

ETYMOLOGY OF GREEK MYTHOLOGICAL
TERMS ACCORDING TO PLATO.

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THE many analogies, pointed out by Mr. Brewer in the May and August *Open Court*, between the names of Greek and Egyptian gods are exceedingly interesting, but his argument that these Greek names are actually derived from the Egyptian lacks conviction. There still remains "the missing link." The elements of all languages are after all exceedingly few and simple; the number of simple consonant and vowel combinations is not large, so that the great majority of the similarities pointed out by Mr. Brewer must be ascribed to accident. Similar resemblances can be traced between the names of the Greek gods, and those of the Hindus, or the Persians, or the Chaldeans. Allow me to mention a few discoveries of my own in Babylonian mythology. Ganymede, servant of Zeus, is the same as *Gunammide*, patesi (or servant) of the great god Gishban. In *Tiamat*, the great universal mother of the Babylonian Cosmos, we see the *Thea mater* or *Dea mater*, the mighty goddess mother Rhea of the Greek and Roman mysteries, *Marduk*, warrior and leader of the Babylonian gods, is the same as *Mars dux* of the Romans. The Greek god, goat-footed *Pan* is no other than *Ea-bani*, whose upper body is a man's, but whose legs are those of a beast. *Hera* is none other than *Aruru*, queen of the Babylonian theogony.

Similarities in names and attributes, such as the above, however striking, are not sufficient by themselves to establish derivations, although they might seem to the layman to have more etymological significance than that for example, between the English word bishop and the French word *evêque*,—words which have no single letter in common, yet are each derived from the Greek *ἐπίσκοπος*. We have exact knowledge of the rules by which the words of our European languages are derived so that the metamorphosis of *ἐπίσκοπος* into bishop and *evêque* is no mystery; but until we know as much of

Egyptian and Chaldaic etymology all theorizing as to the names in their mythology remains largely a matter of conjecture.

It would seem as if the remark of Herodotus, quoted by Mr. Brewer, that the Greeks derived the names of their gods from Egypt, ought to carry considerable conviction. We must remember, however, that Herodotus and Plato were more ignorant (to quote Mr. Jowett) than any school-boy of Greek grammar and etymology, yet with this lack of knowledge the ancient Greeks spun more fine-drawn theories about the origin of the names of their gods, than our modern etymologists have ever dreamed. Hesiod in his poems delights to give the derivations of the names in his *Theogony*. Antisthenes, Heraclitus, Prodicus, and the Sophists of Athens had theories without number concerning the origin of names; but of all their speculations scarcely anything has come down to us. We can, however, still hear the din of the discussions, which agitated the minds of the Athenians in Agora, Lyceum, and Grove, in that matchless dialogue of Plato, called the "*Cratylus*," wherein the etymological madness of the day is satirized without mercy yet with such a delicacy of humor that the most dogmatic of the sophists must have smiled.

Let us seat ourselves for a few moments with *Cratylus* and *Hermogenes* and applaud with them the magician *Socrates*, as he turns his etymologic kaleidoscope and evokes at random most startling and brilliant forms.

SELECTIONS FROM THE CRATYLUS.

(Jowett's Translation.)

Socrates. Hermogenes. Cratylus.

Hermogenes. Suppose that we make *Socrates* a party to the argument?

Cratylus. By all means.

Her. I must inform you, *Socrates*, that *Cratylus* has been arguing about names; he says that they are natural and not conventional; that there is a truth or correctness in them which is the same for Greeks as for barbarians. Tell me, *Socrates*, if you will be so good, what is your view of the truth or correctness of names.

Socrates. Son of *Hippius*, there is an ancient saying, "hard is the knowledge of the good." And the knowledge of names is a great part of knowledge. But being poor and not having heard the fifty drachma course of the great *Prodicus*, which he states is a complete education in grammar and language, I do not know the truth about such matters. I will however gladly assist you and

Cratylus in the investigation of names; you had better watch me though and see that I do not play tricks with you.

Her. We agree to that, Socrates.

Soc. Ought we not to begin with consideration of the gods and show that they are rightly termed gods?

Her. Yes, that will be well.

Soc. My notion would be something of this sort: I suspect that the sun, moon, earth, stars, and heaven, which are still the gods of many barbarians, were the only gods known to the aboriginal Greeks. Seeing that they were always moving and running (*θεῖν*, to run) they called them gods or runners (*θεοῦς*) and afterwards, when they discovered all the other gods, they retained the old name.

Her. You seem to me, Socrates, to be like a prophet, newly inspired, and to be uttering oracles.

Soc. Yes, Hermogenes, I caught the inspiration from the great Euthyphro, who gave me a long lecture which began at dawn; and his wisdom and enchanting ravishment have not only filled my ears but captured my soul. To-day I will yield to the inspiration, but to-morrow we will make a purgation of him, if we can only find some priest or sophist who is skilled in the art of purifying.

Her. With all my heart, but let us hear the rest of the inquiry about names.

Soc. What shall follow the gods? Must not heroes and men come next?

Her. What is the meaning of the word hero? (*ἥρως*).

Soc. Heroes sprung either from the love of a god for a mortal woman, or of a mortal man for a goddess: think of the word in old Attic, (*ἔρως*) and you will see that *heros* is only a slight alteration of Eros (*ἔρως*) from whom the *heros* sprang; either this is the derivation or if not then heroes must have been skilful as rhetoricians and dialecticians, and able to put questions (*ἔρωτᾶν*). All this is easy enough; the noble breed of heroes are a tribe of Sophists and Rhetors. But can you tell me why men are called *ἄνθρωποι*?

Her. No I cannot: and I would not try if I could because I think you are more likely to succeed.

Soc. That is to say, you trust the inspirations of Euthyphro.

Her. Of course.

Soc. Your faith is not vain, for now a new and ingenious thought strikes me, and, if I don't look out I shall be wiser than I ought to be before to-morrow's dawn. The word man implies that other animals never examine, or consider, or look up at what

they see, but that man not only sees (*ὄπωπε*) but is also considering and looking up (*ἀναθρῶν*) at what he sees. Hence man of all animals is right called *ἄνθρωπος*, meaning *ὁ ἀναθρῶν ἃ ὄπωπεν*.

Her. Indeed, Socrates, you are making surprising progress!

Soc. I am run away with, but not yet at my utmost speed.

Her. Let us now analyze the word *ψυχή* (soul).

Soc. I should imagine that those who gave the name *ψυχή* thought the soul to revive or refresh the body (*ἢ ἀναψύχουσα τὸ σῶμα*). But stop a minute; I fancy I can discover something more acceptable to the disciples of Euthyphro. What do you say to this? Soul is that which holds or contains nature (*ἢ φύσιν ἔχει*) or *φυσέχη*, and this expression may be refined away into *ψυχή*.

Her. This last is a better and more scientific derivation.

Soc. Yet I cannot help laughing if I am to suppose that this was the way in which the name was really used.

Her. I think, Socrates, that we have said enough of this class of words. But have we any explanations of the names of gods? I should like to know whether any similar principle of correction is to be applied to them.

Soc. Yes, indeed, Hermogenes; and there is one excellent principle which, as men of sense we must acknowledge, that of the gods we know nothing, either of their nature or of the names which they give themselves; but we are sure that the names by which they call themselves, whatever they may be, are true. We, however, on our part can only inquire about the names which men give them.

Her. I believe, Socrates, you are quite right.

Soc. What, then, may we suppose him to have meant who gave the name Hestia?

Her. That is difficult to answer.

Soc. My dear Hermogenes, the first imposers of names must have been philosophers, who wanted to hear themselves talk.

Her. Why so?

Soc. Because if you analyze these names, even if they be foreign, a meaning is discernible. Hestia is the same as *ἑστία* which is an old form of *οὐσία*, and means the first principle of things; this agrees with the fact that to Hestia the first sacrifices are offered. The name of Zeus has also an excellent meaning, though hard to understand, for it is like a sentence divided in two. Some call him *Ζῆνα* and use the one half, and others call him *Διὰ* and use the other half. The two parts taken together mean the One in whom all creatures live (*δι'ὃν ζῆ πάντα*). Zeus is the son of Kronos, which signifies *τὸ καθαρὸν καὶ ἀκέραιον τοῦ νοῦ*, the pure and garnished mind.

And Kronos, we are informed by tradition, was begotten of Uranus, who is so called ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀρᾶν τὰ ἄνω, from looking upwards; which as philosophers say is the way to have a pure mind.

Her. Let us take next the two brothers of Zeus, Poseidon and Pluto.

Soc. Poseidon is ποσίδεσμος, "the chain of the feet"; the original inventor of this name had been stopped by the watery element in his walks and not allowed to go on, and therefore he called the ruler of this element, Poseidon; the ε was probably inserted as an ornament. Yet perhaps not; the name may have been originally written with a double λ and not with a σ meaning the god "Knowing-many-things" (πολλείδων). Perhaps also he may be regarded as the shaker ἀπὸ τοῦ σείειν, and then π and δ are added. Pluto is concerned with πλοῦτος and means the giver of wealth, because wealth comes out of the earth beneath. People in general use the term as a euphemism for Hades, which their fears lead them erroneously to derive from the "invisible" (ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀειδοῦς).

Her. And what is the true derivation?

Soc. He is called Hades, Hermogenes, not from the invisible but from his knowing all noble things (ἀπὸ τοῦ πάντα τὰ καλὰ εἰδέναι).

Her. Very good; and what do we say of Demeter, and Here, and Apollo, and Athene, and Hephaistos, and Ares, and the other deities?

Soc. Demeter is ἡ διδοῦσα μήτηρ τῆς ἐδωδῆς, the mother and giver of food. Here (Ἥρη) is the lovely one (ἐρατή). Possibly also the one who named her was thinking at the time of the weather (ἀήρ) and just transposed the letters, putting the last part first. You will see the truth of this, if you repeat the letters of Here several times over. As for Apollo I do not believe any single name could express so well the many attributes of the god.

Her. I should like to hear the explanations.

Soc. In reference to ablutions Apollo is first of all the purifier (ἀπολούων); secondly Apollo is the true diviner, ἄπλωος, as the Thes-salians call him; thirdly Apollo is the archer always shooting (ἀεὶ βάλλων), and lastly Apollo is the god who moves together (ἴμο-πολων) all things whether in the poles of the heavens or in the harmony of song.

Her. What is the meaning of Dionysos and Aphrodite?

Soc. Son of Hipponicus, that is a solemn question; there is a serious and also a facetious explanation of both these names; the serious explanation is not to be had from me, but there is no objection to your hearing the facetious one; for the gods too love a

joke. Dionysos is simply ὁ δίδους τὸν οἶνον (the giver of wine), Διδούινσος, as he might be called in fun. The derivation of Aphrodite διὰ τὴν τοῦ ἀφροῦ γένεσιν (on account of her birth from foam) may be accepted on the authority of Hesiod.

Her. There remains still Athene, Socrates, whom you as an Athenian will not surely forget.

Soc. There is no difficulty in explaining her other name Pallas which is derived from the armed dances (ἀπὸ τοῦ πάλλειν τὰ ὄπλα).

Her. But what of the other name, Athene?

Soc. For Athene we must have recourse to the allegorical interpreters of Homer, who make the name equivalent to θεονόα (she who has the godlike mind) or to ἡθονόη (normal perception), which names were afterwards beautified into Athene.

Her. But what do you say of Hephaistos?

Soc. Hephaistos is the lord of light—ὁ τοῦ φάεος ἵστωρ.

Her. That is probable, until some other notion more probable gets into your head.

Soc. To prevent which let us ask about the derivation of Ares.

Her. What is Ares?

Soc. Ares is the "manly one" ἀρρήν or else from his hard and unchangeable nature the "unbroken" one ἀρράτος, which derivation is quite appropriate to the god of war.

Her. Very true.

Soc. And now, by the gods, let us have no more of the gods, for I am afraid of them! Ask about anything else and thou shalt see how the steeds of Euthyphro can prance.

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And Socrates throughout the remainder of the dialogue, which we are unable to quote farther, keeps his promise and gives the steeds of Euthyphro free rein.

But for those who care to read between the lines there is more to the "Cratylus" than a mere Socratic *reductio ad absurdum*. We have in parts of this dialogue a clear and definite statement of the meaning which the sounds of their language conveyed to the Greeks, and this meaning is most vital to those who wish to appreciate the value of spoken Greek as a medium of expression. Jowett remarks that the "Cratylus" contains deeper truths about language than any other ancient writing. We would commend therefore a reading of the dialogue and of Mr. Jowett's excellent notes upon the same to all who wish to arrive at a clearer understanding of the many questions which the derivation of Greek words and names involves.