

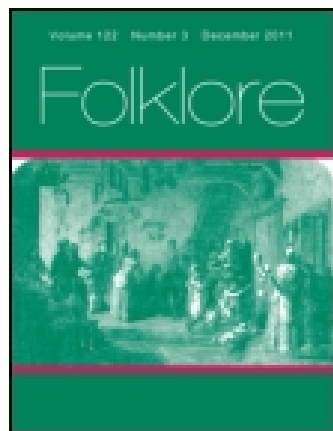
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KING MIDAS AND HIS ASS'S EARS.

BY W. CROOKE, B.A.

(*Read at Meeting, December 21st, 1910.*)

THE ancient kingdom of Phrygia, during the tenth and eleventh centuries before our era, held sway, almost without a rival, over the western half of Asia Minor. Its westward extension, which included influence over Lydia, is indicated by the cycle of myth which grew up round its rulers, and by the parallel which Herodotus suggests between its political position and that of the Lydian Gyges.¹ The princes of this line adopted the dynastic titles of Midas and Gordius or Gordias. One of these monarchs, known as Midas, is commemorated by the remarkable monument representing the façade of a house or temple, which is said to be his tomb.² "Excepting Midas, son of Gordius, king of Phrygia," says Herodotus,³ "Gyges was the first of the barbarians whom we know to have sent offerings to Delphi. Midas dedicated the royal throne whereon he was accustomed to sit and administer justice, an object well worth looking at. It is in the same place as the goblets presented by Gyges." Herodotus,⁴ again, speaks of a place in Macedonia called "the Gardens of Midas, son of Gordius," where roses grew of themselves and with blossoms that had as many as sixty petals apiece. Here Midas is said to have

¹ Maspero, *The Passing of the Empires*, pp. 330 *et seq.*; Professor J. L. Myres, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. xxvi., p. 123.

² Maspero, *op. cit.*, pp. 331 *et seq.*

³ l. 14.

⁴ viii. 138.

captured the satyr Silenus, of whom it was believed that when he was drunk or asleep mortals could compel him to prophesy and sing by surrounding him with chains of flowers. Midas mixed wine in the well from which Silenus was wont to drink, and did not release him till he had held high discourse on the nature of the world and the vanity of human life. The satyr also conferred upon him the power that whatever he touched should turn to gold, a story which in many forms is the common property of folklore.⁵ Another famous tale connected with this dynasty of Phrygia is that of the knot at Gordium which Alexander the Great, when he failed to untie it, cut through with his sword. Professor Frazer⁶ reasonably suggests that this magic virtue attached to the knot caused it to be regarded as the talisman with which the fate of the kingdom was believed to be bound up, and which, like other magic knots, was effective only so long as it remained tied.

Tales such as these invite much examination. But I am now concerned only with the story of the King Midas who had ears like those of an ass, which has come down to us in classical literature.⁷ These ears are said to have been fixed upon him as a punishment by Apollo, because, when Midas was called upon to judge between the lyre of Apollo and the pastoral pipe of Pan, he pronounced that the latter instrument was more harmonious. Midas tried to conceal this deformity by wearing a purple head-dress. But his slave, who discovered the secret, whispered it into a hole in the ground, where reeds grew which, when shaken by the wind, betrayed him.

We may first discuss the wanderings of this much-travelled tale.

⁵ Frazer, *Pausanias*, vol. ii., p. 74; Macculloch, *The Childhood of Fiction*, pp. 220 *et seq.*; Tawney, *Kathā-sarit-sāgara*, vol. ii., pp. 8, 453; Miss M. R. Cox, *Cinderella*, pp. 508 *et seq.*

⁶ *The Golden Bough*, vol. i., p. 403.

⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, xi., 146-193; Aristophanes, *Plutus*, 287.

In its original form it is still current in Greece.⁸

Passing westward, we find it in various forms among the Celts. In one version given by Jeoffry Keating,⁹ Labradh Loingseach, king of Ireland, had ears like those of a horse. To conceal the fact the king used to slay every barber who cut his hair. At last it became necessary to select by lot the person who was forced to undertake this dangerous duty. The lot fell upon a youth, the son of a poor widow, who appealed to the king for mercy. He promised to spare the boy's life on condition that he swore not to reveal anything he might see. But "secrecy, it seems, was ever a burden," and the youth through the load of the secret fell sick. His mother consulted a famous Druid, who advised the boy to go to a neighbouring wood, and, when he came to the meeting place of four highways, a place where evil influences can be dispersed,¹⁰ he was to turn to the right and whisper the secret into the first tree he met. He did this at a willow tree, and found immediate relief. After this the harp of Craftine, the king's musician, was broken, and he cut a branch of the tree wherewith to repair it. Then the harp refused to give any tune other than *De Chluais chapail ar Labradh Loingseach*, which being interpreted means "Labradh Loingseach has the ears of a horse." The king, observing this miracle, regarded it as the work of the gods offended at his cruelty in slaying so many innocent young men. "He repented of the barbarity he had used, and openly exposed his long ears all his life afterwards."

⁸ Schmidt, *Griechische Märchen, Sagen, und Volkslieder*, pp. 70 *et seq.*, 224 *et seq.*, quoted by Frazer, *Pausanias*, vol. ii., p. 74, who gives a Servian parallel from Karadschitsch, *Volksmärchen der Serben*, No. 39, pp. 225 *et seq.*, which has been translated by Naake, *Slavonic Fairy Tales*, p. 61.

⁹ *The General History of Ireland*, translated by Dermo'd O'Connor, 1841, vol. I., pp. 203 *et seq.*; cf. *Folk-Lore Record*, vol. iv., p. 33 note; and, for a variant, *Notes and Queries*, 7th Series, vol. v., p. 502.

¹⁰ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, vol. ii., p. 256 note.

This tale, with sundry characteristic embellishments, has come down to our day as "The King with the Horse's Ears" in Patrick Kennedy's collection.¹¹ Sir John Rhys¹² gives the Welsh version which is told of March (or Parch) Amheirchion, one of the warriors of King Arthur, who had horse's ears. Lest anybody should know of this, he used to slay every barber who shaved his beard. In the place where their bodies were buried reeds grew up, and, when somebody cut one to make a pipe, it would utter no other sound than "March Amheirchion has horse's ears." The warrior would have slain the unfortunate maker of the pipe had it not been that he himself could not make the instrument produce any other sound. But, when he learnt where the reed had grown, he made no further effort to conceal the murders or his deformity.

In a different form the tale appears in the versions from Brittany. In one of these a Seigneur, lord of the desolate rock of Karn, near Portzall, used to subject his vassals to oppressive feudal dues, which even extended to the supply of barbers to cut his hair. None of these, after their work was done, ever returned to the mainland. At length an intrepid youth named Losthouarn undertook to deliver the Seigneur's vassals from his oppression. When the Seigneur removed his head-gear before him, the youth observed that he had ears like those of a horse. Without betraying any surprise he began his work, but he soon came to the conclusion that this accounted for the disappearance of his comrades. So he seized the opportunity and cut off the Seigneur's head with a vigorous sweep of his razor. Then he passed through the guards, who were no little surprised that he was allowed to return, and rejoined his friends safe and sound.¹³ Mr. E. S. Hartland, to whom I am indebted for this reference and others included in this paper,¹⁴ informs

¹¹ Kennedy, *Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts*, ed. 1891, pp. 219 *et seq.*

¹² *Celtic Folklore, Welsh and Manx*, vol. I., pp. 233 *et seq.*

¹³ *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, vol. I., p. 327. ¹⁴ Notes 17, 18, 20, 23.

me that M. Sébillot, who collected this tale in Brittany, remarks that, in another version, the scene of which is laid at Crozon, the reeds grow and are, as in the Welsh tale, made into pipes, which can only repeat,—“Portzmarch, King Portzmarch has horse's ears.” In the Museum at Quimper there is a stone bearing a bas-relief of a human head with horse's ears and holes in the forehead surmounted by a small boss and the remains of horns, which M. Luzel explains by the king's unfortunate marital experiences. The people call it the head of King March with the ears of a horse.¹⁸

A similar tale is that known as *Ar Roue Guivarch*, in which the king covers his horse's ears with a cap. The barber, sworn to secrecy, confided the fact to a clump of elder-trees growing on a slope. Next year a new threshing-floor was laid down in a neighbouring village, and there was to be a grand dance in honour of the occasion. The bagpipe player, passing the elder clump, cut a branch to repair the reed of his instrument. While the dance was going on, the pipe, instead of giving out the usual sound, repeated,—“King Guivarch has horse's ears.” The king, who was present at the sports, was no little surprised to hear the pipe make this indiscreet revelation. His anger fell upon the musician, who protested that he could make the instrument produce no other sound, and, passing it to the king, said,—“Try it yourself.” The result was the same, and the king said,—“Ah well! Since this possessed bagpipe has told you my secret, judge for yourselves,” and he took off his cap, so that every one could see his horse's ears. Mr. Hartland informs me that, when this tale was told at a meeting of the *Société des Traditions Populaires*, M. Allain described it as a Breton tale which he had heard from his father. He added an interesting detail, or rather a fragment of a variant. One of the king's barbers for his

¹⁸ *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, vol. vii., p. 356; see also the remarks of Sébillot on this class of tales, *Le Folklore de France*, vol. iii., pp. 431, 527.

indiscretion was put to death, and on his tomb grew an elder-tree. The piper broke off one of its branches to repair his instrument.¹⁶

Passing from the Celtic area, we have the tale of the king of West Friesland, named Richard Arundel, who, from his enormously long ears, was called King Ass-ears. He was of mighty stature, and had to wife a giantess, the daughter of a giant from Albion, by whom he had two children, a son named Lord Falcon, and a daughter who subsequently became queen of Friesland. Later on the tale diverges into other particulars, but adds nothing relevant to the subject.¹⁷

From Portugal comes the story of the childless king to whom three fairies promise a son. The first enchants him to be the most beautiful prince in the world; the second, that he should excel in virtue and wisdom; the third, that he should have the ears of an ass, to conceal which deformity the king provides him with a cap, and, when the prince's beard begins to grow, threatens the barber with death if he dares to betray the secret. The barber keeps his promise for a time; but one day he told his confessor that he knew a secret; if he did not tell it, he would surely die; if he told it, the king would kill him. So he asked the advice of the holy man, who advised him to go to a valley, dig a hole in the ground, and whisper the secret into it as often as necessary until he felt relieved; then he was to cover up the hole with earth. He followed this advice, and returned home feeling much easier in his mind. By and by a thicket of canes grew up over the hole which the barber had dug. Some shepherds cut the canes to make their pipes, which when they played them gave out no other sounds but "The prince has the ears of an ass." The king heard of this, and sent for the shepherds

¹⁶ *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, vol. vii., p. 357.

¹⁷ Wolf, *Niederländische Sagen*, p. 9, citing old Frisian and Dutch chronicles.

to play before him. He even tried the pipes himself, and the same result followed. Then the king sent for the fairies, and begged them to remove the ass's ears from the head of the prince. They required that the whole court should be assembled, and, when this was done, in their presence they ordered the prince to take off his cap, when lo! to the delight of the king and queen, it appeared that the boy's deformity had disappeared. From that moment the pipes of the shepherds ceased to repeat "The prince has the ears of an ass."¹⁸

In one version from Morocco we are told of a beautiful girl captured by a Jew. He hands her over to the Sultan, and in return is appointed Vizier. Her only brother comes to see her; she recognises him, and hides him through fear of her husband. But he is discovered and received by the Sultan into his favour. He was able to play so finely on his reed flute that no one who heard him could abstain from weeping. The Sultan set him to herd his camels, but, as in the tales of Arion and Orpheus,¹⁹ when he played the beasts could no longer feed, and were obliged to listen to his playing. Hence they fell off in flesh, and the Sultan reproved the youth, who promised to lead them into better pasture. One day the Sultan ordered the youth to cut his hair, and he discovered that his master had horns on his head. Next morning, when he led forth the camels to graze, he sat by a well and played on his flute. By chance it dropped into the well, and then it produced the sound "The Sultan has horns." The Sultan learnt that the youth had discovered his secret, and he threatened him with death if he disclosed it. By and by the flute took root in the well, grew higher and higher, and ever sang the same words,—"The Sultan has horns." One day the Sultan and his Vizier went to inspect the camels, and found them

¹⁸ Coelho, *Contos Populares Portugueses*, 117.

¹⁹ For other parallels to this tale, like that of the Pied Piper, see Somadeva, *Kathā-sarīt-sāgara*, trans. C. H. Tawney, vol. I., 338.

listening and dancing to the music. When the Sultan heard the words he burst into tears, and, calling the youth, told him that it was only for his sister's sake that he spared his life. The Jew had the reed in the well cut down, but it sprang up again and repeated the same words. Again he cut it down, and smeared pitch on the stump, but to no purpose. Then the time came for the Sultan to have his hair cut, and he yielded to his wife's advice to employ her brother again. At her suggestion he took the opportunity of cutting the throat of the Sultan, slew the Jew Vizier, and seized the kingdom.²⁰

In the second version from the same region, told among the Chelhas, a Berber tribe, the barber relieves himself of the fatal secret in the same way. A singer passing by cuts a reed growing in the well, trims it, makes a pipe, and breathes into it, when it says,—“The king has horns.” He takes the pipe and goes his way. Here the tale diverges into another, but similar, type. The singer comes to a tree on which hangs a skin. He says,—“Providence has given me a drum.” So he mends his old drum with the skin. Now this was the skin of one of the king's sons. Some time before this the king had said to his two sons,—“Whichever of you brings me a gazelle with her fawn running behind her, he shall be my heir.” One of the brothers succeeds in the quest, and his jealous brother kills him, flays his corpse, and hangs the skin on a tree. This was the skin with which the singer had chanced to mend his drum. He appears before the king and lays his flute on the ground, on which it says thrice,—“The king has horns”; and, when the drum is placed beside it, it says,—“My brother slew me for the sake of the gazelle and her fawn.” The king puts the singer under examination, rewards him, and sending for the barber and the prince puts both to death.²¹

²⁰ Stumme, *Märchen der Schluf von Tdzerwall*, 138.

²¹ *Journal Asiatique*, February-March, 1889, pp. 208 et seq. For this

Alexander the Great, according to the well-known Moslem tradition, had horns on his head, and hence he was called Zū'l-Qarnain, "he of the two horns."²² It is doubtful whether this legend really belongs to the type which we are now considering, but an Armenian story connects them. Alexander, as usual, swears his barber to secrecy. But he, overcome by internal pains as the result of the enforced reticence, whispers the secret into a well and finds relief. A reed springs from the well, and, when it is made into a flute, it reveals the secret. Alexander sends for the unhappy barber, will not listen to his excuses, and has his head cut off.²³

Perhaps the richest of all the versions is found in what may be called the Mongolo-Iranian type. In its most complete form it tells how the king of Black China, east of India, had never since his accession showed himself to his subjects. Every day he used to send for a barber, and, when he had finished his office, he was executed. At last it became necessary to select a barber by lot, and the turn came of the son of an old woman. She gives him a cake made from flour mixed with her own milk, and warns him to keep nibbling it all the time when he is dressing the king's beard. The youth discovers that the king has the ears of an ass. Meanwhile the king notices that the cake, which the boy is eating, smells very good. So he asks him how it was made. The boy explains,

reference I am indebted to M. E. Cosquin, who remarks that he has illustrated the latter part of the tale in his *Contes populaires de Lorraine*, No. 26. Cf. the tale of the slaying of Marsyas, and the hanging of his skin on a tree, which seems to reflect a ritual practice of slaying the dead god, and hanging his skin on the pine as a means of effecting his resurrection, and with it the revival of vegetation in spring, (Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, pp. 242 *et seq.*).

²² *Korān*, Sūrah xviii., 82.

²³ *Revue de l'histoire de Religion*, vol. xliii., p. 346, translating a tale told to Professor Jalayan by Armenians at Zanguezour in Russian Armenia.

and the king says,—“It is contrary to nature to kill the son of such a mother.” So he spares the boy, and swears him to secrecy. The boy falls ill through the secret which hangs upon his mind, and his physician advises him that he will never recover until he gets rid of it. His mother suggests that he should go into the desert and whisper it into a crack in a tree or rock. The youth follows this advice, and whispers the secret into a tree, in a hole of which lives a squirrel which chatters it out. The news reaches the king, who sends for the boy and learns the whole story. The boy promises the king that he will make him a cap to cover his deformity. This cap comes into fashion, and is used by every one. The king is delighted that he can now appear in public, and makes the boy his minister.²⁴

In the Turkoman version the Khan, long childless, was at last blessed with a son, Jany Bek, who was born with the ears of an ass. To conceal this deformity, every barber who shaved him was put to death. A youth who had learnt the secret gains his favour and is appointed minister. Years pass, and one day at a hunt his falcon outstrips that of the Khan. In thoughtless exultation he cries out,—“My falcon is better than the falcon of ass-eared Jany Bek Khan.” Too late he regrets his hasty words, and flies to save his life. After a time he returns to the capital, and one day, while sitting at the well in the palace square, in regret for the renewed cruelties of the Khan, he prays to God to punish him. In answer to his prayer the water begins to pour out of the well in such abundance that it submerges the city, and its cruel ruler and his cowardly subjects are destroyed.²⁵ Similar cases of the destruction of cities as a

²⁴ E. Cosquin, *Le Lait de la Mère et le Coffre Flottant* (1908), pp. 58 *et seq.*, quoting the *Siddhi Kār*, Tale 22. Cf. A. de Gubernatis, *Zoological Mythology*, vol. i., pp. 381 *et seq.*

²⁵ E. Schuyler, *Turkistan*, vol. ii., p. 129.

punishment for the sins of their rulers and people are common.²⁶

Sir H. Layard gives a Persian version which he heard from a man of Shuster. This tells of King Shapur or Sapor, who ascended the throne 240 B.C., and was the conqueror of the Roman Emperor Valerian and the subject of many legends. He is said to have had horns on his head, and his barber whispers the secret into a well. Soon after, a shepherd, to make a pipe, cuts a reed which grows at the edge of the well. The first time the pipe is played it utters the words,—“Shapur has horns.” The king, learning that the secret has been betrayed, questions the barber, and, when he hears his explanation, graciously pardons him.²⁷

I have been as yet unable to trace this much-travelled tale further east than India, where we find at least four versions, one from the extreme north, two from the central region, and one from the south.

From Gilgit, on the northern frontier, comes the tale of “The Foot of Malik the Rā of Gilgit.” One of his feet was shaped like that of an ass. No one, except a single old servant, knew of this. He kept the secret for a while, but, to quote the native narrator, “his belly began to swell day by day, owing to his keeping the knowledge to himself.” So he goes to a mountain, digs a hole just large enough to hold his head, “and began to cry as loud as possible, in order to let the secret from his belly, that one of the feet of Malik was like the hoof of an ass. He continued repeating the words till he felt quite cured,

²⁶ Many parallels to the story of the destruction of Sodom are collected in *Encyclopædia Biblica*, vol. iv., p. 4670. Similar tales are told of the cities of Valabhi in Gujarat and Māndoi in Cutch (*Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. i., part i., p. 94; vol. v., p. 239; A. K. Forbes, *Rās-Māla*, p. 14). Cf. *The Jātaka*, Cambridge translation, vol. iv., p. 244; Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, vol. i., pp. 217 *et seq.*

²⁷ Sir H. Layard, *Early Adventures in Persia, Susiana, and Babylonia*, vol. ii., pp. 264 *et seq.*

and then returned to Gilgit." A couple of Chili trees spring from the hole, and a shepherd cuts a branch to make a flute. This repeats the fatal words, and the Rā himself, to his perplexity and sorrow, hears the news. He questions the servant, who can give no answer till he traces the wood out of which the flute was made. He tells the story to the great amusement of the Rā, and thus saves his life.²⁸

In the version recorded by myself from the lips of a jungle man in Mirzapur, the Raja has two horns growing from his forehead, a secret known only to his barber. He feels compelled to disclose it, and whispers it into a tamarind-tree. The tree is blown down in a storm, and the Raja gives the wood to his musician to make a drum, which, when beaten, says,—“There are horns on the head of the Raja.” When the Raja hears this he dismisses the musician; but, when he beats it himself, the result is the same. He reflects,—“If I dash the drum on the ground and smash it to pieces, some greater trouble may befall me. It is better that I should become a Fakīr.” So he starts on his wanderings. One day, as he sits under a tree, he hears two thieves quarrelling over the division of some plunder which they had gained. When they go their way, servants appear who spread carpets, and they are followed by a number of fairies who ask the Raja to play his drum for them while they dance. This gratifies the fairies, who, when the dance is over, ask the Raja who he is and how he got the horns. When they hear his story they lift the horns from his head and fix one on the head of each of the thieves, who are forthwith turned into Rākshasas or demons. The story ends with the moral,—“Never confide a secret to a person who wins your confidence by flattery.”²⁹

²⁸ Ghulām Muhammad, *Festivals and Folklore of Gilgit*, in *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. i. (1905), No. vii., pp. 113 *et seq.*

²⁹ *North Indian Notes and Queries*, vol. iii., p. 104.

The Santāl version is more imperfect. Here the Raja's son has ears like those of an ox. His father makes the barber take an oath of secrecy, but when he cannot disclose it his stomach swells to an enormous size. A Dom outcast asks him the cause of his malady. He blurts out the secret, on which his stomach regains its normal shape. The Dom cuts down a tree and makes a drum out of the wood, which when beaten says: "The son of the Raja has the ears of an ox." The Raja is wroth and swears that he will punish the treacherous barber. But the Dom explains that he was not to blame. The Dom receives a present, and the barber escapes punishment.³⁰

In Mysore the story runs that Chengal, a Raja of Bettudpur in the tenth century, had his right ear like that of an ass. The barber whispers the secret to a sandal-tree under which the Raja used to sit when he was being shaved. One day, pleased with the performance of some tumblers, he gives the tree to them. They cut it down, and make a drum out of the wood, which utters the ominous words. Thus everyone learnt the secret.³¹

A tale from Arakan, though not exactly akin to this type of story, may be quoted. The king Minzaw had a magic drum which made so loud a noise when it was beaten that it produced a panic throughout Burma. The king of Burma, in his alarm, sent an embassy to discover the secret. The ambassador learnt that the king of Arakan was so much feared that no one dared to look him in the face. So he directed his cook to boil some creepers in long pieces, and to bring them to the table when he next had the honour of dining with the king. While eating them he took the creepers by one end, and, raising them above his head, turned up his face so as to put the other end in his mouth. He thus succeeded in seeing the face of the king,

³⁰ C. H. Bompas, *Folklore of the Santal Parganas*, p. 171.

³¹ B. L. Rice, *Mysore*, 1897, vol. ii., pp. 236 *et seq.*; ed. 1878, vol. ii., pp. 223 *et seq.*

and noticed that he had two tusks like those of a wild boar. The king himself was not aware that he had these tusks, and was astounded when he learnt the fact. The ambassador thus gained the confidence of the simple-minded king, and induced him to shorten the length of his drum, assuring him that if trenches were dug in his city treasure would be found, and that the king's tusks would be removed. He also succeeded in poisoning the water of the town by inducing the king to substitute wide for narrow-mouthed jars throughout his dominions. The result was that the king lost his power, his city, which had the power of flying in the air, could no longer do so, the water was polluted, and the country fell into the hands of the Burmese.³²

Comparing these versions, we may reasonably conclude that the deformity of the prince consists in the growth of ears or horns, not in a misshapen foot, as in the tale from Gilgit. It seems clear, also, that in the most primitive forms of the story the tree springs from the corpse or corpses of the murdered barber and his comrades; that it is the spirits of them, or the spirit of one of them, which animate the tree and speak through its wood when made into a drum or flute; or, rather, that the tree itself is the spirit of the murdered men, or a transformation of them. This theme constantly appears in folklore. Thus the nymph Syrinx, when pursued by Pan, flies into the river Ladon, and at her own request is turned into a reed, out of which Pan makes a pipe.³³ This grave-tree appears in Homer and elsewhere as the abode of the spirits of the dead which lie beneath it.³⁴ Many instances from savage beliefs to illustrate the principle that the souls of the dead

³² J. G. Scott, J. P. Hardiman, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma*, 1900, vol. ii., part i., pp. 402 *et seq.* A different version, without the incident of the tusks, is given by Capt. T. H. Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong etc.*, 1869, pp. 53 *et seq.*

³³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, i., 690.

³⁴ *Iliad*, vi., 419; cf. *Folk-Lore*, vol. xix., p. 66.

animate trees have been collected by Professor Frazer, and Miss Cox has provided parallels to the case of the tree springing from the bones of the dead.³⁵ Some cases from India admirably illustrate the present story cycle. Thus, in a Santāl story, the girl is drowned and becomes a bamboo out of which a Jugi makes a pipe which informs her relations of her fate.³⁶ In another story from the same people a gourd grows from the body of a dead monkey, and tells about the lost princess.³⁷ In a third, the brothers murder their sister; her corpse floats to the river bank, where a bamboo springs up; when a Dom tries to cut it to make a flute, the spirit of the girl cries out,—“O Dom! Do not cut high up; cut low down.” He obeys the voice, and makes a flute out of the wood, which every night turns into a woman.³⁸ So, in a Deccan tale, the children who are turned into rose-bushes cry out when the girl touches the flowers.³⁹ In a story from Ceylon the tree is a girl imprisoned by the Rākshasas or demons; when the prince cuts her in two, she becomes a tree; when he drops the knife, she regains her original shape.⁴⁰ The analogy of these tales to the cycle now under consideration is obvious.

The most important question, however, is the explanation of the legend of Midas appearing with the ears of an ass. This explanation, which I now venture to propose, rests upon the well-known principle that the folk-tale is often a naive method of accounting for some incident of ritual

³⁵ *The Golden Bough*², vol. I., pp. 178 *et seq.*; Cox, *Introduction to Folk-Lore*, pp. 72 *et seq.*

³⁶ A. Campbell, *Santal Folk Tales*, pp. 52 *et seq.*; cf. J. Jacobs, *Indian Fairy Tales*, pp. 240 *et seq.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 102 *et seq.*

³⁸ C. H. Bompas, *Folklore of the Santal Parganas*, p. 390. In one of the tales of Somadeva, (*Kālikā-sarīt-sāgara*, trans. C. H. Tawney), a woman comes out of a banyan tree, and a dry tree turns into a young Brahman (*ibid.*, vol. II., p. 148).

³⁹ Miss M. Frere, *Old Deccan Days*², p. 57.

⁴⁰ H. Parker, *Village Folk-tales of Ceylon*, vol. I., pp. 264 *et seq.*

which was known only imperfectly through hearsay or tradition, or was so ancient that the original meaning of the rite had passed out of current knowledge. The theory which I now advance, and which occurred to me independently, has, I find, been anticipated by Mr. A. B. Cook, who has illustrated the subject with his usual wide display of learning.⁴¹

The custom found in various totemic rites of draping an idol or sacred stone in the skin of a sacrificial victim has been explained by Professor Robertson Smith as a theurgic practice intended to bring the sacred life into the stone or image. It is, he adds, "equally appropriate that the worshipper should dress himself in the skin of the victim, and so, as it were, envelop himself in its sanctity. To rude nations dress is not merely a physical comfort, but a fixed part of social religion, a thing by which a man constantly bears on his body the token of his religion, and which is itself a charm and a means of divine protection."⁴² A rite of this kind possibly explains the story of Jacob, when seeking his father's blessing, wearing the skins of sacrificial animals.⁴³ The custom of draping images, which is a later development of the same practice, a survival of the primitive custom of skin-wearing, prevailed widely in Greece, Babylonia, among various sects of Indian Vaishnavas, and in other places.⁴⁴

Again, in the ritual of the sacred marriages of gods, a

⁴¹ *Animal Worship in the Mycenaean Age*, in *Journal of the Hellenic Society*, vol. xiv., pp. 81 *et seq.*

⁴² *Religion of the Semites*², pp. 436 *et seq.* When the Paniyans of Madras worship Kattu Bhasavati, goddess of the woods, the medium dresses in the clothing of the goddess, the divine afflatus descends upon him, and he utters prophecies, E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. vi., pp. 69 *et seq.* Cf. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, vol. v., p. 233; Frazer, *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship*, p. 174.

⁴³ *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, vol. i., p. 1140; vol. ii., p. 1334.

⁴⁴ Frazer, *Pausanias*, vol. ii., pp. 574 *et seq.*; vol. iii., pp. 70, 592 *et seq.*; M. Jastrow, *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, p. 670; *North Indian Notes and Queries*, vol. v., pp. 43 *et seq.*; *Folk-Lore*, vol. v., pp. 333 *et seq.*

piece of sympathetic or mimetic magic intended to promote the fertility of men, animals, and crops, the god was represented at his marriage in animal form, Dionysus, for instance, appearing as a bull.⁴⁵

These forms of ritual, combined with the theriomorphic cult of animal deities, seem to have left numerous traces in the Ægean area where the tale of Midas appears to have originated. Thus we have the strange fresco at Mycenae, with figures bearing the heads not of horses but of asses, as is evident from the long ears and general outline of the mouth with its lips and nostrils.⁴⁶ These ass-headed figures have been identified with those of demons "which belong to the earliest conceptions of the Greeks,"⁴⁷ but they are more probably a record of incidents in a primitive ritual. Again, a lenticular carnelian shows a figure clothed in the skin of an ass, bearing a pole on his shoulder.⁴⁸ In a gem from Phigaleia we have two upright figures dressed in the skins and heads of horses.⁴⁹ Images probably representing the mother goddess Cybele in the form of a horse's head were found by Schliemann at Troy.⁵⁰ On an archaic vase from Rhodes, Medusa is depicted with the body of a woman and the head of a horse.⁵¹

In the same way, to account for the horns which appear in so many variants of the Midas cycle, we have the countless images in the form of terra-cotta cows found at Tiryns and Mycenae, as well as cows' heads of gold, women with cow's horn-like, crescent-shaped projections

⁴⁵ Frazer, *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship*, pp. 174 *et seq.*; Miss Harrison, *Prolegomena to Greek Religion*, p. 537.

⁴⁶ A. B. Cook, *op. cit.*, pp. 81 *et seq.*

⁴⁷ Schuchhardt, *Schliemann's Excavations*, p. 292.

⁴⁸ A. B. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138; cf. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, vol. iii., pp. 56 *et seq.*

⁵⁰ *Troy and its Remains*, p. 353.

⁵¹ Frazer, *Pausanias*, vol. iv., pp. 407 *et seq.*, who gives references to similar cult images.

from the breast, which Schliemann identified with the cult of Hera Boopis.⁶²

It is difficult to say whether these animal cults were indigenous or imported. We know that both the horse and ass were regarded as sacred animals by the Semites,⁶³ and they may have come from that region into Asia Minor. On the other hand, the facts collected by Mr. Cook indicate the existence of an Ægean cult of the ass regarded as a musician, a servant of the harvest-gods with phallic aptitudes, and representing the waters of the underworld.⁶⁴ In this last attribute the frequent occurrence of the well in connection with the Midas tales is significant.

The worship of the horse, again, passed into the religion of Greece in the strange cult of the horse-headed Demeter, which has been fully illustrated by Professor Frazer and Mr. Farnell,⁶⁵ the latter refusing to explain it by totemism or by any known Greek symbolism of the underworld or of vegetation, and preferring to suppose that Demeter Erinys or Medusa merely took over from Poseidon, the horse-god, an equine form in certain local legends and cults, "this form being necessary that they might become the mothers of his horse-progeny." This view, even if it be accepted, does not invalidate the present theory.

Lastly, it must be remembered that there is some reason to believe that this ass cult may have survived in the Mediterranean down to early Christian times. As evidence of this we have the title *Asinari* applied as a reproach to the early Christians; Tertullian's angry expostulation,—*som-*

⁶² *Tirynt*, p. 165. But this view is opposed by Farnell, *op. cit.*, vol. I., p. 16.

⁶³ Robertson Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 468 *et seq.*, 293; *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, pp. 208 *et seq.*

⁶⁴ A. B. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁶⁵ *Pausanias*, vol. iv., pp. 407 *et seq.*; *Cults of the Greek States*, vol. iii., pp. 50 *et seq.*

niastis caput asininum esse Deum nostrum; ⁵⁶ and the famous *graffito*, now deposited in the library of the Collegio Romano in Rome, which is usually supposed to represent our Lord with the head of an ass, by some regarded as a mere vulgar caricature directed against a Christian of the second century, but possibly embalming a reminiscence of some cult such as we have been discussing. ⁵⁷

It is well known that priest-dynasts were a widely spread feature of the primitive social and religious life of Asia Minor, ⁵⁸ and we may be certain that the Phrygian princes were priest-kings, like those of the Semites. They may well have been in the habit of wearing the skins of sacrificed or sacred animals to indicate communion with the deity; and such theriomorphic cults were common in that region,—Amathus represented in bestial form, with huge ears, a pair of stumpy horns on the top of the head, and a lion skin knotted round him; the deity at Ibreez, his cap adorned with several pairs of horns; the lion-god at Boghaz-keui. ⁵⁹ "We may take it as probable," says Professor Frazer, "that the oriental deities who are represented standing or sitting in human form on the backs of lions and other animals were originally indistinguishable from the beasts, and that the complete separation of the bestial from the human or divine shape was a consequence of that growth of knowledge and of power which led man in time to respect himself more and the brutes less." ⁶⁰

To sum up the suggestions which I have made in this paper,—the story of Midas and his ass's ears seems, from the geographical provenience of the variants, to

⁵⁶ *Apolog.*, cxvi.

⁵⁷ W. Smith, *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, vol. I, p. 149; Lanciani, *Ancient Rome in the Light of Recent Discoveries*, p. 122; Farrar, *Life of Christ in Art*, p. 94.

⁵⁸ Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*³, p. 109 note, pp. 12 *et seq.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 94, 103, 107.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

have started from the region of the eastern Ægean. It was based on the well-known fact that some people are constitutionally unable to keep a secret,—that they even suffer physically from this enforced reticence, and that this peculiarity would naturally be accentuated in the case of a notoriously garrulous person like a barber. It was then connected with a half-forgotten and misunderstood form of ritual which prevailed throughout Asia Minor and the area subject to Mycenaean culture.

If there be any force in these suggestions, the study of this cycle of tales is another indication of the importance of folklore research in connection with primitive thought and ritual.

W. CROOKE.
