

*SOME NOTES ON CHRISTIAN DIOSCURISM.*

*The Dioscuri in the Christian Legends : The Cult of the Heavenly Twins.* By J. Rendel Harris, D.Litt. Cambridge University Press.

THE subject of the survival of heathen custom and myth in Christianity is intensely interesting, and forces itself upon the observer at every turn. To expound it completely would demand a cross between Scaliger and Methuselah ; but Dr. Harris's published labours in one corner of this vast field, while a sign of the immensity of the task, are a proof of his learning, diligence, and acumen, as well as an inspiration and example to others who shall follow in his steps. He has taken as his province the annexation of Dioscurism by the Church ; and, though we are led to hope for much more on this point from his pen, the two works named above are full of suggestion, and crowded with fact and ingenious conjecture.

It is not our part to criticize Dr. Harris, but to learn from him with the humility that is optimistically ascribed to pupils. We have not indeed—nor would he desire it—always agreed with him ; but we shall not linger here on our disagreements or on the grounds of them. It is our object, in a series of tentative and disconnected notes, to add our tiny quota to Dr. Harris's collection. Some of our additions will be from Norse and Old English sources ; and, if we are correct in them, this may well be an advantage ; for Germanic legend differs so widely *in tone* from Hellenic or Italic, that any material harmony seems to point to a *primary* unity, and will justify Dr. Harris in seeking his explanations deep down in unsophisticated human nature.

Later published than the *Dioscuri*, *The Cult of the Heavenly Twins* is logically the earlier, and traces Dioscuric worship to more primitive beginnings. Dr. Harris starts by pointing out the fact that in early stages of human development the birth of twins is a portent to be received with dread. Unlike Virgil, to whom a "simillima proles, indiscreta suis," was a "gratus parentibus error" (*Aeneid*, 10, 392), Dr. Harris has learnt that such a birth is the very reverse of a pleasure to the parents. We can illustrate this from Northern sagas.

In the story of Geirmund Hell-skin (*Sturlunga Saga*, ed. Vigfusson and Powell, i. 1) we learn that Geirmund and Hámund were the twin sons of King Hjor and his queen; but, we are told, so dark was the skin of both that the queen took a dislike to them, and exchanged them for the fair son of one of her handmaids. It is no unlikely conjecture that the queen's hatred of her children was really due, not to their dusky colour, but to the mere fact that they were twins. As in the case of Romulus and Remus, mentioned by Dr. Harris (*Cult of the Heavenly Twins*, p. 23), the Saga-man, ignorant of the uncanniness of twinship, invents a new reason for their expulsion from the royal house.

A second point of interest is the similarity of the names given to twins (*Cult*, p. 66 and *passim*; *Dioscuri*, p. 42). Here again Germanic legend supplies illustrative examples. We have already mentioned Geirmund and Hámund, a sufficient parallel to Speusippus and Mesippus. Modern criticism inclines to accept the historical reality of Hengest and Horsa; whether this is just or not, their joint leadership unites with their practical identity of name to induce us to put them down as twins. To Menja and Fenja, the two giant maidens who ground the mills of King Fródi (*Grotta Songr*, *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, i. 184 seq.), twin-

ship is nowhere directly ascribed, but it can be inferred with tolerable certainty. "We were playmates, brought up under the earth for nine winters": i.e. as giantesses they required nine years of gestation in the womb of earth, in place of the ordinary nine months, as Loki (*Lokasenna*, 92, C.P.B. i. 104) was eight years under the earth as a female producing his monstrous brood. As to their Dioscuric character, it is obvious. Welcomed by King Fródi, they grind him benefits; tyrannized over by him, they grind him ruin; a well known characteristic of the Heavenly Twins everywhere. Nor are they less similar to the Great Brethren in their warlike doings; in fact, they give us a picture of another Lake Regillus: "Thereafter in Sweden we stepped into the battle-storm; we brake the byrnies, we shivered the shields; we went to meet the gray-clad warriors; we pulled down one king and set up another; we gave help to good Gutthorm and rested not till Knui fell."

It would be easy to multiply twin *names* from the Edda: Hrist and Mist, Randgrith and Radgrith, the Valkyries (*Grimniss Mál*); the serpents Goin and Moin (*ibid.*); and innumerable others; but the proof of actual personal twinship would be difficult. In the case of the dwarfs, to which we shall recur in a moment, the names are peculiarly suggestive; but, as is so often seen in Northern mythology, etymological and allegorical considerations have played their part. We hear (*Voluspá*) of Vitr and Litr, Fili and Kili, Fialarr and Galarr, Skirvir and Virvir, Anar and Onar, Finnr and Ginnr, Bivavr and Bavavr, Dvalinn and Durinn. Some of these unquestionably seem to point to Dioscurism; but Nár and Náinn (both meaning *corpse*), Thrár and Thráinn (probably *obstinate* or *rotten*), seem to be merely etymological. Passing by these for an instant, we are confronted (*Hervarar Saga*, 2) with a case in which there

is no doubt, that of the "tveir Haddingjar" or two Haddings. They were the youngest of the twelve sons of Arngrim: "they did between them the work of one man, because they were twins and the youngest," whereas Angantyr, the eldest, did the work of two. It is not unworthy of mention that among Arngrim's other sons are Hervardh and Hjorvardh; and in the same Saga Angantyr's daughter Hervor appears as a virago, taking the name Hervardh when doing her deeds with the magic sword Tyrting. And here we may incidentally notice a further point or two. The sons of Arngrim were Berserks; hence we are not surprised to find that the two Berserks who, in spite of their giant size and great strength, came to such grief before Thorvald Vidforli (*Kristni Saga*, 2) were both called Hawk. We might perhaps ascribe some of the extraordinary deeds of the Berserks to an infusion of older Dioscuric legend into tales of demoniac possession and of remarkable deeds of bravery or strength. Nor must we forget to notice that the sons of Arngrim are twelve in number—a common feature in Berserk stories, and an instructive parallel to the story of Jacob. Not only were the sons of Westmarr, referred to by Dr. Harris (*Cult*, p. 58), twelve in number (including a triplet of Greps), but the Berserk companions of Thorir and Ospak in *Grettis Saga* were also twelve. In the prose Edda (*Skaldskaparmál*, 43) we read of King Hrolf Kráki and his twelve Berserks, among whom are the *brothers* (twins?) Svipdag and Beigudh: and the tradition survives in the twelve Paladins of Charlemagne. Hence the twin Haddings among the twelve sons of Arngrim may represent an obscure reminiscence of the Gemini among the signs of the zodiac, in which Castor and Pollux, of course, found an early place. The fact that King Volsung (*Volsunga Saga*, 2) had ten sons only, may go back to a ten-month year—a point on which Dr. Harris has a few words to say—but here

again the youngest, Sigmund, was twin to his sister Signy : and here again we note the similarity of name (cp. *Cult*, p. 45). Observe also that, as we learn from *Beowulf* (line 875 seq.), Sigmund is the original hero of the great Volsung epic, having only later been displaced by his son Sigurd (Siegfried). Among the many elements that have gone to make up that wonderful story, this of Dioscurism can hardly be omitted from consideration. For example, may not the wanderings of Sigmund as a werwolf (*Vols. Saga*, 8) be due to a belated memory of the expulsion of at least one of a pair of twins from the house ? (cp. *Cult*, ch. ii.). Among the many ideas underlying werwolves, that of outcast is not the least important ; and we may here compare the well known story of Valentine and Orson. Again, Sigmund's fight with the dragon may be placed alongside of the story of Sisinnius and Sisinnodorus (*Cult*, p. 84), or of the feats of St. Michael. Remembering the keen eyes of Lynceus, we may recall how Sigurd's (i.e. originally Sigmund's) *bright eyes* were too piercing for Gutthorm, who dared not kill him till they closed in sleep (*Vols. Saga*, 30). Once more, the death of Sigmund at the hands of Odin signifies his choice as one of the Einherjar or immortal warriors, and is the nearest approach to *stellification* that the somewhat prosy Northern mythology allows. After being thus chosen, Sigmund becomes a special watcher over battle. But we must not dwell longer on this point.

Dr. Harris (*Cult*, p. 58) notices how frequently twins with the same name, requiring some discrimination, receive a distinguishing cognomen. Thus, as he reminds us, Harald's twin sons were known as Halfdan the White and Halfdan the Black. Other instances might be given. For example, Olaf the Peacock (*Laxdaela Saga*, 24 : ed. Kölund, p. 83) had two servants, brothers, one called Ann the White and

the other Ann the Black. These are not directly called twins, but we can hardly doubt that they were so, when we find their brother Beinir mentioned apart. A similar reason makes us suspect that Otkell and Hallkell in *Njals Saga*, (cap. 47) were twins. A further example we had ourselves independently observed; and though we find that Dr. Harris has himself inserted it (*Cult*, p. 59), yet, as we do not think he has made the most of it for his own purposes, we shall refer to it here. In Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, (Book V. cap. 10), we read of two saints, both called Hewald, but distinguished as Hewald the White and Hewald the Black. Both were martyred among the old Saxons (A.D. 695); but, as the sword of Pallas gave "dura discrimina" to the twins ThyMBER and Larides (*Aeneid*, 10. 395), so they met distinction in death, one being slain with the steel, the other horribly tortured. That they were twins is sufficiently obvious. But let us see what miracles they performed after death. "A great ray of light, reaching up to heaven, shone every night over the place, whatever it might be, to which they had arrived, and this in the sight of the heathen that had slain them. Moreover, one of them appeared in a vision by night to one of his companions, whose name was Tilmon, acquainting him that he should find their bodies in that place where he should see rays of light reaching from heaven to earth; which happened accordingly. Their bodies, being found, were interred with the honour due to martyrs." It needs no great acumen to perceive that in these two Hewalds we have yet another case of the transference of Dioscuri from heathenism to the Church; and we are not surprised to hear that "a stream gushed out of the place where they were killed, which to this day affords abundance of water." But it is possible to trace their ancestry still more closely. Turning to Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* (Eng. ed. by Stallybrass, p. 454), we find that

the dwarfs, many of whom we have already suspected to be twins, are called in the Edda (*Grimnismál* 43, *Skaldskaparmál* 35) the *sons of Iwald*, and build ships or weave gold. Passing on a few pages in Grimm, we learn that many Dioscuric functions are performed by the elves (whose identity with the dwarfs hardly needs proof, *Grimm*, p. 457). They assist she-dwarfs in labour; they settle disputes; they requite favours by bringing luck to their benefactors. Finally, when we see that the two Hewalds are buried at *Cologne*, after a journey in which miraculous rays of light guide the whole way, we can hardly help associating them with the more famous triplet Balthasar, Melchior, and Caspar, whose relation to the Dioscuri is not far to seek. (Note also that the name *Ann* is that of a dwarf: *Voluspá*, 11, 5, his double is *Onar*: hence it seems as if, at least occasionally, twins were named after dwarfs.)

Dr. Harris tells us much, and we hope for more, tending to prove that St. Michael himself is a Dioscure (*Cult*, p. 131 seq.). When he discusses the question further, we shall hope for light on the curious story told by Aelfric in his Homilies (ed. Thorpe, i. 502 seq.), and in the O. E. Martyrology (May 8), derived from some source which he has doubtless traced, of the origin of Michael-worship. "From Mount Garganus originated the festival of Michaelmas. There dwelt a wealthy man named Garganus. It happened that when the immense multitude of his cattle was grazing on the mountain, an unruly bull wandered alone, and despised the herd. He sought the bull everywhere, and at last found him at the entrance of a cavern. He was angry, and bent his bow, intending to shoot the bull with a poisoned arrow; but the poisoned arrow turned back and instantly slew him who had shot it. After a time, the archangel Michael appeared to the Bishop in a ghostly vision, saying,

Know that the shooting of the man with his own arrow was done by my will. I especially love the place which the bull defended, and I would by that sign manifest that I am the guardian of the place." Then follows the sudden appearance of the Church of St. Michael in that place, and a description of the repulse of invaders in almost every detail similar to that of the defeat of Brennus at Delphi ; nay, we hear of the impression of the archangel's footsteps near the door of the church. That we have here a Dioscurophany is obvious. Garganus was at one time renowned for its oaks (*Hor. Od.* ii. 9) and for its aromatic plants (4. 2) : and it is needless to point out that by its position it would be a suitable abode for the guardians of sailors.

Have we not here a plain metamorphosis of a temple of Castor and Pollux into a church of St. Michael ? And may not the bull, defending their abode, be a reflection of the close relation of Taurus and Gemini among the signs of the zodiac ? The fatal arrow has its parallel in the darts of Apollo and Artemis. Yet as a rule Michael is the successor of Hermes.

But it is when we come to Dr. Harris's chapters on St. Thomas that we are most interested. He deals with the Thomas legend in full. According to the Edessan *Acta Thomae*, the real name of Thomas was Judas, and his cognomen denoted twinship to our Lord. Strange stories are told of the confusion due to his extraordinary likeness to Christ ; and in these Dr. Harris makes it plain that we have a transference of Edessan Dioscurism into the hagiology of the Church. Now here we have to make the interesting point that this legend, in a form, perhaps, independent of the Edessan, was early known in our own country. The old English version of the Gospels, in John xx. 24, gives the following : " Thomas, án of thám twelfon, the is geweden

Didimus, that is gelicost on úregethéode, hene waes mid him” —“ Thomas, one of the twelve, who is called Didymus, *that is in our language very like.*” And again, in John xxi. 2, we find, “ Thomas the is gecweden gelicost.” It might seem that this strange gloss was derived from the story of Thomas as given in the Old English Martyrology; a story unquestionably borrowed (though probably not through Isidore of Seville) from the Eastern legend. At any rate, the Martyrology simply translates the *Passio Sancti Thomae*, which itself gives the Edessan tale with sufficient accuracy to show its derivation. But its opening words are as follows: “ On thone án and twentegthan daeg thaes monthes bith sancte Thomas týd thaes apostoles, se waes on Grecisc nemned didimus and on Romanisc geminus, thaet is on úre gethéode getwyn. Forthám hé waes swá geciged forthám he waes úrum haélende gelic on menniscre onsýne ”: “ On the 21st of this month (December) is the day of St. Thomas the Apostle, who was called in Greek Didymus, and in Latin geminus, that is in our language Twin. He was so called because he was, in bodily appearance, like our Saviour.”

Considering this passage, we see that it is unlikely that the author of the O. E. Version can have borrowed, at least directly, from it. Not to press the change of *gelic* into *gelicost*, it is hard to believe that with *geminus* before him both in his Martyrology and in his Latin copy, he would have omitted to translate it *getwyn*, even if he had decided to add a gloss “ very like.” Also, he would unquestionably have added “ úrum Haélende,” (our Saviour); for *gelicost* by itself is unintelligible without a limitation. It is not possible to assume that words have fallen out in the English version; for in *both* passages, xx. 24 and xxi. 2, the same phrase occurs.

Again, if the translator was adding out of his own head, he would surely have added his gloss where Thomas is first mentioned, namely, John xi. 16 ; but there he omits alike the twinship and the resemblance, apparently not finding *didimus* in his Latin copy. We are thus shut up to the conclusion that in the Latin from which the O. E. Version was made, there was the phrase, "Thomas, qui dicitur Didymus, id est in nostra lingua simillimus." But where did this gloss come from ? On independent grounds it is suspected that the form of the Vulgate on which the O. E. Version was based, was largely influenced by the old Latin, as used by the Irish missionaries of the North. As Berger (quoted by Bright in his edition of the O. E. Gospels) remarks, "Le mélange des traditions religieuses est resté longtemps la loi des provinces du nord d'Angleterre et plus encore des pays celtiques. Il est donc tout naturel qu'une partie des meilleurs manuscrits du type irlandais proviennent de Mercie ou de Northumbrie, et ces manuscrits sont des textes mêlés, c'est-à-dire des Vulgates remplies d'interpolations irlandaises." It is true that the O. E. version of John is less "Irish" than that of the Synoptics ; but it remains probable that it is in an "Irish" Vulgate that a "simillimus" passage is to be sought. As Professor Bright adds, it is not unlikely that the very MSS. used by our translators may be found ; if so, we shall look with interest to see if our conclusion is correct. But in any case it is interesting to find that the tradition was familiar in England about 850 (the date assigned by Herzfeld to the O. E. Martyrology), and continued at least till the beginning of the eleventh century (the date of our O. E. Gospels). It is curious that it seems to have been unknown to Cynewulf, whose *Fata Apostolorum* (Grein-Wülker, ii. 89) merely tells us of the Apostle's Indian journeys ; of his raising a

king's brother, named Gad, to life ; and of his martyrdom by the sword. Aelfric's homilies also practically disregard St. Thomas. There is, however, no limit to the possibility of discovery in this field.

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