

THE ORIGIN  
OF THE  
CULT OF DIONYSOS

A LECTURE

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## THE ORIGIN OF THE CULT OF DIONYSOS.<sup>1</sup>

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MODERN research is doing much to resolve the complicated and almost interminable riddles of the Greek and Latin Mythologies. In another sense than the religious interpretation, the gods of Olympus are fading away : as they fade from off the ethereal scene, the earlier forms out of which they were evolved come up again into view ; the Thunder-god goes back into the Thunder-man, or into the Thunder-bird or Thunder-tree ; Zeus takes the stately form in vegetable life, of the Oak-tree, or if he must be flesh and blood he comes back as a Red-headed Woodpecker. Other and similar evolutions are discovered and discoverable ; and the gods acquire a fresh interest when we have learnt their parentage. Sometimes, in the Zeus-worship at all events, we can see two forms of deity standing side by side, one coming on to the screen before the other has moved off ; the zoömorph or animal form co-existing and hardly displacing the phytomorph or plant form.

One of the prettiest instances of this co-existence that I have discovered came to my notice in connection with a study that I was making of the place of bees in early religion. It was easy to see that the primitive human thinker had assigned a measure of sanctity to the bee, for he had found it in the hollows of his sacred tree : at the same time he had noticed that bees sprang from a little white larva, comparable with the maggot in a putrescent body. So he devised explanations of the origin of these larvæ, and not unnaturally theorised that the bee would arise in the body of an ox, if the ox were buried, or killed and shut up in a building, whose doors and windows were

<sup>1</sup> A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on 5 January, 1915.

closed for a sufficient length of time. Classical literature is full of these stories, and even Biblical literature is not destitute of the tradition, as witness the story of Samson, eating honey from the carcase of a lion. We will not, however, go to ancient literature, but to something much more ancient, the traditions and folk-lore of existing peoples.

For instance, there is a wide-spread folk-tale, according to which Jesus asks bread from an old woman who is baking, and upon refusal turns her into a woodpecker or an owl : you have a reminiscence of the story in Ophelia's statement in the play of Hamlet, that " the owl was a baker's daughter ". This story, the explanation of which is not difficult, is, amongst the peasants of Little Russia, embroidered with another story from quite a different cycle. The old woman in this tale strikes Jesus on the head and makes a wound. In the wound is found a little worm, which Peter is bidden to extract and place in the hollow of a tree. The story-teller goes on to say that when they next passed that way, there was an abundance of honey in the tree. *Bees had been produced out of the Lord's head.*

In another form of the story, as told in Poland, Jesus is travelling with Peter and Paul, and asks for hospitality for the night from an old woman. Instead of a welcome they have stones thrown at them, and Paul is struck in the head. As the weather was hot, the wound putrified, and little maggots were produced, which Jesus took from the wound and placed in the hollow of a tree. A good while after, they passed that way again, and Jesus directed Paul to look in the tree hollow, where to his surprise *he found bees and honey sprung from his own head.*

In German Bohemia, the story is told without the introduction of the old woman. Jesus and Paul walk through the woods together. Christ's forehead itches, and Peter extracts the troublesome maggot and puts it in a hollow tree. Result as before.

Sometimes the peasant says that the bee-larva was found in a hole in the body of God, either an artificial hole made in his forehead, or elsewhere, from which it is removed into a corresponding hole in the tree, where bees are to be found.

In all these stories the oak in whose holes the bees are found has been externalised into the body of God in which the bees exist in germ-form. The Thunder-man is seen to be the externalisation of

the Thunder-tree ; the phytomorph and the anthropomorph standing side by side, and each of them being read in terms of the other, for each is the Thunder. Christ as the thunder-man has, in fact, stepped out of the Thunder-tree ; but he has not gone very far off and easily finds his way back.

Now it is easy to see that this method of regarding the oak as personified thunder, capable of an external and visible incarnation, may lead us to important results in other parts of ancient mythology. When, for example, we read that Athena sprang from the brain of Zeus, and was actually liberated from that temporary prison by the axe of Hephaestus, we have only to remember that Athena is the owl, and that, from the habits of the owl and its dwelling-place in the hollow tree, it has claims to be regarded as a Thunder-bird ; though, for want of sufficient colour-credentials, it cannot hold its own against the Woodpecker.

Zeus is, from this point of view, a projection of the Thunder-tree and of the Thunder-bird into human form, while Hephaestus with his axe (the thunder-axe of which we may see the wide diffusion in popular beliefs and in surviving cult-monuments), is himself an artificial double of the thunder-god, and in some respects nearer to the thunder than Zeus himself. Athena is the daughter of Zeus, because she is the daughter of the Thunder, and she springs from the thunder-struck oak.

We are now going to spend a little time over the myth of Dionysus, because it suggests a parallel to the birth of Athena. In Athena's case, the place of gestation is the head of Zeus, in the case of Dionysos, the story ran that when he was born of the intercourse of Semele and Zeus, and his mother had perished in the fiery embrace of her Olympian lover, Dionysos himself underwent gestation in the thigh of Zeus, and being born again from thence became the type of the twice-born man. It is natural, then, to enquire whether any explanation of the relations between Zeus and Dionysos can be made in terms of the oak-tree and the Thunder.

It is well known that the mythology of the Dionysos cult furnishes some of the most obscure and intricate problems in the whole history of Greek religion. Who was Dionysos ? What is the meaning of his name ? Why is he born of Zeus and Semele ? And why re-born of Zeus ? How does he become a god of wine and take the

vine under his patronage? And what possible connection can there be between the Zeus-born babe, or the discoverer of the vine, or the Thracian hero of the Bacchic religion, whom the Maenads pursue in wild ecstasies upon the mountains? What connection has the Thracian Dionysos with the Phrygian Sabazios? How did they come to be identified one with the other? And how did the Bacchic revellers become identified at a later date with the followers of Orpheus and the initiates into the Orphic mysteries? And what is the meaning of the devotion to Dionysos in the very sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi? These are some of the questions which engage more or less successfully the attention of the students of Greek religion. Indeed, it is only after the enunciation of a series of inadequate hypotheses that the ground is cleared for one that harmonises and colligates the known facts and traditions. Without for a moment suggesting that it is in our power, by a fortunate intuition, to resolve the varied tangle of Dionysos-cults and customs, and the place of the god in Greek religion, we may perhaps be forgiven if we say that, up to the present, the solutions offered have failed because they did not go far enough back into primitive religion, and because they were not sufficiently simple. Suppose, then, we try and verify this statement by a hypothesis which goes down to the lowest stratum of religious ideas, and is as simple as it is primitive.

In order to make such a hypothesis, we recall the direction in which we were taken by Mr. A. B. Cook and others with regard to the character of the European Sky-God. He was found to be also a Thunder-god, who dwelt animistically in a thunder-struck tree (an oak-tree by preference as being the tree that is oftenest struck),<sup>1</sup> and whose bolts in the form of arrows or axe-heads were found, and often conserved in the neighbourhood of the tree, if not actually in its hollows. Moreover, as we have shown, the common belief that the thunder existed in bird-form, and could even be recognised as thunder by his red colour, led to the association of certain birds with the thunder and the thunder-tree. Last of all, it was evident that bees

<sup>1</sup> The oak is struck thrice as often as the pine, more than ten times as often as the beech. For the proof of this see my note in "Boanerges," p. 392, which was written without knowledge that the same result had been given in Frazer, "G. B.," VII, II. 298, from Warde Fowler in "Archiv für Religionswissenschaft," XVI (1913), pp. 318 sqq.

and honey, from being commonly found in hollow thunder-struck trees, had acquired a close affinity with the thunder-god, whether in bird-form or in his later human guise. The relationship was natural in any case ; but it was emphasised by the observation that the Woodpecker rifled the bees' nests. These things being so, we find that the animistic belief makes everything that thunder touches into thunder : the trees, the bird, the man, the axe.

If this be true, we must ask a further question : if the tree and its associated animate and inanimate forms are thunder, what shall we say of the parasites of the tree ? Are they thunder also ? In the case of the mistletoe, the evidence for an affirmative reply is being piled very high by Dr. Frazer in the "Golden Bough," and we have no need to repeat his arguments, or gather over again his multitudinous facts. The mistletoe, however, is not the only oak-parasite. We are thus led to our next hypothesis, which is that the ivy that grows on the oak is also thunder, and that when the phytomorph becomes the anthropomorph, the name of the new (subordinate) thunder-deity is Dionysos. In other words, *Dionysos is the ivy*, in the first instance, he is ivy, nothing more nor less. When we make that suggestion, we have gone back almost to the lowest stratum of religious belief, and it will be agreed that if we can defend our hypothesis, it is one of extreme simplicity.

In some respects the statement is not new ; we might show that the Greeks themselves made it, and at Acharnai, says Pausanias (I, xxxi. 6) they honour an Ivy-Dionysos ; this identification is also the goal towards which a number of modern investigators have been tending. There has been a general feeling that in order to solve the origins of Dionysos and of Dionysiac worship, we must go behind the vine and the cult of the vine. Miss Harrison tried to do this when, in her "Introduction to the Study of Greek Religion," she started the theory that behind the Thracian wine-god, there was a beer-god. With great ingenuity she replaced the Dionysian-goat by spelt (*Tragos*) and deduced the Dionysian title *Bromios* from oats (*Bromos*). Thus we lose the conventional origin of tragedy, the goat-song, and the traditional connection of Dionysos with the Thunder, so far as thunder is implied by one of his most popular titles (*Bromios*). Miss Harrison's theory did not find favour, and she very soon withdrew it, and the four titles which she thought she had explained, *Bromios*, *Braites*,

Sabazios, and Tragedy. The hypothesis was short-lived, and perhaps it was buried too hastily for decency. Even a hypothesis requires time for a death-certificate. I mean that it had an *à priori* verisimilitude which commends it; when one thinks what beer has meant in the history of our own ancestors, and what it means to-day in almost all the tribes of East Africa, it is difficult to see how the latent inspiring principle of the beverage should have escaped some sort of divinisation. After all, there is a subterranean connection between Beer and Bible.

The fact is, however, that neither the beer-hypothesis nor the closely related mead-hypothesis is sufficient to explain Dionysos and his cult, though they may easily have been stages on the way to the recognition of a wine god. So one of the first steps forward, i.e. backward, is to deny that Dionysos is the equivalent of alcohol. Accordingly Perdrizet said, in his "Cultes et Mythes du Pangée"<sup>1</sup> that "primitively the Thracian Dionysos was not a god of wine". He then suggested that Dionysos might be the ivy, but gave the wrong reason, affirming that Dionysos was the god who presided over vegetable life, and for that reason his symbol was the evergreen, whose persistence in the winter attests that the death of nature is only an appearance. This exactly misses the point; Dionysos is not a true vegetation-God; the real reason for the identification of Dionysos with the ivy is that the ivy is the thunder, not, in the first instances, the symbol of any vegetable life, whatever vegetable connections may ultimately be developed. Yet on the other hand, how close Perdrizet came to the identification! Here is an admirable summary<sup>2</sup> which he makes of the divinity of the ivy:—

"Il est croyable que dans les temps très anciens la lierre passait aux yeux des Thraces pour la résidence de leur divinité, probablement même était-il un de leurs totems: ainsi s'explique que pendant la période Hellenistique encore, les Dionysiastes se faisaient tatouer au signe de la feuille de lierre: et que les femmes, quand elles célébraient, comme dit Plutarque ("Quaest. Rom." 112) la 'Passion de Bacchus,' mettaient en pièces des branches de lierre et en mangeaient les feuilles; le lierre, comme la faon, le chevreau ou le taureau, était un forme de Dieu; et comme ces animaux, il servait aux repas de communion qui formaient le mystère par excellence de la Bacchanale".

<sup>1</sup> l. c., p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> l. c., pp. 65, 66.

Perdrizet was referring to the attempts made to introduce the Greek religion into Jerusalem, and to force it upon Egyptian Jews, and in particular to the decree of Ptolemy Philopator that the Jews should be "branded with the ivy-leaf, the emblem of Bacchus";<sup>1</sup> (3 Macc. II. 29 : cf. 2 Macc. VI. 7.). Philopator goes farther in this compulsory Hellenisation than Antiochus Epiphanes, who had required the Jews to take part in Bacchic processions, carrying thyrsi twined with ivy : he will have them take the totem-mark of the god. It was not meant to be a degradation, for he was tattooed himself with the same sacred symbol.

The description of the tearing and eating of the ivy in a sacramental manner is also very instructive ; it is the god that is eaten here,<sup>2</sup> just as in the more terrible sacraments of raw flesh with which we are familiar in early religion in general, and in the Bacchic revels in particular. What Perdrizet then missed was the identification of the underlying god. He saw the ivy off the oak : if he had seen it on the oak, the whole matter would have been much clearer to him. And we are inclined to think it might have been clearer : for consider how closely Dionysos is connected with the thunder, not only by his miraculous birth from the thunder-smitten Semele, but also by the titles and descriptions given to him by the Greek poets. Miss Harrison tried to get Bromios away from the thunder, but she admitted that throughout the Bacchae "Dionysos is in some degree a god of thunder as well as thunder-born, a god of mysterious voices, of strange confused orgiastic music, which we know he brought with him from the North".<sup>3</sup> "In some degree a god of thunder" ! the expression will bear re-writing. When we see the ivy climbing over

<sup>1</sup> τούς δὲ ἀπογραφόμενους χαράσσεσθαι, καὶ διὰ πυρὸς εἰς τὸ σῶμα παρασήμῳ Διονύσῳ κισσοφύλλῳ.

—3 Macc., II. 29.

γενόμενης δὲ Διονυσίων ἑορτῆς ἠναγκάζοντο κισσοὺς ἔχοντες πομπεύειν τῷ Διόνυσῳ.

—2 Macc., VI. 7.

See further on the totem-marks of Dionysos in Miss Harrison's review of Perdrizet, "Classical Review," December, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Harrison, "Prolegomena," p. 429, misses the meaning of the chewing of the ivy and suggests that "the Maenads chewed ivy leaves for inspiration, as the Delphic prophetess chewed the bay". They ate the god for inspiration, would be a more correct statement.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 415.



the oak, and attaching itself to it, the birth from Zeus and Semele, the tree and the earth (for it is well-established now that Semele means earth), becomes intelligible. *The tree is the thunder and makes all its parasites and all its denizens thunder.*<sup>1</sup>

The new hypothesis connects a number of scattered phenomena and traditions together. To begin with: the vine displaces the ivy: why? Simply because the first vines were trained on trees, as indeed they long continued to be: so that the transference from ivy-Dionysos to vine-Dionysos was easy and natural. The ivy, however, never loses its place in the cult, in spite of the predominance given to the new-comer. It will stay on the thyrsus: it will continue to be the totem mark of the god. Thus the vine and the ivy grow side by side. They are on the same oak. In the language of mythology they both grow over the ruins of the thunder-struck palace of Semele.<sup>2</sup> In Euripides, *Bacchae* 41 f., it is the vine that so spreads itself: in Euripides, *Phoenissae* 651, it is the ivy that clings to the pillars of the ruined house, and the scholiast has a note to the effect that when the Kadmean palace was struck by the lightning of Zeus, the ivy grew over the pillars so as to hide and protect the infant god. On this ground it is said that the god is called Perikionios (pillar-clinging) by the Thebans. The royal palace to which the vine and ivy cling is originally the sacred oak. Even the description of Dionysos in terms of the ivy clinging to the pillar is probably a misunderstanding of an original Perkunios, Perkun being the oak-and-thunder-god of the

<sup>1</sup> This is, I suppose, the explanation of the legend of Dionysos-statues with faces painted red. According to Pausanias the Corinthians made two images of Dionysos out of a tree, and the images had red faces and gilt bodies (Paus., II, II. 6; Frazer, "G. B.," II. 161). So also at Phigaleia, there were images of Dionysos, covered with leaves of ivy and laurel, through which it was possible to see that the fetish had been smeared with vermilion (Paus., VIII, XXXIX. 6). Farnell thinks ("Cults of the Greek States," V, 243) that, "in these cases the idol's face was smeared with red, no doubt in order to endow it with a warm vitality, for 'red' is a surrogate for blood, and anointing idols with blood for the purpose of animating them is a part of old Mediterranean magic". We have shown that there is another explanation of "red" as the colour of the thunder, and that this is a widespread and fundamental conception in the growth of cults. See *Boanerges*, c. 4.

<sup>2</sup> We may compare the story which Philostratus ("Imagg.," II. 19) tells of a certain savage Phorbas, who dwelt under an oak tree, *which was regarded as his palace*, whither the Phlegyæ resorted to him for judgment.

northern nations, whose name still survives in the Slavonic Perun, and in the Latin Quercus and the Hercynian forest. As the Greeks had lost the word for oak, which answers to the Latin Quercus, they naturally made Perkunios into Perikionios. For once mythology in a minor point was a disease of language. The transfer of names was invited by the fact that, in mythology, a pillar commonly represents a tree.

When we use the word parasite of a plant which grows on or over another, we are not to be understood as using the word in a botanical sense. Any plant closely attached to a tree is a parasite of that tree and shares its fortunes and partakes of its life. To the early botanist the ivy was as much a part of the oak as the mistletoe.

The matter may be taken a little farther: for there are other creeping plants which are found in the cult of Dionysos, and have a similar origin to the ivy. For instance, there is a plant called *smilax* (*milax* of the Attic speech), which (whatever be its exact botanical equivalent) turns up with the ivy and the vine in the ritual of Dionysos. Just as the ivy and the vine are found growing side by side over the pillars of the ruined palace of Semele, so the *smilax*, the ivy, and the vine are found in the garlands of the Bacchae. Thus Athenaeus<sup>1</sup> tells us that in the great Bacchic procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus, the maidens were crowned with *ivy, vine-leaves, and smilax*. And this conjunction explains the language of the Bacchae (703-5) where the Maenads are garlanded with *ivy, oak, and smilax*;

Then did they wreathe their heads  
With ivy, oak and flower-starred briony.

—A. S. WAY.

The same conjunction of ivy, oak and *smilax* together with the addition of pine-branches is in *Bacchae* 104, *sqq.*, but this time the *smilax* is described as green *with fair fruits*: so it is probably a creeper whose identification with the thunder has been assisted by its red berries. We have traces, also, of another creeper, the Clematis: in the inscriptions from Cos,<sup>2</sup> there is an allusion to Dionysos Skul-litas, and the name finds its explanation in a gloss of Hesychius,

<sup>1</sup> p. 198 E.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. Paton and Hicks, No. 37.

Σκυλλίς κληματίς. So we have a Clematis-Dionysos, to set with the ivy-Dionysos, and with the smilax-Dionysos.

The case of the smilax ought not to be dismissed too hastily : for the question arises whether it is not something more than one of a group of creepers associated with the oak-tree. It is evident that in the Ptolemaic times it has acquired sanctity, and become the subject of regulation on the part of those who have charge of the Dionysian revels. May it not be that smilax has a sanctity of its own, apart from the tree as well as upon it ?

The suggestion has been made that we may identify the smilax with the wild briony, or some similar climbing-plant *with red berries*. Let us see what Pliny says on the plant in question. Here is a passage from the "Natural History" (H. N. XVI. 153-155) :—

"Similis est hederæ e Cilicio quidem primum profecta, sed in Græcia frequentior, quam vocant *smilacem*, densis geniculata caulibus, spinosis frutectosa ramis . . . fert racemos labruscæ modo, non hederæ, *colore rubro*, . . . id volgus ignorans plerumque festa sua polluit *hederam existimando*, sicut in poetis aut Libero patre aut Sileno, quis omnino scit quibus coronentur ?"

Pliny is clearly describing the smilax as used in the Bacchic festivals : he thinks the plant has no business there : it is not a true ivy, but has been mistaken for such by the vulgar and the poets. Incidentally it differs from the ivy in having red berries.

Yes ! but perhaps the vulgar and the poets knew more about the matter than the natural philosopher. We are grateful for the mention of the red berries. They help us to identify the plant with the thunder. At this point we have an exact parallel in the Rowan-tree, which is Thor's tree on account of its red berries. Its redness is emphasised in its name : if any confirmation were needed that the sanctity of the tree is in its berries, the following passage from the Kalevala will be sufficient :—

In the yard there grows a rowan,  
Thou with reverend care shouldst tend it.  
Holy is the tree there growing,  
Holy likewise are its branches,  
On its boughs the leaves are holy  
*And its berries yet more holy.*

—"Kalevala," tr. Kirby, XXIII. 221-226.

Note further that amongst the Finns, whose traditions are incorporated

in the Kalevala, the mountain-ash is called Rauni, and is regarded as the consort of the Thunder-god (Ukko).<sup>1</sup>

I think it is likely that it is to these creepers, beginning with the vine and the ivy, which must surely be vegetable cult symbols, that we owe the cult animals, the goat and the fawn. For if these creatures eat the green plants that climb over the oak, they become the god, just as the Maenads do when they chew the ivy, or when at a second remove they eat the flesh and drink the blood of the animal that has eaten the sacred plant. Both the goat and the fawn occupy a large place in the ritual of Bacchic religion; the men are clad in goat-skins, and the women in fawn-skins; they are pretending to be goats and fawns. How does that help them? It helps them to annex and assimilate their god. It seems certain that the fawn as a cult animal, is very near to the origin of the cult: for the Maenads are tattooed with fawn marks, just as the male worshippers are with ivy-leaves: so that the ivy and the fawn are probably primitive symbols. If that be so, the ivy is the earlier symbol, for the fawn only comes in because it has eaten the ivy, or one of the companion growths of the ivy. It might be that both the goat and the fawn had been eating the vine trained on the oak.

These considerations will help us to see how much is gained for the understanding of the cult, by taking the sacred ivy back to the tree from which it originally derived its sanctity.

Notice, in the next place, how the discovered oak-parentage of Dionysos helps us to understand his connection with honey and with the Melissai and with Aristaeus. We have shown that Aristaeus is the original countryman's god, Goodman-god in the language of Eastern Europe, and that amongst his special cares must be reckoned the care of bees. He is himself the discoverer of honey. It is through the bees that Aristaeus comes into the circle of thunder-animisms, his daughters are the *Μέλισσαι*, or Bee-maidens, who will ultimately

<sup>1</sup> "To *Rauni* . . . corresponds the Finno-Lappish *Raudna*, to whom were consecrated the berries of the mountain-ash, and as E. N. Setälä has shown, it is a Scandinavian loan-word (Ice. *reynir*, Swed. *rönn*, cf. Scots *Rowan*).

"The Finns also regard the mountain-ash in their courtyards, and especially its berries, as sacred. The idea that the Ukko and Rauni were husband and wife finds its explanation in the close relations which both Teutons and Litu-Slavs believed to exist between the thunder and the oak."—Kaarle Krohn in Hastings, "Dict. R. E.," sv. Finns.

become priestesses of Demeter at Eleusis. He himself is little more than a glorified shepherd, made famous by the discovery of honey and of olive oil. Now if we turn to Apollonius Rhodius, IV. 1132, we find that Medea is wedded in the "sacred grot" of Makris, the daughter of Aristæus, the finder of honey and oil; it was she who took to her breast the infant Dionysos and touched his baby lips with honey. Here is the passage:—

αὐτοῦνχλὶ κούρη θαλαμήιον ἔντυον εὐνήν  
 ἄντρῳ ἐν ἠγαθέῳ, τόθι δὴ ποτε Μάκρις ἔβαιεν,  
 κούρη Ἀρισταίου μελίφρονος, ὅς ῥα μελισσέων  
 ἔργα πολυκμήτιό τ' ἀνεύρατο πῖαρ ἐλαίης·  
 κείνη δὲ πᾶμπρωτα Διὸς Νυσῆιον νῆα  
 Εὐβοίης ἔντοσθεν Ἀβαντίδος ᾗ ἐνὶ κόλπῳ  
 δέξατο, καὶ μέλιτι ξηρὸν περὶ χεῖλος ἔδευσεν,  
 εὐτέ μιν Ἑρμείας φέρεν ἐκ πυρός·

And here is Mr. Way's rendering of it:—

And the self-same night for the maiden prepared they the couch of the  
 bride,

In a hallowed cave, where of old time Makris wont to abide,  
 The child of the Honey-lord, Aristæos, whose wisdom discerned  
 The toils of the bees, and the wealth of the labour of olives learned.  
 And she was the first that received and in sheltering bosom bore  
 The child Nysaian of Zeus, on Euboea's Abantian shore,  
 And with honey she moistened his lips when the dew of life was dried,  
 When Hermes bare him out of the fire.

So it appears that the babe Dionysos was entrusted at first to one of the Bee-Maidens, whom we may call the "tall Miss Goodman". Thus the Bee-maidens are a duplicate of the Kuretes, and they stand to Dionysos in the same relation as the Kuretes to Zeus. They bring the honey to him for baby-Thunder likes honey. *Dionysos is really a new Zeus*, and has similar experiences to the old one.

Moreover, the connection of the Ivy-god with the Oak-god, and with the Oak-god's bees, helps us to see how in certain quarters he usurped the functions of Zeus-Aristæus and became himself Bee-Master. Accordingly, Ovid makes him responsible both for the finding of the first honey, and the fashioning of the first bee-hive.

Liba deo fiunt; sucis quia dulcibus ille  
 Gaudet et a Baccho mella reperta ferunt:

Colligit errantes et in arbore claudit inani  
 Liber: et inventi præmia mellis habet.

—"Fasti," III. 735-744.

It is even possible that the Satyrs who accompany Dionysos and the Maenads are originally a group of Kuretes, and that the Maenads may have arisen out of an antecedent group of Bee-maidens. This would explain why the Maenads are so constantly spoken of as the "nurses" (τιθήναι) of Dionysos. In the Orphic Hymns, for example, Dionysos is invoked (Hymn xxx) as

εὐμενὲς ἦτορ ἔχων, σὺν ἐϋζώγοισι τιθήναις.

This connection between Dionysos and Honey is even more striking in the great vase of Hieron: here we have the god adorned *with a necklace of honey-combs strung on sprays of ivy*. The god himself is, as Miss Harrison points out,<sup>1</sup> a mere herm draped in a ritual garment, that is, a tree-pillar. We have, then, the tree, the ivy that grows on the tree, and the honey that is found in the tree.

It will be seen that we are beginning to answer some of the questions connected with the Dionysos-cult. Now for a word or two with regard to his name. The old-fashioned explanation was a geographical one, he was from his birth-place Nysa or Nysaios. The modern explanation is that of Kretschmer<sup>2</sup> who makes *νύσος* = a son *or* young man. According to this explanation, Dionysos is simply a Thracian form of Dioscouros. I am not altogether satisfied that we have got the true solution of the problem: but no doubt Kretschmer's explanation, at present, holds the field.

The explanation of Dionysos as the ivy and the identification of the ivy with the thunder helps us to understand why the ivy is used in making fire by friction of two sticks. One stick, at least, of the two should have the thunder in it, for how can one get fire out of that which has not fire in it? Frazer<sup>3</sup> points out that both Greeks and Indians preferred to make one of the fire-sticks from a parasitic plant and suggests that the reason of the selection is the analogy of the union of the sexes, one stick, the borer, being male, and the other female, and the parasite which embraces the tree, being considered male. That fire-sticks are male and female is evident, but the reason for the selection of the ivy or wild-vine for a fire-stick lies, not in the sex attributed to the plant, but in the thunder which it contains. Moreover, of parasitic plants employed in making of fire, it is not necessary that the plant should be a vine or creeper. Frazer himself

<sup>1</sup> "Prolegomena," p. 429.

<sup>2</sup> "Aus der Anomia," p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> "The Magic Art," II. 251.

has pointed out that in Vedic times the male fire-stick was cut by preference from a sacred fig-tree which grew as a parasite on a *sami* or female tree. So the question is raised whether the connection of Dionysos with the fig may not be similar to his connection with the ivy. Does the wild-fig ever grow parasitically on the oak? If it does, there is thunder in it, and it can be a Dionysos and a fire-stick. The point deserves, perhaps, a closer investigation.

While talking of fire-sticks, it occurs to me that it is perhaps in this direction that we are to look for the explanation of the apparent androgynism of Dionysos. The artistic representations of the god are effeminate in the later periods of Greek art, but even in the earlier times we have significant suggestions of feminine dress and appearance. We think, for instance, of Pentheus in the *Bacchae*, dressed up as a female Dionysos in order that he may spy out the revels: and the rude images of the aniconic period are often draped and their heads are covered with feminine gear. Farnell brings the point out clearly in the following sentences: <sup>1</sup> when speaking of the Thrasyllos statue in the British Museum, he says, "In the forms of the breasts, which are soft and almost feminine, we note the beginnings of that effeminacy, which becomes the dominant characteristic of the Dionysiac types". Again, "An interesting vase of the earlier fifth-century style, almost certainly by Hieron, had embodied the legend of the confusion of sex of the infant Dionysos: we see Zeus holding the divine babe attired as a girl, behind him is Poseidon and Hermes goes before: and this is a direct illustration of the story preserved by Apollodorus". Again: "Effeminacy in the forms renders it difficult at times to distinguish a head of Bacchus from one of Ariadne". Again: "In the larger (Pergamene) frieze Dionysos is a dramatic and impressive figure enough, but the breasts are half feminine". These quotations will show how decided was the tradition of a feminine element in the idea of Dionysos. How could such a conception have arisen? What was there in the origin of the cult that was the germ which found such pronounced efflorescence in Greek art? I am going to hazard a speculative solution.

It is known that the ivy is one of the early forms of the fire-stick, out of which by rapid rotation of one stick in another fire was produced; for example, ivy and laurel were conjugate fire-sticks, the ivy being the male and the laurel the female. Now, if we imagine an

earlier stage, in which both the fire-sticks were made of ivy-wood, as might easily have been the case, as soon as it was recognised that the fire had gone into the ivy, then we should have not only a male Dionysos but a conjugate female Dionysos, and one way of expressing this is to say that Dionysos is androgyne. We may get some confirmation of this explanation in the following way: one of the alternative forms for a fire-stick is a piece of nut-wood: when the need-fire was last made in Westmoreland in 1848, I was told by an old man who took part in the ceremony, and put the cattle through the smoke of the new fire, that the said new fire had been produced by the friction of nut-wood. Now Servius tells us that in Laconia, Dionysos loved a maiden named Caroea (a Miss Nutt, that is), and that he turned her into a nut-tree. As usual in such cases, it was really the nut-tree that was turned into the maid. Her relation to Dionysos is that of the female fire-stick to the male.<sup>1</sup> That was how it happened. It was the ivy that loved the nut-tree. As I have said, this is a speculation and not a demonstration. There may be other explanations possible. The ivy, for instance, may have actually grown over the nut-tree. We should, then, have to look for a feminine Dionysos in some other direction. There is enough evidence extant to make us believe in the existence of such a feminine counterpart, even if we may not at once be able to say who or what she was.

We have now established our main point as to the meaning of the ivy in the cult of Dionysos. The probability is that Dionysos himself is a lesser Zeus, and through the ivy, a kind of Dioscure, or Zeus-child. This simple and elementary belief has been combined with other nature-cults, roughly described as Thracian or Phrygian, and Bacchic or Orphic, and the outcome is the god Dionysos, the last recruit to the Olympian family, and one of the best of the whole crowd.

<sup>1</sup> Servius, "Ecl.," VIII. 29.