



## Correspondence

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

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### SUPERSTITIONS IN THE CANONS.

(Vol. v. pp. 275, 333.)

THE superstitions mentioned on p. 275 seem to be derived not, as I ignorantly stated, from the *Canon of Matthew*, but from Matthew Vlastari's *Syntagma Canonon*, a book inaccessible to me. Most of them, not all, are condemned in the sixty-first canon of the council "in Trullo" (A.D. 680-1), including the leading about of performing bears. Balsamon's comment on this canon gives us the key to this, at first sight, incomprehensible prohibition. He tells us that the bear-leaders attach coloured ribbons or beads (*βάμματα*) to the heads and bodies of their bears, that they cut hairs from the bears and sell them together with the ribbons as phylacteries, and as potent to cure sickness and protect against the evil eye.

I to-day interviewed a bear-leader here, and he told me that the bear's hairs were very good for the evil eye, but that the parings of his claws were better still. An old woman tells me also that the bear's hairs are good for the evil eye and fevers; she knew nothing about the superior potency of the claws, but no doubt the owner of the bear is the proper judge. As regards the *βάμματα* they seem to have been abandoned. The hairs and parings of claws are burnt on live coals and the patient is smoked.

The use of bears' hairs as amulets must have been very prevalent in the seventh century at Constantinople, since the General Council of the Church was obliged to prohibit *for this reason* the innocent pastime of dancing bears. It was an age in which the noses of unsuccessful pretenders were habitually cut off, and no considerations of humanity can have immediately influenced the bishops. But the dancing bears were the last survival of the brutal shows of the amphitheatre, and these had been prohibited

in a more humane age; and, perhaps, without knowing it quite, the bishops were still engaged in killing this vile and dead institution. I fancy I have read somewhere of the magical use of the blood of gladiators, and I have no doubt that the parts of the animals killed in the arena were magically used. The notion inherent in the practice of using parts of wild animals (e.g. tigers' claws) as amulets is, of course, that the animals themselves terrify and attract. How strong must have been the virtue of parts of a beast killed in the arena, whose death-struggle fascinated so many eyes and thus killed their power of fascination! The belief in the virtue of bears' hairs may, I think, be, with some certainty, pronounced to be a belief which the sports of the amphitheatre did not perhaps create, but, at least, helped to foster.

*Mytilene.*

W. R. PATON.

[As to the use of the blood of gladiators, see Tertullian, *Apol.* ix. E. S. H.]

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### CLOTHED IMAGES.

(Vol. v. p. 333.)

Information as to the practice is to hand in Greek inscriptions, especially the Lists of Temple property.

*Inventory of Temple of Hera at Samos.*

(Curtius, Samos, pp. 10 foll.)

κόσμος τῆς θεοῦ. κιθῶν Λύδιος ἔξαστιν ἀλογγὴν ἔχων·  
κιθῶν κατάστικτος (embroidered)· κιθῶνίσκος χρυσῷ πεποι-  
κιλμένος μύρτον χρυσεὸν ἔχων· μίτρη λίτῃ στυππείου.  
περίβλημα λίνου ῥακινόν, etc., etc.

Hera had a complete and elaborate wardrobe.

Athene of Lindos (Rhodes) had also a wardrobe (*Bull. Corr. Hell.*, ix. p. 85). To this goddess Amasis gave a θώρηξ λίνεος. (Herod., ii. 182.)

Is any more information of this sort wanted?

W. H. D. ROUSE.

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## TWO CHRISTMAS EVE CUSTOMS.

My father gave the following account of two old Christmas Eve customs, still in use in Devonshire in his boyhood. If you should already have them it will of course be unnecessary to repeat them. I only venture to send them as it is better a thing should be told twice than not at all.

*Charming the Orchards.*—In charming the orchards it was an ancient custom in Devonshire, still followed by the "old folks" as late as sixty years ago, for the farmer and his men to visit the orchards after dark with guns and a jug of cider with toast or cake in it. No gun was too old if it would only hold the priming, and the more noise the better. When under one of the largest trees the spokesman of the party recited these words—

"Here's to the old apple tree,  
Bear to me apples free;  
Hatfuls, capfuls, dree-bushel bagfuls.  
Hurrah! hurrah!"

accompanied by the reports of the guns. They then drank the cider and ate the sop, taking good care to leave a large piece in the fork of the tree for the robins, or the charm would have no effect. When each orchard had been visited they adjourned to the farmhouse, and drank cider and told tales round the fire. This must be done on the eve of Old Christmas Day, "Old Twelftyane."

*Burning the Ashen Faggot.*—On Christmas Eve the labourers on the farm remain behind after their work is done and join the carters and ploughboys, who, when it is dark, go to a hedge (previously decided upon as having a suitable ash-tree or bush) and cut down enough branches to make a faggot, taking care to get the largest branches and to put the thickest stick in the middle, because they sit in the chimney-corner drinking cider until the largest stick is burnt through; then they disperse. The ash is selected because it is the only wood that will burn green, and by it our Saviour was warmed in the stable of Bethlehem.—*Told by* T. G. HARDING.

EMILY J. ANDREWS.

## A ROSS-SHIRE BETROTHAL CUSTOM.

In the neighbourhood of Ellapool, in Ross-shire, I heard of the following custom connected with the ceremony of betrothal. The betrothal takes place some weeks before the time fixed for the marriage. The relations and friends assemble at the house of the bride's father; and last of all the bridegroom arrives in the character of a would-be purchaser of a cow or a sheep. He is assured that he has come to the right place to have his want supplied; and one by one the sisters and young friends of the bride are presented to him, he making a point of finding some fault with every one, until at length the bride herself appears, when he declares himself entirely satisfied and anxious to conclude the bargain. Whiskey is then brought in, and two glasses of it are poured out for the couple, the woman only raising the glass to her lips, while the man empties them both. A man not a native of the place gave me lately rather a different version of this custom, in which the bridegroom, instead of coming to buy, comes to seek a lost lamb.

CONSTANCE TAYLER.

## SAINT JOHN'S EVE IN THE GREEK ISLANDS.

(Vol. v. page 330.)

About the Lesbian rhyme I know nothing as yet; but *κάφαλα* is a misprint for *κάψαλα*, and there can be no pun. At Calymnos they dance round the fire singing (I have the words of the song), with stones on their heads, and then jump over it. They throw the stones in the fire when it is getting low. When it is nearly out they make crosses on their legs, and then go *at once* and bathe in the sea. This is my wife's account. I have never witnessed it there. What do the stones mean? "The hare's fire," I should fancy, means "the fire that will bring fertility." The hare had, in antiquity at least, the privilege of conceiving when pregnant, and was regarded as an emblem of fertility (I have no books and cannot give references). The Midsummer fire is regarded as giving abundance for the year to come, just as it is regarded as cleansing from vermin for the year to come. It is (whatever its original significance may be) regarded as cathartic and fertilizing. That the two notions may be mixed up is shown by a way they have in Calymnos of throwing the first bunch of grapes into a house and saying "In grapes, out fleas."

W. R. PATON.