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The Classical Review / Volume 10 / Issue 02 / March 1896, pp 115 - 117
DOI: 10.1017/S0009840X00203417, Published online: 27 October 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009840X00203417

How to cite this article:

W. W. Merry (1896). The Classical Review, 10, pp 115-117 doi:10.1017/S0009840X00203417

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D'ARCY THOMPSON'S GLOSSARY OF GREEK BIRDS.

A Glossary of Greek Birds: by D'ARCY WENTWORTH THOMPSON, Prof. of Nat. Hist. in University College, Dundee. Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1895. 10s. net.

If Peithetaerus had been asked to review Professor D'Arcy Thompson's book he would certainly have repeated the exclamation he made when the noisy, fluttering crowd put in an appearance in the *Birds* (l. 294), ὦ Πόσειδον, οὐχ ὁρᾷς ὅσον ξυνείλεκται κακὸν ὄρνέων; while Euelpides would have been quite justified in expressing his amaze once more, ὦναξ Ἀπολλων, τοῦ νέφους· ἰοῦ ἰοῦ. And the services of the Hoopoe might have been secured again as a show-man, ready with all the names of the motley troop:

οὔτοσι πέρδιξ, ἔκεινοσι δὲ νῆ Δι' ἀτταγᾶς,

οὔτοσι δὲ πηνέλοψ, ἔκεινῃ δέ γ' ἄλκυών.

But, in the play of Aristophanes, the Hoopoe proceeds to rattle off three more lines, with the names of six birds in each, which sorely need Professor Thompson's interpretation. Those who know how hard a matter is the identification of some of the commonest flowers in Greek and Latin, who recognize that they must be content to leave unsettled the exact equivalent of ἴον and ὑάκινθος, of *lilia* and *vaccinia*, will be prepared to find the identification of Greek birds not a whit easier. Indeed, in his preface, the Professor wisely defines his position: 'Instead of succeeding in the attempt to identify a greater number of species than other naturalist-commentators, dealing chiefly with the Aristotelian birds, I have on the contrary ventured to identify a great many less.' And, except perhaps to eager ornithologists, the loss is not great; for it is not every one who can instantly call up a clear presentment of the 'Short-toed Eagle' or the 'Purple Gallinule.' But all ornithologists are eager. No men show more willingness to 'live laborious days,' and laborious nights as well, in studying the migrations and nesting of birds; now camping out on the marshy Uralian tundra, like the late Henry Seebohm, now swinging, like Mr. Kearton, over the precipices of the Farne Islands to photograph the guillemots. And Professor Thompson is not less devoted than these wanderers and climbers. The work which he has put into his *Glossary of Greek Birds* is so thorough and valuable, that the volume is indispensable to the student as a book of reference. First, he has collected

for us all the curious lore about birds, the information, good, bad and indifferent, recorded by Aristotle in his *History of Animals*. (And here it may be an act of kindness to commend to any one who has not seen it, a singularly interesting paper on Aristotle as an ornithologist by Mr. W. Warde Fowler, printed in his *Summer Studies of Birds and Books*.) But not only is Aristotle's description given us of the sizes, colours, notes, habits and anatomy of birds, their nesting and breeding, their migrations, their likes and dislikes, but also Aelian and Phile and Pliny are laid under similar contribution, and notices of birds known and unknown are gathered from the grammarians and lexicographers, while classical writers are ransacked for references, proverbs, legends, metamorphoses, etc., checked and interpreted by commentators of every age down to the present day. Indeed, the number and complexity of the references suggest a fuller bibliographical appendix for the next edition.

It is therefore no mock modesty to express diffidence in attempting to estimate the value of a book which seems to record on every page the contrast between the fulness of the special knowledge of the author with the ignorance of the reviewer. But it may be permitted to him, while recognizing most warmly the importance of the work, to venture on a few minor criticisms on one or two points. The wording on p. 8 might be improved, where allusion is made to a *combat* between the Eagle and the Hare. Might not the Hare object to the word *combat*, and shrewdly say 'si rixa est ubi tu pulsas, ego vapulo tantum'? The melancholy ritual of the Ἀδώνια, p. 73, (which may or may not be etymologically connected with ἀηδών) should hardly be described as 'lamenting the departing year.' The lamentation was rather over the departed freshness of the spring; for, nearly everywhere, the feast was kept at midsummer (Thuc. 6, 30); or, perhaps, even in March (cp. Arist. *Lysist.* 389). Why does the Professor (p. 34) seek an equivalent for ἀνόπαια in Hebrew, and propose to identify it with the 'night heron'? It seems very unsuitable to the passage in the *Odyssey*. And the mention of Herons reminds us that under ἐρωδιός we might expect to find an allusion to the story preserved in a fragment of the Ψυχαγωγοί of Aeschylus, connecting the death of Odysseus with the fish-bone dropped by the bird in its flight.

And as Prof. Thompson is particularly devoted to the Pleiads or *πλειάδες*, we expect to find some interpretation (possibly astronomical) of the story which recounts the repeated carrying off of one of the doves by the *λὶς πέτρῃ* (*Od.* 12, 64), and the constant despatch of a new one to make up the loss (*ἐναρίθμιον εἶναι*). The passage is quoted, but no explanation is offered. On p. 72 the whirling of the *λυγξ* on its four-spoked wheel is described, and an alternative explanation added, that it 'was not rotated round its own axis, but spun at the end of a string, as we spin cockchafers.' This particular process may be Aristophanic; but our village boys would say that it is not the modern usage; at least not south of the Tweed! The quotation on p. 87 from *Acharn.* 598 is misleading as printed: it should run—*ΛΑΜ. ἐχειροτόνησαν γὰρ με ΔΙΚ. κόκκυγες γε τρεῖς*. Exception may also be taken to the identification of the *σπερμολόγος* with the 'rook'; certainly the use of the word in *Av.* 232 is all against the view. But any attempt here to enlarge on the question would open up the whole controversy, upon which farmers have so much to say, as to the ordinary food of the rook. Points of etymology raised in the book are not always convincing, as e.g. the suggested anagram *σπέρβυς* (*σπέργυς*) out of *πρέσβυς*, or *τροχίλος* from *ὀρχίλος*. The orthography of Latin words leaves something to desire, for we find *coecus*, *coeruleus*, *obscoenus*, *hyems* and *quum* along with *cum*. But, as a rule, the printing is remarkably correct: a few slips are noticeable here and there, as 'sic' for Germ. 'sie' (p. 182); *φύσιγξ* for *φῦσιγξ* (p. 22); *μελώδουσιν* for *μελῳδουσιν*. A few errors in punctuation catch the eye, as e.g. a comma out of place after *περίνας* (p. 29), and after *pullos* (p. 128).

But now a far larger and more difficult question arises, for which we are prepared by the preface to the *Glossary*. Starting with the curious statements recorded by Aristotle and others of certain unintelligible enmities and intimacies between various species of birds—as, e.g. the hostility of one sort of hawk to the raven and of another to the dove; of one particular eagle to the goose and the swan—the Professor rightly refuses them 'entry into the domain of Zoological Science.' He offers a new solution; 'an astronomical interpretation.' Thus, according to his theory, 'the Eagle which attacks the Swan, and is in turn defeated by it, is the constellation Aquila which rises in the East immediately after Cygnus, but, setting in the West, goes down

a little before that more northern constellation: Haliaetus and Ciris are the Sun and Moon in opposition, which rise and set alternately, like the opposite constellations of Scorpio and Orion, with which the poet compares them.' This theory is evidently capable of indefinite expansion, and offers an irresistible temptation to that particular form of ingenuity which, a few years ago, read every heroic legend into a solar myth. There was the solar Odysseus warring with the storms and clouds represented by the Suitors: there was Samson (the Babylonian Sun-god *Shamash*) shorn of his rays by the cold mists of the departing year (*Dehilah*, the languishing one). Nor is Professor Thompson at all averse to solar myths, which, soberly used, give a plausible interpretation to many stories in mythology; though he frankly acknowledges that the theory has been overdone. The astronomical myth is far less simple, and must belong to a different period of the world's history, and to a different development of thought and observation. This fact the Professor duly recognizes: but until we have clearer evidence as to the age in which the sequence of the zodiacal signs and the general grouping of the constellations became so widely accepted as to form a part of current language, we must feel the strength of the Herodotean criticism: *ἐς ἀφανὲς τὸν μῦθον ἀνεvéikas οὐκ ἔχει ἔλεγχον*. It is a wise saying that 'the magic mirror of mythology shows every inquirer what he wishes to see.' We need therefore make no apology for setting against Prof. Thompson's theory the dictum of Otfried Müller, that 'astronomical myths are an unimportant part of Greek mythology.' The connexion of the orientation of temples with early astronomy is not denied; and we are quite prepared to find in the great tunnel that pierces the pyramid of Gizeh a sort of monster telescope for use in an age when the pole-star was in the constellation Draco. But the gap between rudimentary science and popular myth is 'a great gulf'; and there is a strong temptation to bridge it over. Will the Professor's theory cross it without being strained beyond the breaking point? In an earlier paper on 'Bird and Beast in Ancient Symbolism,'¹ he notes that 'the sun, which had its summer and winter solstices in Cancer and Capricorn in classical times, stood in Leo and Aquarius at the corresponding seasons in the immediately preceding age.' These points of time are somewhat loosely stated; but, in

¹ *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*: vol. 38, part 1. (No. 3).

happy innocence of accurate astronomical science, I venture to ask whether the 'precession of the equinoxes' has not had a little extra steam turned on to produce this result? We want more than 2,000 years to give the sun time to perform the feat of changing his equinoctial points from a place in one sign to the corresponding place in the next. Prof. Thompson, in a brilliant passage ('Bird and Beast,' p. 191), tells us how 'generations of Hellenic priests, like their fathers in Egypt and Chaldea, had regarded the strength of Mazzaroth and the bands of Orion and the sweet influences of the Pleiades. These guardians of an esoteric knowledge divulged their store little by little, in myth and allegory, in the sacred art of sculptor and of poet, and through the mystified lips of the teller of tales and the singer of songs. The traditional belief that Perseus and Boötes, Cepheus and Heracles, were earthly heroes translated to a restful seat in the stellar firmament is an inversion of the true order of things. The Heroes that were set in the sky had been drawn thence in the beginning: the Gorgon's head was not the creation of a poet's fancy, nor the legend of an antique chronicler, before a place was found for it in the star Algol; but patient study and accurate knowledge of the Demon Star, with its mysterious flashes and its rhythmical wax and wane, preceded the allegorical conception of Medusa's snaky head.' This is very picturesque: but was this the process which passed the loves and hates of the birds into the common language of Greece? There are other factors in the sum, which Prof. Thompson does not ignore, though he does not seem to allow them sufficient counterpoise to the overwhelming weight of his astral theory. For instance, there is 'Volksetymologie.' Is it not as likely that the Halcyon Days, for which the Professor can find no explanation except an astronomical one connected with the culmination of the Pleiads, represent a story which has grown round about the absurd idea of the ἀλκυών as ἡ ἐν ἀλλ' κύνουσα? The inventive ignorance which could easily supply Ἀργειφόντης with an Argus ready to be slain should find no difficulty in making the Halcyon nest on a waveless sea, irrespective of the position of the Pleiads.

But let us confine ourselves for a moment to the antipathies of the birds, and see if nothing analogous can be found in circumstances which can suggest nothing of zodiacal signs or defined constellations.

Among the aborigines of Victoria, Pundjel the Eagle-hawk is a creative, cosmogonic power. His rival, the Jay, opened a great bag in which the winds were confined, and blew him into the heavens. In Australian legend generally the Crow is always at war with the Owl. The Bushman mythology gives us the conflict of the Mantis-insect with the Cat. The Zulus attributed thunderstorms to the thunderbird, with red bill, legs and tail. In the legends of the Alaskan Thinkleets, Yehl went about in the feathers of the crane, or in the form of a raven, with a peculiar animosity against the wolf. In Mexico, Huitzilopochtli is confused with the Humming-bird, which ultimately becomes his attendant. And, as Plutarch remarks, the Egyptians actually worshipped beasts, while the Greeks made the same creatures attendants upon the gods, rather than the gods themselves.¹ Here we are, unfortunately, plunged in the thick of a keenly contested fray; and we find ourselves supporting the survival of savagery and totemism in Greek myths—and certainly there were survivals of savagery in Greek religion. But Professor Thompson raises a warning finger ('Bird and Beast,' p. 183), condemning 'the speculations of those who, running folk-lore to the death, seek to read antiquity in the light of savagery; who see the childhood of the world in a culminating age [?] of astronomic science, symbolic art, and mystical religion, and who arrive at what I unhesitatingly regard as misconception by the double blunder of unduly depreciating the complexity of initial or archaic Greek thought, and unduly exalting the importance, and too freely correlating the results, of their own study of incipient or semibarbarous civilizations.' Yet may not a similar rebuke be reserved for those who run astronomical interpretations 'to the death'; who find the mystical lore of Hellenic priests in stories which have their counterpart in the traditions of Australasia? Perhaps it is the very attractiveness of Prof. Thompson's theory which makes us resist, for fear of being converted; and which suggests at least a 'suspension of judgment.'

Meanwhile we are heartily grateful to him for a 'corpus' of Greek bird-lore, at once scholarly and conscientious, which will not easily be superseded.

W. W. MERRY.

¹ But see Mr A. B. Cook's article on 'Animal Worship in the Mycenaean Age.' *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. xiv. pt. 1.