

CORRESPONDENCE

'THE HEAD OF JOHN BAPTIST.'

I SHOULD like to thank Dr. James for his kind—if perhaps not too kindly—correction of my inaccuracies. 'Apocryphal Scriptures' and 'late Byzantine legends' are to me new seas into which I am but just plunging, so I am doubly grateful to be set right at the outset. The details in which he is good enough to correct me nowise invalidate, or even affect, my argument. But I remember well my own foolish exasperation when eminent literary scholars made slipshod references to Greek vases, so I offer him sympathy as well as contrition. Some Russian scholars must, I am sure, have suffered the like anguish from the misprints in the Russian transliterations. As to my main contention—that the Gospel narrative pre-supposes a daimon-myth and ritual, as well as a kernel of historic fact—I abide by it unmoved. I am well aware that it *is* not, and perhaps never will be, logically proved, but it seems to me to correlate a quite pleasing number of facts. Several sympathetic letters from scholars have reached me; one of them, from the Abbé Loisy, has given me special pleasure; he finds my hypothesis 'très vraisemblable.' I propose, therefore, to continue unabashed my 'crude and inconsequent speculations.'

As to the general desirability of Comparative Mythology as a subject for students, I would leave that question in hands more judicious than my own. I am no educationalist. To me the keenest joys of science—as of sport—are always perilous, and I hope to die commending these perilous joys to a generation better equipped, and I trust more valorous, than my own.

JANE E. HARRISON.

To the Editors of THE CLASSICAL REVIEW.

SIRS,—'Very outspoken criticism' may no doubt at times be desirable, but I cannot see that the errors of fact or faults of method which the Provost of King's has pointed out in Miss Harrison's article on 'The Head of John the Baptist' are sufficient to justify the tone of his condemnation.

Miss Harrison, let us admit, does make mistakes. She is apt to have her mind so much concentrated on her main point that she is often inaccurate in language about side-issues. In this particular article there are several such errors, all duly collected by the Provost. She says, 'an early apocryphal scripture,' instead of saying 'a Byzantine MS. of an apocryphal scriptural legend, probably early.' She says the story of the beheading 'is immediately followed by' another incident, without mentioning (what is of no importance for the argument), that it is only so followed in the book she is quoting, not in the MS. from which

the beheading-story is taken. She says this incident occurs 'at the time of the Temptation,' when really it is not quite clear, nor does it matter in the least, when it occurred. For all these errors let her repent and mend her ways.

Then come two passages of Greek, where the Provost differs from her. But here, I must confess, her interpretation seems to me to be probably right, and certainly defensible.

1. ἔδωκε τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ ὑπὸ γυναικὸς ὀρχηστρίδος θριαμβεθῆναι. I should translate 'gave his head to be borne in triumph by a dancing woman.' And I should precisely agree with Miss Harrison that 'a triumphal dance with the head seems almost implied.' Observe the 'almost.' The Provost wants it to mean 'was exposed in triumph' by a woman who, by profession, happened to be, in other circumstances, a dancer. Quite possible; though unlikely in point of language. And surely unnecessary in view of the passage quoted by the Provost himself from the 'Life of John the Baptist' in Graffin and Wau's *Patrologie Orientale*, where the damsel definitely does dance with the head at a banquet.

2. ἐποίησα . . . δοθῆναι τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ πίνακος εἰς ὄρχησμα κορασίου ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ Ἡρώδου. I should naturally translate: 'I caused his head to be given on a charger for the dancing of a girl before Herod.' And so Miss Harrison. The Provost prefers: 'at the dancing of a wench before Herod.' Both are possible; but considering that, according to the passage in Graffin and Wau, the girl did dance with the head, I see no objection to the first interpretation. The Provost argues that it would be awkward to dance 'with the head on a dish all the time.' But no one says that the dancer kept the head on a dish. It was given to her on a dish, and, I presume, she handled it as best pleased her.

Next comes an argument of Miss Harrison's which I think the Provost misunderstands, and, indeed, this misunderstanding seems to lie at the root of his whole criticism. He evidently thinks that Miss Harrison has said something both paradoxical and offensive, something which justified him in using every art of polemic to destroy so noxious a view. I believe he imagines—though I hesitate to ascribe such a view to him, and offer him sincere apologies if I am wrong—that Miss Harrison means that John the Baptist was a Year-daemon and not a historical person; or, even more strangely, that, to quote his own words: 'There were love-passages between Herodias' daughter and St. John (on her side only) and that when she was repulsed the motive *spretæ iniuria formæ* came into play, and she demanded John's head out of spite.'

It had never occurred to me that any student of mythology would so interpret Miss Harrison's argument. I understand her to mean that the

historical story of the death of John the Baptist became in legend involved with a number of those motives which are commonly found in the Year-daemon myths. For example, in medieval Byzantine texts we find that the dancing-girl dances with St. John's head; that St. John has a miraculous infancy, and is fed with honey in a cave; we find, in general tradition, that St. John's Day is Midsummer-day—the regular festival of the Sun-daemon; and that the Russian *Vertep* plays and the *Yarilo* myth provide some very striking parallels to the ritual stories about certain heads of decapitated Year- or Vegetation-daemons in Greek mythology.

I do not know the medieval legends about John the Baptist well enough to know if Miss Harrison's passing allusions to them are right or wrong: for example, her suggestion that in some of them he was made into a sort of Adonis-figure. If she is wrong, let the Provost correct her. But her main argument seems to me in the first place to be an interesting and very probable suggestion, though not capable of complete proof or disproof; and, in the second place, to be entirely undeserving of such a fierce

attack. Indeed, I can hardly imagine a more inoffensive thesis. Miss Harrison never suggests that the Gospel story itself is derived from the Year-myth—though I do not for a moment mean to imply that a scholar should be debarred from making such a suggestion, if the argument seemed to him to lead that way. She only once suggests that it may have been affected by the Year-myth—namely, that John's death may have been put on Herod's birthday for a mythological reason, because in these stories the King is apt to die on the birthday of the enemy King.

The Provost ends by a denunciation of Comparative Mythologists. If we mythologists are to blame for the excessive hostility which we seem to arouse, I venture to suggest that it is chiefly not for the reasons alleged by the Provost, but for a quite different one. It may be true that, like other groups of inquirers, we sometimes fall into a sort of shorthand language which is perfectly intelligible to other mythologists, but is apt to be misinterpreted by outsiders. If that is so, it looks as if we and our readers both ought to be more careful.

G. M.

BOOKS RECEIVED

All publications which have a bearing on Classical Studies will be entered in this list if they are sent for review. The price should in all cases be stated.

*** Excerpts or Extracts from Periodicals and Collections will not be included unless they are also published separately.*

- Batten* (J. D.) *Poems*. 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ " \times 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Pp. 24. London: Chiswick Press, 1916. 1s. net.
- Bridges* (Robert) *Ibant Obscuri, an experiment in the Classical Hexameter*. 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ " \times 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Pp. 158. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916. Cloth, 12s. 6d. net.
- Cagnat* (R.) and *Chapot* (V.) *Manuel d'Archéologie Romaine. Tome Premier. Les monuments; décoration des monuments; sculpture*. 9" \times 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Pp. xxvi + 737. Paris: A. Picard, 1917. 15 fr.
- Epictetus* (the Discourses and Manual) Translated by P. E. Matheson. 2 Vols. Pp. 246 and 280. 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ " \times 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916. Cloth, 3s. 6d. net each.
- Game* (J. B.) *Teaching High-School Latin*. 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ " \times 5". Pp. x + 126. Cambridge University Press (for Chicago University Press), 1916. Cloth, 4s. net.
- Harris* (Rendel) *The Ascent of Olympus*. 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ " \times 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Pp. 144. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917. Cloth, 5s. net.
- Holmes* (T. R.) *Cæsar's Campaigns in Britain*. 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ " \times 5". Pp. 160. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916. Cloth, 1s. 6d.
- Registered Teachers* (Official List of), 1917. 10 $\frac{3}{8}$ " \times 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Pp. 386. London: Teachers' Registration Council, 1917. Cloth, 10s. 6d. net.
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