PICUS WHO IS ALSO ZEUS

by

RENDEL HARRIS

Cambridge:
at the University Press
1916
INTRODUCTION

The present volume is a continuation of the one which was published in 1913 under the title of Boanerges, much in the same way as Boanerges was the expansion and extension of the previous volumes dealing with the Dioscuri in Christian Legend, and the Cult of the Heavenly Twins, which are cited in the following pages under the abbreviated forms, Dioscuri and Cult respectively. It is assumed (for how could one continue the argument on any other hypothesis?) that the main positions in the previous volume are sound, and that they furnish a secure foundation upon which the students of Man and of Man’s Religions may build further: this does not mean that there are no corrections necessary and no re-statements desirable, but that, on the whole, we have liberty to proceed: for the investigation, as far as it has gone, has thrown too much light into odd corners of human history to be altogether negligible. The student of classical archaeology cannot afford to ignore it, for it explains many hitherto unintelligible features in Greek and Roman Mythology, and shows us in what direction to look for the origin of the Olympian worship. The student of history cannot pass by discoveries which, to a large extent, enable us to re-write the story of the foundation of Rome and other great cities of the past. Folk-lore, folk-medicine, and the like, begin to be translated out of a thousand languages into a single speech, expressing the Unity of Civilisation and the Interrelation of Religions. Let us see how far we have gone, and then we shall see the lines that are laid for the progress of the present volume.

It has been shown that mankind, in its primitive state, the subject of many fears, and evolving its faith from its fears (“primus in orbe deos fecit timor”), found itself beset especially by two Fears, one the great rational Fear, the Fear of the Thunder, the other, the great irrational Fear, the Fear of Twin Children. From the first of these Fears came the worship of Zeus, from the
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second the reverence for the children of the Thunder, known by various names as Dioscuri, Boanerges, and the like. The road to Zeus-worship was shown to start from the belief that the Thunder was a bird, and commonly the explanation was made that it was a bird with a red head. In particular the bird which personified the Thunder over Europe and part of Asia (and perhaps elsewhere) was the Red-headed Woodpecker, omitting for convenience some associated bird-forms that have slight claims to similar rank. This Red-headed Woodpecker, either the Great Black Woodpecker, the Picus Martius of ancient Latins and of the modern Zoologists, or the Green Woodpecker, the Gecinus Viridis, dominates the whole religious evolution of Greece and Rome. He is the “Picus who is also Zeus” of the Cretan and Italian tradition, the good King Keleos (sometimes the bad Keleos) of Cretan and Eleusinian story. From one or other of these forms the Zeus and the Jupiter with which we are familiar have been derived; and the colour with which he is supposed to symbolise the thunder becomes a religious token of the first moment, in Europe, Asia and Africa, as well among the priesthood of the Capitoline Jupiter as among the soldiery of the Spartans, and the medicine-men of tribes of West Africa. It was pointed out also that this Thunder-god who was a bird and became a man made his evolution in easy stages, and that we could catch him in the transition from the ornithomorph to the anthropomorph, among existing people like the American Indians of the Pacific slope, who confess him in both forms, or among the Chinese and Japanese who figure him, indeed, as a man, but encumber the human form with bird-like appendages, in the shape of claws and wings and a beak-like nose, in order that we may say in Chinese the equivalent of the Cretan formula that “Picus is also Zeus.” Something of the same kind may, perhaps, be traced in the early Vedic religion.

When we came to the second great primal Fear, we were able to show it to be diffused over almost the whole world, and frequently to be expressed in what we could only describe at the present day as acts of systematic and revolting cruelty. It appears that primitive man was in the habit of making away with any woman who bore twins, and that the twin-children were themselves destroyed; sometimes reason came to the relief of the situation and sometimes humanity asserted itself: in such cases it was argued that only one child was abnormal, it was a
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spirit-child, a devil-child, a bird-child, a thunder-child, and therefore only one was killed. The theory of a dual paternity changed the situation, exile was substituted for murder, and the Twin-village was formed; we thus discovered one of the missing origins of human Sanctuary, in the island or bush-clearing, where the exiled twins and their mother were allowed to live, but under the severest of taboos. Moreover since, in many parts of the world, the supposition that the second parent in the fatherhood of a pair of twins was regarded as a bird, and particularly as the bird which was the thunder, there was a blending of the two great Fears into a single and combined Reverence, in which the Thunder and the Twins were a sacred triad, known to the Greeks as Zeus and the Dioscuri (or Zeus' boys), and revered in common; similar evolutions occurred elsewhere, and even religions that became monotheistic, like the Hebrew religion, for a long time did not regard it as impious or idolatrous to associate a pair of celestial Sons of Thunder with the central worship of Jahveh.

Probably the discovery that will be most far-reaching in connection with Twins and the Thunder-cult is precisely that of the Twin-town. We can already begin to mark the twin-towns upon our classical maps, just as we can do in the Niger district, and, as we hope to show in the present volume, on the map of England.

It is not, of course, maintained that one can, all over the world, find Thunder-cults, either in the present or the past; nor that the Twin-Fear is universal; nor that the areas of the one Fear are necessarily the areas of the other, so that every Thunder-bird would have Thunder-children, and there would be a pair of Dioscures for every sacred Woodpecker. It is not necessary to assume that there was a Thunder-bird in ancient Egypt, where there is not normally any Thunder; we may not always be able to connect the Twin-cult with the Thunder-cult, even where both of them exist. All that we at present assert is that in the course of human evolution the two fears in question have existed over very wide areas, and that the areas where they do exist overlap one another widely. That will be a sufficient statement from which to work.

In the region of Greek Mythology, our gains have been very great. The legends of the birth of Zeus are now reasonably intelligible. The Curetes and Corybantes who protect with their
clatter and clamour the infant god turn out to be the counterpart of the humble peasantry who call the swarming bees by beating upon tin pans! And the reason why the bee-maidens and others fed the babe Zeus with honey arises out of a very natural supposition that the Woodpecker, who is the Thunder-bird and is also Zeus, has a fondness for bees and bee-products. We ought, of course, to have found out long ago the riddle of the Curetes and Corybantes, for it was disclosed in unambiguous language by Vergil himself.

The Heavenly Twins were shown to be the patrons of many human arts and industries, especially they were credited with the invention of the Plough and the invention of the Ship. It was shown that in each case the Woodpecker parent was really responsible. From this point a new departure was made with the greatest of all the Greek Myths, the story of the Argonauts. Jason was shown to be a Heavenly Twin and his ship to be manned, for the most part, by pairs of twin heroes. The ship had been evolved out of a dug-out with twins on board, just such an aleveus as Romulus and Remus were exposed in on the Tiber!

The religious importance of the enquiries became clear when the results were applied to the Christian Scriptures. In the Old Testament and in the Apocrypha there were shown to be many stories that were based upon twin-myths, and it was evident that such beliefs in twin-myths lasted nearly to the borders of the Christian era, so far as literary evidence was forthcoming. Perhaps the best instances will be found in the explanations that were made of the story of Esau and Jacob, the inverted birthright in these legends being capable of immediate illustrations from West African twin-customs.

If literary evidence for Dioscurism was in evidence down to the borders of the Christian era, it goes without saying that the Twins were current in folk-lore in the times of the N.T. itself; consequently there was no reason to explain away, by exegetical subtlety, the reference to the Boanerges or Sons of Thunder amongst the disciples of Our Lord. The real difficulty arose out of the observation of an apparent parallel between Jesus in the Gospels and Jason in the Argonautica. Could we assume the equivalence of Jesus and Jason etymologically? Was Jason originally a Semitic product, borrowed, as so many other Oriental features, by the Greeks? If so, was it possible that the Gospel, either
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in its central figure or its leading incidents, had been Jasonised? If not Jasonised, might we say Dioscurised? As regards Jason, it was made out that the Jason-Cult was widely diffused in Asia, but the final evidence for his Semitic ancestry is not yet forthcoming. It seems more probable that the home of the hero was in Thessaly or in Crete than in Palestine. So the identification to which we have referred is covered at present by a suspense of judgement. Dioscurism, however, is a much more widely diffused factor than Jasonism, and there is reason to suspect that its influence may be capable of detection in the New Testament, beyond the playful cognomen given to the Sons of Zebedee. It will require a good deal of patient investigation to define the limits within which the influence has operated.

We come now to the outlook of the present volume. The discovery of the Aryan Twins, the Sanskrit Aśvin or Nasatiya, upon the Hittite Monuments, would lead naturally enough to the enquiry as to whether traces of Twin-cult exist among the populations who now occupy the ground of the ancient Hittite Empire. An accidental discovery made it possible to carry such an enquiry out to a definite conclusion, and to show that in the region in question, and down to a time at least as late as the second century of the Christian era, twins were regarded as the sons or the priests of the Thunder-god, and that such a twin-priest received the name Barlaha or Son of God; this startling discovery occupies the front place in the present volume.\(^1\)

After that we return to Zeus, who is now resolved into the Thunder-bird (the Woodpecker), the Thunder-tree, and the Thunder-bolt, or axe. The question of the diffusion of Woodpecker-cult is taken up afresh, and it is asked whether in the British Isles there are traces of Woodpecker-cult or of Twin-cult at special centres. The results are again surprising; for it can be shown that, all over England, there are traces of the deference paid to the Woodpecker.

In this way the argument proceeds, and the results of the previous volumes become more and more accentuated and assured. It is not easy to say how much further this reconstruction of primitive religion is likely to go: it is already long past the stage

\(^1\) The chapter is reprinted from Preuschen’s *Zeitschrift für N. T. Wissenschaft* for 1914, where it formed a part of a votive number to Julius Wellhausen on his seventieth birthday.
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of the incredulous jest with which it was at first received, even by some who were folk-loreists of high repute; the proved human interest in twins and their destruction cannot be limited to the question “which of them shall I keep?” We are confident also that the supposition on the part of some unsympathetic readers (if indeed they were actual readers) that the writer with whom they professed to be acquainted saw everything double, will not much longer be found satisfactory to educated people. However let them say what they will. The present volume shows that we are continuing the investigation. It is a part of the Quest for Truth to which we have been all our lives committed.

R. H.

February 1916.
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