
   c) as a standard of perfection.

On a few occasions this use as a standard of perfection is perverted into a justification for sinful acts on the grounds that they were done in the freer Golden Age.

Of all these the historical is the least important. From
the point of view of number and length of citations, the philosophical and moral use would seem to be the most important. However, many of these passages are by obscure authors whose works have little literary value. Since this thesis is on literary purposes, it is held herein that the use for praise and flattery is the most important use to which the myth was put. Numerically it is nearly as strong as the philosophical use, and the literary significance and beauty of the works composed in its name far outweigh the duller, prosy, philosophical writings. Furthermore, Vergil's use of the myth for praise, and above all the fact that the fourth Eclogue was composed for this end, make the motive of praise and flattery the most important of the literary purposes of the myth of the Golden Age.
### TABLE I

**LOCi OF THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE**

**IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>WORKS</th>
<th>TIMES MENTIONED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hesiod</td>
<td>Works and Days 109-126.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theognis</td>
<td>Maxims 1133-1136.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Comic Authors:</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Empedocles</td>
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<td>Aratus</td>
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<td>Sibylline Oracles 3.743-759.</td>
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<td>Fragment on p. 27 of Alfredus Breysig, De P. Nigidii Figuli Fragmentis apud Scholiasten Germanici Servatis.</td>
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<td>Horace</td>
<td>Epodes 16, 2.1-4: Odes 4.2.37-40.</td>
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<td>Diodorus Siculus</td>
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*Incidental use. ------------------------------------------ Cumulative total 51*
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<td>1.42-47, 63-64, 4.5-11. Carmina Einsidensia 2.21-24.</td>
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<td>Statius</td>
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<td>Epigrams 12.62.1-6.</td>
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<td>Juvenal</td>
<td>6.1-20, 13.28-70.</td>
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<td>Appendix Vergiliana, Lydia 74-78.</td>
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<td>De Die Natalis* 5(16).</td>
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<td>De Abinentia 2.20-21, 3.27, 4.2.</td>
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<td>Lactantius</td>
<td>Divinae Institutiones 1.11, 5.5-8, 7.2.</td>
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<td>Aurelius Victor</td>
<td>Orego Gentis Romanae 1, 3.</td>
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<td>De Raptu Prosperpinae 3.19-30: Laus Serenae 70-82: De Consulatu Stilichonis 422-466: In Rufinum 1.380-387.</td>
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<td>Lactantius Placidus</td>
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**Cumulative Total** 89

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<th>TRANSLATIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cicero</td>
<td>Translation of Aratus</td>
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<td>De Consolatione ad Apollinimum.</td>
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**Cumulative Total** 92

| Hyginus                               | De Astronomica (repetition of Aratus' Phaenomena.) | 1 |

**Cumulative Total** 93

*Incidental use.
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<td>Catullus</td>
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<td>Carmen Saeculare 57-60.</td>
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<td>Nicander</td>
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<td>Mentioned in V. Vergiliii</td>
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<td>Maronis Opera, John Covington, ed., vol. 1, p. 142.</td>
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<td>Alcmaeon, quoted by Philodemus and mentioned by Smith E. R. E. p. 194, Footnote t.</td>
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<td>Aristophanes</td>
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<td>Masters of the Frying Pan mentioned by Athenaeus in his consideration of Greek Comic Authors who wrote of the Golden Age.</td>
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<td>Eupolis</td>
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<td>Golden Age; a lost work mentioned by Gilbert Norwood, Greek Comedy, p. 198.</td>
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<td>Grand Total</td>
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Biographical material on all authors to be found therein taken from The Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th Edition.
The thesis submitted by Mrs. Mary Agnes O'Neill Gross has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Classical Languages.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 4, 1945

Date

Signature of Adviser

A. Hubert Abel, Ph.D.