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JACOB AND THE MANDRAKES

by

J. G. FRAZER

FELLOW OF THE ACADEMY

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Introduction to the Digital Edition

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Author: Sir James George (J G) Frazer (1854–1941), was a Scottish social anthropologist influential in the early stages of the modern studies of mythology and comparative religion. His most famous work, *The Golden Bough* (1890), documents and details similar magical and religious beliefs across the globe. Frazer posited that human belief progressed through three stages: primitive magic, replaced by religion, in turn replaced by science. He studied at the University of Glasgow and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he graduated with honors in Classics (his dissertation would be published years later as *The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory*) and remained a Classics Fellow all his life. He went on from Trinity to study law at the Middle Temple and yet never practised. He was four times elected to Trinity's Title Alpha Fellowship, and was associated with the college for most of his life, except for a year, 1907-1908, spent at the University of Liverpool. He was knighted in 1914. He was, if not blind, then severely visually impaired from 1930 on. He and his wife, Lily, died within a few hours of each other. They are buried at the Ascension Parish Burial Ground in Cambridge, England. The study of myth and religion became his areas of expertise. Except for Italy and Greece, Frazer was not widely traveled. His prime sources of data were ancient histories and questionnaires mailed to missionaries and Imperial officials all over the globe. Frazer's interest in social anthropology was aroused by reading E. B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871) and encouraged by his friend, the biblical scholar William Robertson Smith, who was linking the Old Testament with early Hebrew folklore. (*adapted from Wikipedia*)

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ON a day in May, when the reapers were busy among the wheat,¹ the child Reuben had followed them into the fields, and straying along the hillside, he observed growing on the ground a plant which attracted his attention both by its appearance and its smell. Its great broad leaves, like those of a primrose, but more than twice as large, lay flat on the earth and radiated from a centre, where grew a round yellow fruit about the size of a large plum. The plant emitted a peculiar but not unpleasant odour, which had guided the child to the spot. He plucked the fruit and tasted it, and finding it juicy and sweet, he gathered his lapful of the yellow berries and carried them home to his mother Leah. The fruit was what we call mandrakes, and what the Hebrews called ‘love-apples’ (*dudaim*), apparently because the taste of it was thought to cause barren women [2] to conceive. Now, when Rachel saw the love-apples that the boy Reuben had brought home, the sight of them stirred in her a longing to be, like her sister Leah, the happy mother of children; for Leah had four sturdy boys, but Rachel was childless, though her husband Jacob loved her and consorted with her more than with Leah. So Rachel begged Leah to give her of the love-apples that she, too, might conceive and bear a son. But Leah, jealous of the preference shown by her husband to her sister, was angry and answered, saying, ‘Is it a small matter that thou hast taken away my husband? and wouldest thou take away my son’s mandrakes also?’ Nevertheless, Rachel urged her to give her of the apples, saying, ‘Give me of them, and to-night Jacob shall sleep with thee instead of with me.’ To this Leah consented, and gave her sister some of the love-apples.

And at evening, when the sun was setting and the asses, almost buried under corn-sheaves, like moving ricks, were seen returning from the harvest fields along the narrow path on the mountain side,² Leah, who had been watching for them, went out to meet her husband as he plodded wearily home from the reaping, and there in

¹ Genesis xxx. 14. Throughout Palestine the wheat harvest is at its height at the end of May, except in the highlands of Galilee, where it is about a fortnight later. See H. B. Tristram, *The Land of Israel* (London, 1882), pp. 583 sq. Compare I. Benzinger, *Hebräische Archaologie* (Tübingen, 1907), p. 141; C. T. Wilson, *Peasant Life in the Holy Land* (London, 1906), pp. 205 sq. The barley harvest is earlier; in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem it is usually in full swing by the end of April or the beginning of May (C. T. Wilson, *op. cit.* p. 205). As to the plant (*Mandragora officinarum* or *officinalis*), see H. B. Tristram, *The Natural History of the Bible* (London, 1898), pp. 466-8. Others speak of ‘the insipid, sickish taste’ of the fruit (W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, London, 1859, p. 577), and of the ‘ill savour’ of the plant (H. Maundrell, *Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem*, Perth, 1800, p. 96, under date March 24th, Old Style). The Hebrew name of the plant (דודים *dudaim*) is derived from דוד *dod*, ‘beloved,’ ‘love.’ See Fr. Brown, S. R. Driver, and Ch. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1906), pp. 187, 188. That by *dudaim* are meant mandrakes is made certain by the rendering of the Septuagint (μήλα μανδραγοῶν), of Josephus (μανδραγόρον μήλα, Antiquit. iud. i. 19. 8), and of the Vulgate (*mandragoras*). My learned and ingenious friend, Dr. Rendel Harris, would deduce the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, from the superstition as to the fertilizing virtue of the mandrake, and he proposes to derive the name of the goddess from *pri* (פרי) and *dudai* (דודים), so that the compound name *pridudai* would mean ‘fruit of the mandrake’. See Rendel Harris, ‘The Origin of the Cult of Aphrodite,’ *The Ascent of Olympus* (Manchester, 1917), pp. 131 sqq.

² I have ventured to transfer to antiquity the description of the return from the harvest-field, as it may be witnessed in Palestine at the present time. In the East such scenes have probably altered but little since the days of Jacob. See C. T. Wilson, *Peasant Life in the Holy Land*, p. 206.

the gloaming, with an arch or a wistful smile, she told him of the bargain she had struck with her sister. So he turned in to her that night, and she conceived and bare Jacob a fifth son. But Rachel ate of the mandrakes which her sister had given her, and having eaten of them, she also conceived and bare a son, and she called his name Joseph.³

Such appears to have been the original Hebrew tradition as to the birth of Joseph: his mother got him by eating of a mandrake. But the pious editor of Genesis, shocked at the intrusion of this crude boorish superstition into the patriarchal narrative, drew his pen through the unedifying part of the story which traced Rachel's first pregnancy to the eating of the yellow berries, replacing it by the decorous phrase, 'God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.'⁴ Nevertheless, though this curious piece [3] of folk-lore was struck out of the text of Genesis some thousands of years ago, the popular belief in the magical virtue of the mandrake to ensure conception was by no means thereby eradicated, for it has survived among the natives of Palestine to the present time. When Henry Maundrell visited the high priest of the Samaritans at Nablûs, the ancient Shechem, in 1697, he inquired into the story of Rachel and the mandrakes. 'I demanded of him', he says, 'what sort of plant or fruit the *dudaim* or (as we translate it) *mandrakes* were which Leah gave to Rachel, for the purchase of her husband's embraces? He said they were plants of a large leaf, bearing a certain sort of fruit, in shape resembling an apple, growing ripe in harvest, but of an ill savour, and not wholesome. But the virtue of them was to help conception, being laid under the genial bed. That the women were often wont to apply it, at this day, out of an opinion of its prolifick virtue. Of these plants I saw several afterwards in the way to Jerusalem; and if they were so common in Mesopotamia, as we saw them hereabout, one must either conclude that these could not be the true mandrakes (*dudaim*), or else it would puzzle a good critick to give a reason why Rachel should purchase such vulgar things at so beloved and contested a price.'⁵ And again, the late Canon Tristram, one of our principal authorities on the natural history of Palestine, tells us that 'the mandrake is universally distributed in all parts of Palestine, and its fruit is much valued by the natives, who still hold to the belief, as old as the time of Rachel, that when eaten it ensures conception. It is a very striking-looking plant, and at once attracts attention from the size of its leaves and the unusual appearance of its blossom. We found it in flower at Christmas in warm situations, and gathered the

³ Genesis xxx. 14-24.

⁴ Compare *The Century Bible, Genesis*, edited by W. H. Bennett, D.D., p. 293: 'Probably in the original form of the story Rachel conceived through the help of the mandrakes; but this seemed to the more enlightened editors of later days a piece of heathen superstition. Hence it was omitted, and there is no sequel to Rachel's acquisition of the mandrakes, as far as she is concerned. We read instead, in verse 22, the more seemly statement of the Elohist, "God opened her womb."' The view taken by H. Gunkel is similar (*Genesis übersetzt and erklärt*, Göttingen, 1910, p. 335).

⁵ Henry Maundrell, *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter, A.D. 1697* (Perth, 1800), p. 96 (under date March 24th).

fruit in April and May. Wheat harvest is, therefore, the period of its ripening generally.’⁶ The blossoms of the plant are cup-shaped and of a rich purple hue.⁷ We can now understand why, in the exquisite picture of love and springtime in the Song of Songs, the lover should blend the smell of the mandrakes with the budding of the vines and the flowering of the pomegranates to lure his beloved out with him at morning into the vernal fields.⁸

The ancient Greeks in like manner ascribed to the mandrake the power of exciting the passion of love, and perhaps, though this is not directly stated, of promoting conception in women; but for this [4] purpose they used, not the fruit, but the root of the plant, which they steeped in wine or vinegar.⁹ And because the root was thus used in love charms, they called the mandrake the plant of Circe, after the famous sorceress who turned men into swine through a magic draught.¹⁰ Indeed, so well recognized was the association of the plant with the mysteries of love that the great goddess of love herself, Aphrodite, was known by the title of Mandragoritis, or ‘She of the Mandragora’.¹¹ Special precautions were thought by the Greeks to be necessary at cutting or digging up the wizard plant. To secure the first specimen you should trace a circle thrice round the mandrake with a sword, then cut it while you faced westward; and to get a second you were recommended to dance round it, talking of love matters all the time.¹² As an additional precaution you were advised to keep to windward in digging up the root, no doubt, lest the stench should knock you down; for some people found the smell of the mandrake very unpleasant.¹³ The amatory properties of the plant are still an article of popular belief in Greece, for in Attica young men carry pieces of mandrake about with them in satchels as love-charms.¹⁴ The same superstition long survived in Italy, for Machiavelli’s comedy *Mandragola* turns on the power which the mandrake was supposed to possess of rendering barren women fruitful.¹⁵ Nor were such notions confined to the south of Europe. In the seventeenth century the English herbalist John Gerarde wrote that ‘great and strange effects are supposed to be in the mandrakes to cause women to be

⁶ H. B. Tristram, *The Natural History of the Bible* (London, 1898), p. 468.

⁷ H. B. Tristram, *op. cit.* p. 467.

⁸ Song of Songs vii. 11-13.

⁹ Theophrastus, *Historia Plantarum*, ix. 9. 1. It is to be observed that elsewhere Theophrastus bestows the same name of mandragora (mandrake) on an entirely different plant, which may be the deadly nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*). See Theophrastus, *Enquiry into Plants*, with an English translation by Sir Arthur Hort (London and New York, 1916), ii. 463 (identifications by Sir William Thiselton-Dyer).

¹⁰ Dioscorides, *De materia medica*, iv. 76; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxv. 147. As to Circe, see Homer, *Odyssey*, x. 203 sqq.

¹¹ Hesychius, s. v. Μανδραγορίτις.

¹² Theophrastus, *De Historia Plantarum*; ix. 8. 8.

¹³ Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxv. 148.

¹⁴ J. Sibthorp, *Flora Graeca*, iii. (London, 1819) p. 27, ‘*Radix frustula, in sacculis gesta, pro amuleto amatorio hodie, apud iuvenes Atticos, in usu sunt.*’ The plant (*Atropa mandragora*) is found near Athens, also in Ells and the Greek islands. It flowers in late autumn. See J. Sibthorp, *op. cit.* iii. 26.

¹⁵ W. Hertz, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1905), pp. 259 sq.

fruitfull and to beare children, if they shall but carry the same neere unto their bodies'.¹⁶ Indeed, the Jews still believe in the power [5] of the mandrake to induce fertility; and in America they import roots of it from the East for that purpose. 'Here, in Chicago,' we are told, 'is a man of wealth and influence among the Orthodox Jews; he mourns the fact that no child perpetuates his line; he has been interested in the return of the Jews to Palestine, and has given largely to the cause. The Jews of Jerusalem, knowing of his family sorrow and appreciative of his sympathy, sent him a mandrake with their best wishes. At first this merely indicated to me that the mandrake superstitions still live in Syria, a fact already well known. But questioning soon showed that mandrakes imported from the Orient are still in demand here among Orthodox Jews. They are rarely sold for less than four dollars, and one young man whose wife is barren recently paid ten dollars for a specimen. They are still thought to be male and female; they are used remedially, a bit being scraped into water and taken internally; they are valued talismans, and they ensure fertility to barren women.'¹⁷ So persistent among the Jews is that superstition touching the magical virtue of the plant, which first appears under a decent but transparent veil in the story of Jacob and the mandrakes.

The superstitions which have clustered thick about the mandrake or mandragora in ancient and modern times¹⁸ are partly explicable by the shape of the root, which is often forked and otherwise shaped so [6] as to present a rude resemblance to a human figure.¹⁹ Hence the Pythagoreans, whose so-called philosophy was to a great extent simply folk-lore,²⁰ called the mandrake the anthropomorphic or man-like plant,²¹

¹⁶ John Gerarde, *The Herball or General Historie of Plantes* (London, 1633), p. 353.

¹⁷ Frederick Starr, 'Notes upon the Mandrake,' *The American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal*, xxiii. (Chicago, 1901) p. 267.

¹⁸ Much has been written on the folk-lore of the mandrake. Among modern writings on the subject it may suffice to refer to Sir Thomas Brown, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, bk. ii. chap. vi. (pp. 72-4 in *The Works of Sir Thomas Brown*, London, 1686); J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie* (Berlin, 1875-8), ii. 1005 sqq., iii. 352 sq.; F. Liebrecht, *Des Gervasius von Tilbury Otia Imperialia* (Hanover, 1856), p. 70 note**; A. Wuttke, *Der deutsche Volksaberglaube* (Berlin, 1869), pp. 98 sq., § 131; A. de Gubernatis, *La Mythologie des Plantes* (Paris, 1878-82), ii. 213 sqq.; Andrew Lang, *Custom and Myth* (London, 1884), pp. 143 sqq., 'Moly and Mandragora'; Hilderic Friend, *Flowers and Flower Lore* (London, 1886), pp. 291 sqq., 532 sqq., 647; F. von Luschan, P. Ascherson, R. Beyer, and J. G. Wetzstein, in *Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*, 1891 (Berlin, 1891), pp. (726)-(746), (890)-(892) (appended to the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, xxiii. 1891); P. J. Veth, 'De Alruin en de Heggerank,' *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, vii. (1894) pp. 81-8, 199-205; Frederick Starr, 'Notes on the Mandragora,' *The American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal*, xxiii. (1901) pp. 258-68; W. Hertz, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1905), pp. 273-5; Ch. Brewster Randolph, 'The Mandragora of the Ancients in Folk-lore and Medicine,' *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. xl. No. 12, January 1905, pp. 487-537; Bendel Harris, 'The Origin of the Cult of Aphrodite,' *The Ascent of Olympus* (Manchester, 1917), pp. 107-140. Our word mandrake is a corruption of the Greek *mandragoras*.

¹⁹ See the coloured plate (No. 232) in J. Sibthorp's *Flora Graeca*, vol. iii, facing p. 26. The plate is reproduced, without colours, in Rendel Harris's *The Ascent of Olympus*, plate facing p. 107.

²⁰ On this subject I may refer to my article, 'Some popular Superstitions of the Ancients,' *Folk-lore*, i. (1890) pp. 147 sqq.

²¹ Dioscorides, *De materia medica*, iv. 76.

and Columella speaks of it as semi-human.²² The Arabs call it the ‘face of an idol’, or the ‘man-plant’, on account of the strong resemblance of the root to the human form.²³ An old writer tells us that the mandrake was fashioned out of the same earth whereof God created Adam, and that its likeness to a man is a wile of the devil which distinguishes it above all other plants; for that reason, when a mandrake is dug up, it should be placed for a day and a night in a running stream,²⁴ no doubt in order to wash out the taint of its diabolic association. It is the Greek medical writer Dioscorides who tells us of the epithet ‘man-like’ applied to the mandrake by the Pythagoreans; and in a manuscript of his treatise, which is preserved at Vienna, the epithet is appropriately illustrated by two drawings which represent the plant in human shape with leaves growing out of the head. In one of the drawings the goddess Invention is represented handing the man-like mandrake to Dioscorides, who is seated in a chair; while immediately beneath the mandrake a dog is seen rearing itself on its hindquarters. An inscription beneath the picture sets forth that the dog is ‘dragging up the mandragora and then dying’. The meaning of this picture and inscription will be explained immediately. In early printed herbals the mandrake is similarly portrayed in human form, sometimes male and sometimes female, with a bunch of leaves growing out of the top of his or her head.²⁵ The distinction of sex in the mandrake is as old as Dioscorides, who says that the male mandrake was white and the female mandrake black.²⁶ In English folk-lore the two sorts are known as Mandrakes and Womandrakes respectively.²⁷

In modern times the high value set on the mandrake as a potent [7] charm, especially useful for its power of fertilizing barren women, has given rise to a trade in counterfeit mandrakes carved in human form out of bryony and other roots. The use of substitutes for the mandrake was all the more necessary in northern countries because the plant grows wild only in lands about the Mediterranean, including Syria, Cilicia, Crete, Sicily, Spain, and North Africa.²⁸ The most northerly point where it has been certainly found is Mount Vicentin, on the southern edge of the Venetian Alps. Specimens are reported to have been found in the Tyrol, but these reports seem to be disputed.²⁹ A Tuscan doctor of the sixteenth century, by name Andrea Matthioli, who wrote a Latin commentary on Dioscorides, and whose *New Herbal* was translated into German and published at Prague in 1563, learned the secret of these forgeries from a mountebank and quack, whom he had cured in a hospital at

²² Columella, *De re rustica*, x. 19 sq.

²³ John Richardson, *Dictionary, Persian, Arabic and English* (Oxford, 1777-80), i. col. 104, s.v. *isterenk*.

²⁴ Hildegard, *Phys.* ii. 102, quoted by J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, ii. 1007.

²⁵ Bendel Harris, *The Ascent of Olympus*, p. 116, with the annexed plates.

²⁶ Dioscorides, *De materia medica*, iv. 76. The same distinction is made by Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* xxv. 147), who here copies from Dioscorides.

²⁷ John Parkinson, *Theatrum Botanicum* (London, 1640), p. 343.

²⁸ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Ninth Edition, xv. 476, s. v. ‘Mandrake.’

²⁹ R. Beyer, in *Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*, 1891, p. (738) (appended to *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, xxiii, 1891).

Rome. The fellow told the doctor that his practice was to take roots of canes, bryony, or other plants, carve them into the shape of a man or woman, stick grains of barley or millet into the parts of the figures where hair should grow, and then bury them under sand for twenty days or so until the grain had sprouted, when he dug them up and trimmed the sprouts with a sharp knife into the likeness of hair, and beards. These false mandrakes he then palmed off on childless women, some of whom gave him as much as five, twenty, or even thirty gold pieces for a single figurine, fondly expecting by its means to become the joyful mothers of children.³⁰ Bacon was acquainted with such magical effigies, though it does not appear that he suspected the mode in which art assisted nature to invest them with a rich growth of beard. He says: ‘Some plants there are, but rare, that have a mossy or downy root; and likewise that have a number of threads, like beards; as mandrakes; whereof witches and impostors make an ugly image, giving it the form of a face at the top of the root, and leave those strings to make a broad beard down to the foot.’³¹ John Parkinson, [8] herbalist to Charles I, writes that ‘those idle forms of the Mandrakes and Womandrakes, as they are foolishly so called, which have been exposed to publike view both in ours and other lands and countries, are utterly deceitfull, being the work of cunning knaves onely to get money by their forgery’.³² Two such effigies, covered all over their bodies with mock hair, have been preserved in the Imperial Library at Vienna since 1680; they formerly belonged to the Emperor Rudolph II, a great patron of all so-called occult sciences. They used to be bathed regularly, and if the bath chanced to be omitted, it is said that they would scream like children till they got it.³³

To this day there are ‘artists’ in the East who make a business of carving genuine roots of mandrakes in human form and putting them on the market, where they are purchased for the sake of the marvellous properties which popular superstition attributes to them. Antioch in Syria and Mersina in Cilicia particularly excel in the fabrication of these curious talismans. Sometimes the desired form is imparted simply by cutting and pressing the roots while they are still fresh and juicy, or while they are in process of desiccation. But sometimes, when a root has been thus moulded into the proper shape, it is buried again in the ground, until the scars on it have healed, and the parts which had been tied together have coalesced. When such an effigy is finally unearthed and allowed to dry and shrivel up, the traces of the manipulation which it has undergone are often hard to detect. A skilful ‘artist’ will

³⁰ A. de Gubernatis, *La Mythologie des Plantes*, ii. 216; Rendel Harris, *The Ascent of Olympus*, pp. 116 sq.; R. Beyer, in *Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*, 1891, pp. (739) sq.; Sir Thomas Brown, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, bk. ii. chap. 6, p. 83 (*The Works of Sir Thomas Brown*, London, 1686). Compare F. Panzer, *Beitrag zur deutschen Mythologie* (Munich, 1848-55), i. 250 sq., quoting Tabernaemontanus, *Kräuterbuch* (1687), p. 979.

³¹ ‘Natural History,’ Cent. vii. 616 (*The Works of Francis Bacon*, London, 1740., vol. iii, p. 123).

³² John Parkinson, *Theatrum Botanicum* (London, 1640), p. 343.

³³ R. Beyer, in *Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*, 1891, p. (740) (appended to *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, xxiii, 1891).

in this way turn out mandrake roots which look so natural that no native would dream of questioning their genuineness. The virtues ascribed to these figures are not always the same. Some act as infallible love-charms, others make the wearer invulnerable or invisible; but almost all have this in common that they reveal treasures hidden under the earth, and that they can relieve their owner of chronic illness by absorbing it into themselves. This last property, however, has its dark as well as its bright side, for the new owner of the talisman is apt to contract the malady which the previous owner had transferred to it. So popular are these artificial mandrakes in Syria that hardly anybody will look at the natural roots. The Turkish name for the root is the ‘man-root’ (*Adam-Kökü*); the Arabic name is the ‘servant of health’ (*Abdul-Selâm*).³⁴ [9]

The human shape of the mandrake root has probably helped to foster, if it did not originate, the weird notion that the plant springs from the drippings of a man hanged on a gallows. Hence in Germany the plant bears the popular name of the Little Gallows Man. It is, or used to be, believed in that country that when a hereditary thief, born of a family of thieves, or one whose mother stole while he was in her womb, is hanged on a gallows, and his seed or urine falls on the ground, the mandrake or Little Gallows Man sprouts on the spot. Others, however, say that the human progenitor of the plant must be, not a thief, but an innocent and chaste youth who has been forced by torture falsely to declare himself a thief and has consequently ended his days on a gallows. Be that as it may, the one thing about which all are agreed is that the Little Gallows Man grows under the gallows tree from the bodily droppings of a hanged man. It is a plant with broad leaves and yellow fruit. But there is great danger in digging it up, for while it is being uprooted it moans, and howls, and shrieks so horribly that the digger dies on the spot. Therefore if you would get it you must proceed as follows: Go to the gallows hill on a Friday evening before the sun has set, having stopped your ears fast with cotton or wax or pitch, and taking with you a black dog that has no patch of white on his body. When you come to the plant make three crosses over it and dig the soil away round its roots, till they remain attached to the earth only by a few slender fibres. Now bring up the black dog; take a string, and tie one end of the string to the animal’s tail and the other end to the mandrake. Next hold out a piece of bread to the dog, taking care to keep beyond its reach, and retreating rapidly as you do so. In its eagerness to snatch the bread the dog will strain and tug at the string, and thus wrench the mandrake out of the ground. At the awful yell which the plant utters in the process, the poor dog drops dead to the ground, but you have got the mandrake. All you have now to do is to pick up the plant, wash it clean in red wine, wrap it in white and red silk, and lay it in a casket. But you must not forget to bathe it every Friday and to give it a new white shirt every new moon. If you only observe these precautions, the mandrake will answer any question you like to put to it concerning all future and secret

³⁴ F. von Luschan, in *Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*, 1891, pp. (726)—(728) (appended to *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, xxiii, 1891).

matters. Henceforth you will have no enemies, you can never be poor, and if you had no children before, you will have your quiver full of them afterwards. Would you be rich? All you need do is to lay a piece of money beside the mandrake overnight; next morning [10] you will find the coin doubled. But if you would keep the Little Gallows Man long in your service, you must not overwork him, otherwise he will grow stale and might even die. You may safely go the length of half a thaler every night, and you must not exceed a ducat, and even that a prudent man will not lay down every night but only now and then. When the owner of the Little Gallows Man dies, the precious heirloom passes not to his eldest but to his youngest son, who must in return place a piece of bread and a coin in his father's coffin to be buried with him in the grave. Should the youngest son die in his father's lifetime, the mandrake goes to the eldest son; but the youngest son must be buried with bread and money in the grave, just as if he had owned the mystic plant.³⁵ Some think that the proper time for grubbing up the wondrous root is at dead of night on Midsummer Eve³⁶ —the witching hour when the year is on the turn and many plants are invested with mystic but evanescent virtues.

Thus in German folk-lore the mandrake root is treated as a familiar spirit, who brings treasures both of wisdom and of wealth to his fortunate owner. This mystical aspect of the plant is expressed by its ordinary German name of *alraun*, which, derived from a word identical with our word 'rune', means 'the all-wise one', with the connotation of 'witch' or 'wizard'.³⁷ In some parts of North Germany the name (*alrun*) is applied to a helpful elf or goblin; hence of a rich man they will say that he possesses such an elf, and of a lucky gamester that he has one of them in his pocket. A woman in Nordmohr has been heard to say that the goblin is a little man about a foot high, who must be kept in a cupboard and fed on milk and biscuit; on that diet he grows so strong that he can bring a whole wagon-load of rye in his mouth to his owner.³⁸ Dr. Faust [11] and all wizards and witches were supposed to possess such a familiar spirit.³⁹ Hence in trials for witchcraft the Inquisition used to inquire whether the alleged culprit owned a familiar of this sort; and many a woman is said to have been burnt as a witch because she kept a puppet carved out of a root (*alrüncken*) and

³⁵ Grimm (die Brüder), *Deutsche Sagen* (Berlin, 1865-6), vol. i, No. 84, pp. 117 sq.; J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, ii. 1006; F. Panzer, *Beitrag zur deutschen Mythologie* (Munich, 1848-55), i. 250 sq., quoting Tabernaemontanus, *Kräuterbuch* (1687), pp. 250 sq. Similar superstitions as to the origin, virtues, and mode of obtaining the mandrake or Little Gallows Man prevail in Lower Austria, Bohemia, and Silesia. See Th. Vernaleken, *Mythen und Bräuche des Volker in Oesterreich* (Vienna, 1859), pp. 253 sqq.; J. V. Grohmann, *Aberglauben und Gebräuche aus Böhmen and Märren* (Prague and Leipsic, 1864), p. 88, § 622, compare id., pp. 19, 94, 95, §§ 82, 659, 662; P. Drechsler, *Sitte, Brauch und Volksglaube in Schlesien* (Leipsic, 1903-6), ii. 212 sq., § 585.

³⁶ K. Haupt, *Sagenbuch der Lausitz* (Leipsic, 1862-3), i. 64 sq., No. 66; P. Drechsel, *Sitte, Brauch und Volksglaube in Schlesien*, ii. 212. As to the magic plants of Midsummer Eve, see *Balder the Beautiful*, ii. 45 sqq.

³⁷ J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, i. 334 sq., ii. 1005 sq. Compare Du Cange, *Glossarium ad Scriptores Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*, s.vv. *Alraunae* and *Alyrumnae*.

³⁸ A. Kuhn und W. Schwartz, *Norddeutsche Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche* (Leipsic, 1848), p. 423, § 220.

³⁹ K. Haupt, *Sagenbuch der Lausitz*, i. 65, § 66.

laid it under her pillow at night to dream upon.⁴⁰ In 1603 the wife of a Moor was hanged as a witch at Romorantin, near Orleans, because she kept and daily fed a mandrake-goblin in the likeness of a female ape.⁴¹ One of the articles of accusation against Joan of Arc was that ‘the said Joanna was once wont to carry a mandrake in her bosom, hoping by means of it to enjoy prosperity in riches and temporal things, alleging that the said mandrake had such a power and effect’. This accusation the Maid utterly denied. Being asked what she did with her mandrake, she replied that she never had one, but she had heard say there was one near her town, though she had never seen it. Moreover, she had heard that a mandrake is a dangerous thing and difficult to keep; she did not know what it was used for. Questioned further about the particular mandrake which she admitted to have heard about, she answered that she had been told it was in the ground under a hazel-tree, but the exact spot she did not know. Interrogated as to the use to which a mandrake is put, she replied that she had heard that it causes money to come, but she did not believe it, and the voices that spoke to her had never said anything to her on the subject.⁴²

These quaint superstitions touching the mandrake, or any plant which served as a substitute for it, appear to have been widely distributed over Europe. ‘In many parts of Wales the black bryony, with its dark green and glossy leaves and brilliant red berries, which clings to trees and shrubs and has no tendrils, was known as the mysterious and uncanny mandrake. The leaves and fruit were called “charnel food”, and formerly it was supposed only to grow beside the gallows-tree or near cross-roads. Witches gathered the leaves and flowers, and uprooted the plant for magical purposes. When uprooted it shrieked and groaned like a sensible human being, and its agony was dreadful to hear. From its stalk a sweat like blood oozed, and with each drop a faint scream was heard. There was an [12] old saying that people who uprooted the mandrake would die within a year. They would die groaning as the mandrake died, or approach their death raving, or uttering penitent prayers for having uprooted the unholy plant. Witches kept the mandrake, and were said to sell portions of it to people who wanted to find out secrets, to wives who desired offspring, and to people who wished for wisdom.’⁴³ The English herbalist, John Gerarde, mentions, only to ridicule as old wives’ fables, the belief that the plant grew under a gallows from the drippings of a corpse, that it shrieked when it was torn from the earth, and that it should be extracted by being tied to a dog.⁴⁴ Shakespeare was clearly familiar with the fantastic story, for he speaks of

⁴⁰ K. Bartsch, *Sagen, Märchen and Gebräuche aus Mecklenburg* (Vienna, 1879-80), ii. 39, §§ 39^a, 39^b. Compare R. Kühnau, *Schlesische Sagen* (Leipsic and Berlin, 1910-13), iii. 16, No. 1366.

⁴¹ Hilderic Friend, *Flowers and Flower Lore* (London, 1886), p. 532.

⁴² Jules Quicherat, *Prosés de Condamnation et de Réhabilitation de Jeanne d’Arc*, i. (Paris, 1841) pp. 213 sq.

⁴³ Marie Trevelyan, *Folk-lore and Folk-stories of Wales* (London, 1909), pp. 92 sq. After mentioning the belief that the mandrake grew from the tears (sic) of an innocent man hanged on the gallows, the writer adds: ‘It was also supposed to grow mysteriously near the cross-roads where suicides were buried.’ But whether this last belief was general or peculiar to Wales does not appear.

⁴⁴ John Gerarde, *The Herball or General Historie of Plantes* (London, 1633), p. 351.

‘Shrieks like mandrakes’ torn out of the earth,
That living mortals, hearing them, run mad’.⁴⁵

And again,

‘Would curses kill, as doth the mandrake’s groan?’⁴⁶

He was acquainted also with the soporific property which popular opinion ascribed to the plant. Thus in the absence of her lover Cleopatra is made to cry:

‘Give me to drink mandragora ...
That I might sleep out this great gap of time
My Antony is away.’⁴⁷

And again, at sight of the victim whom his vile insinuations had for ever robbed of his peace of mind, the villain Iago mutters:

‘Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou owedst yesterday.’⁴⁸

The belief in the soporific and narcotic quality of mandragora or mandrake is very old; the ancient Greeks held it so firmly that they administered the drug as an anaesthetic to patients undergoing [13] surgical operations,⁴⁹ and this practice was continued into the Middle Ages, being recommended, for example, by the Arabian physician Avicenna in the eleventh century.⁵⁰ Allusions to the drowsy effect of the plant are not uncommon in Greek writers. Xenophon represents Socrates as saying that wine lulls care to sleep as mandragora lulls men’s bodies.⁵¹ Plato compares the philosopher among common men to the master of a ship whom his crew have reduced to a state of torpor by wine or mandragora.⁵² Inveighing against Philip of Macedon, and attempting to rouse his countrymen to a sense of their danger, Demosthenes declared that they were as lethargic as men who had drunk

⁴⁵ *Romeo and Juliet*, Act iv. Scene iii. Drayton also speaks of ‘the mandrake’s dreadful groans.’ See the poem quoted in ‘The Folk-lore of Drayton’, *The Folk-lore Journal*, iii. (1885) p. 153.

⁴⁶ Second part of *Henry VI*, Act iii. Scene ii.

⁴⁷ *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act i. Scene v.

⁴⁸ *Othello*, Act iii. Scene iii.

⁴⁹ Dioscorides, *De materia medica*, iv. 76. Compare Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxv. 150; Isidore, *Origines*, xvii. 9. 30.

⁵⁰ Ch. Brewster Randolph, ‘The Mandragora of the Ancients in Folk-lore and Medicine’, *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. xl. No. 12 (January .1905), pp. 513 sqq. Compare John Parkinson, *Theatrum Botanicum* (London, 1640), p. 345.

⁵¹ Xenophon, *Convivium*, ii. 24.

⁵² Plato, *Republic*, vi. 4, p. 488 c.

mandragora or some other soporific.⁵³ Aristotle includes mandragora with poppies and darnel among the things that induce slumber and heaviness.⁵⁴ The Carthaginian general Maharbal is said to have captured or slain a host of rebels whom he had contrived to drug with a mixture of mandragora and wine;⁵⁵ and Caesar is reported to have overcome by a similar stratagem the Cilician pirates by whom he had been captured.⁵⁶ Lucian describes the city of Sleep surrounded by a wood in which the trees were tall poppies and mandragoras, with a multitude of bats perched on the boughs.⁵⁷

The notion that the mandrake, if properly treated, was an inexhaustible source of wealth to its lucky owner, must doubtless have greatly contributed to enhance the popularity of the plant with that indolent and credulous portion of mankind who are always on the look-out for shorter cuts to riches than the tedious and roundabout road of honest industry. In this capacity the mandrake appears to have appealed strongly to the saving and thrifty disposition of the French peasantry. "The *Journal of a Citizen of Paris*, written in the fifteenth century, speaks of this superstition. "At that time", says the anonymous author, "Brother Richard, a Franciscan, caused to be burned certain *madagfoires*, (mandragoras, mandrakes), which [14] many foolish people kept and had such faith in that rubbish as to believe firmly for a truth that so long as they had it they should never be poor, provided that it was wrapt up in fine cloths of silk or linen." This superstition lasted into the eighteenth century. "There has long prevailed in France," says Sainte-Palaye, "an almost general superstition concerning mandragora; a relic of it still lingers among the peasants. One day, when I asked a peasant why he gathered mistletoe, he said that at the foot of the oaks which bore mistletoe there was a *hand of glory* (*main de gloire*, that is, in their language, *mandragora*); that it was as deep in the earth as the mistletoe was high on the tree; that it was a sort of mole; that he who found it was obliged to give it food, whether bread, or meat, or anything else, and that what he had given it he must give it every day and in the same quantity, otherwise it would kill those who failed to do so. Two men of his country, whom he named to me, had perished in that way, but to make up for it the *hand of glory* gave back twofold next day what any one had given it the day before. If to-day it received food to the value of a crown, he who had given it would receive two crowns next day, and so with everything else; such and such a peasant, whom he named to me, and who had become very rich, was thought to have found one of these *hands of glory*."'⁵⁸ French fishermen used to wear necklaces or bracelets of mandrakes as talismans which would protect them against accidents of all sorts.⁵⁹

⁵³ Demosthenes, *Philipp.* iv. 6, pp. 132 sq.

⁵⁴ De somnio, 3, p. 456 B 30, ed. Im. Bekker (Berlin).

⁵⁵ Frontinus, *Stratagem.* ii. 5. 12.

⁵⁶ Polyænus, *Strateg.* viii. 23. 1.

⁵⁷ Lucian, *Vera Historia*, ii. 33.

⁵⁸ A. Chéruef, *Dictionnaire historique des Institutions, Mœurs et Coutumes de la France*, Sixième Edition (Paris, 1884), ii. 726 sq. Compare P. Sébillot, *Le Folk-lore de France* (Paris, 1904-7), iii. 487, quoting *Les Évangiles des Quenouilles*, ii. 2.

⁵⁹ J. L. M. Nogués, *Les Mœurs d'autrefois en Saintonge et en Aunis* (Saintes, 1891), pp. 147 sq.

The belief concerning the danger of uprooting the mandrake, and the expediency of deputing the perilous task to a dog, is not confined to the centre and north of Europe, for it occurs also in the Abruzzi, where the season recommended for culling the mysterious plant is Midsummer Day, the day which the Catholic Church has dedicated to St. John the Baptist.⁶⁰ In modern Greece also it is believed that any man who dug a mandrake clean out of the earth would die, and that to get it you must tether a dog to the root.⁶¹ Nor is the device of employing a dog for such a purpose a modern invention. It is recommended by a late writer of antiquity, who bore or [15] assumed the name of Apuleius Platonicus and composed a treatise on herbs, perhaps in the fifth century of our era. The last chapter of his work is devoted to the mandrake, and describes how the plant is to be uprooted by a hungry dog who has been tied to it and drags the plant out of the earth in his efforts to get at a piece of meat placed beyond his reach. This work was translated into Anglo-Saxon, and the manuscripts of the translation are adorned with illustrations which represent, among other things, the extraction of the mandrake by the dog. In one of these pictures the plant is delineated in human form with leaves and berries growing out of the head, while the dog is seen tugging at a chain by which his neck is fastened to the left arm of the figure. On the other side of the mandrake are two human figures carrying implements of some sort, perhaps for the purpose of digging up the mandrake. The manuscript which contains this illustration was originally in the Cottonian Library, but is now in the British Museum. Though sadly damaged by fire, it must once have been a splendid volume, beautifully written and decorated with a large number of coloured figures of plants and animals. In another Anglo-Saxon manuscript of Apuleius the mandrake is represented with a human trunk and limbs, but with vegetable extremities, the human head being replaced by a bunch of leaves, and the hands and feet by branching roots; the dog is seen fastened by his tail to the roots which stand for the left hand of the mandrake.⁶²

But the use of a dog to uproot a plant, which it would be fatal for a man to extract, can be traced still further back than the fifth century of our era. In the second century A.D. the Roman writer Aelian, author of a gossipy work in Greek on the nature of animals, gave a similar account of the way to obtain a certain plant which he calls *aglaophotis*, or 'bright shining,' because it was said to shine like a star or like fire by night, but to be hardly visible, or at least hardly distinguishable from surrounding plants, by the light of day. This remarkable plant is supposed by moderns to be the peony.⁶³ When the herb-gatherers desired to collect specimens of the peony, as we may call it, they put a mark at the root of

⁶⁰ Antonio di Nino, *Usi Abruzzesi* (Florence, 1879-83), i. 86 sq.; A. de Gubernatis, *La Mythologie des Plantes*, ii. 21 note 1.

⁶¹ P. Ascherson, in *Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*, 1891, p. (732) note, quoting Th. v. Heldreich, *Nutzpfl. Griechenl.*, pp. 36 sq.

⁶² J. F. Payne, M.D., *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times* (Oxford, 1904), pp. 62 sq., 72 sq., with the plates, figures 3 and 5, compare 4. The Apuleius of this treatise (*Herbarium*) is not to be confounded with the far more famous writer of the second century A. D., the author of *The Golden Ass*.

⁶³ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1883), p. 311, s.v. γλυκυσίδη.

the plant and returned to the spot at night, bringing with them a young dog, which had been kept without food for several days. They did not dare to uproot the [16] plant with their hands or even to dig it up with a spade, because the first person who had tried to do so was said to have perished in the attempt. So they tied one end of a very strong cord to the dog, and having made the other end of the cord into a loop they threw it over the stalk of the peony, standing as far from the plant as they could. Then they offered savoury cooked meat to the dog, and he, smelling the sweet savour and impelled by the pangs of hunger, struggled to get at the tempting viand, straining at the leash till it uprooted the peony. But no sooner did the sunlight fall on the roots of the peony than the dog died. So the herb-gatherers buried him on the spot and performed certain secret rites in honour of the animal, because they believed that he had sacrificed his life for theirs. Having done so they could safely handle the peony and carry it home. There they employed it for many useful purposes, particularly for the use of epilepsy and of blindness caused by a 'drop serene'. And on account of the mode in which the plant was procured it received the special name of *kynospastos* or 'dog-dragged'.⁶⁴

The identification of Aelian's *aglaophotis* with the peony seems to be fairly certain, since Dioscorides, a good authority, gives *aglaophotis* as one of the many names which the Greeks applied to the peony.⁶⁵ Moreover, we know from Theophrastus that in the opinion of some people the peony, like the *aglaophotis*, should only be dug at night, for if a man attempted to do it by day and were seen by a wood-pecker while he was gathering the fruit, he would risk losing his eyesight, and if the bird saw him cutting the root, he would suffer from *prolapsus ani*; at least so thought these wiseacres.⁶⁶ However, Aelian's account of the *aglaophotis* reminds us of the mandrake, not only in the extraction of the plant by a dog, but also in the bright light which it was supposed to diffuse at night. For the Arabs call the mandrake 'the devil's candle, on account of its shining appearance in the night, from the number of glowworms, which cover the leaves'.⁶⁷ The authority for this statement seems to be the learned Ibn Beithar, who has been called the Arab Dioscorides. In his dictionary of medicine he gives an account of the mandrake, in which he tells us that the Moors of Andalusia called the plant *sirâg el-kotrob*, 'lamp of the elves', because its stalk shone by night. Also, he says, the Arabs call it 'plant of the idol', because its root has the shape of [17] a man. According to him, King Solomon carried a mandrake in his signet-ring, whereby the jinn were subject to him, and Alexander the Great also employed it in his conquest of the East. The plant, he informs us, is a remedy for all maladies that are caused by jinn, demons, and Satan; likewise it cures lameness, cramp, epilepsy, elephantiasis, insanity, and loss of memory; and in general it affords protection against mishaps of all sorts,

⁶⁴ Aelian, *De natura animalium*, xiv. 27.

⁶⁵ Dioscorides, *De materia medica*, iii. 147 (157).

⁶⁶ Theophrastus, *Historia Plantarum*, ix. 8. 6. Compare Pliny, *Natur. Hist.* xxv. 29.

⁶⁷ John Richardson, *Dictionary, Persian, Arabic, and English* (Oxford, 1777-80), i. coll. 104 sq., *s.v. isterenk*.

including theft and murder. Finally, he not only describes the method of procuring the mandrake by means of a dog but asserts that he had witnessed it in practice, which is possible and not improbable, since he has the candour to add that contrary to the usual belief the dog survived the operation.⁶⁸

The Arab doctor's account of the mandrake presents some remarkable points of resemblance to the account which the Jewish historian Josephus gives of a root called by him the *baaras*. According to him, the root grew in the deep rocky ravine which descends from the mountains of Moab to the eastern shore of the Dead Sea and has been famous both in antiquity and in modern times for the abundance of its hot medicinal springs. A little to the south of the ravine a commanding height is crowned by the ruins of the castle of Machaerus, in the dungeons of which John the Baptist was beheaded.⁶⁹ The root which grew in this romantic situation was itself, if we may trust Josephus, very remarkable both in its appearance and in its properties. It was flame-coloured, and at evening it shone like lightning on persons who attempted to approach and seize it. As they drew near, the root retreated before them, and could only be brought to a standstill by such as poured the urine or menstruous blood of a woman upon the fugitive plant. Even then to touch it was certain death, unless the seeker contrived to hang the root from his arm. However, the Jewish historian adds that the root could be procured without danger in another way. The seeker dug round about the root till only a small part of it remained in the earth; then he tied a dog to it and walked away. In its effort to follow him the animal easily pulled up the root but died on the spot, as a sort of vicarious sacrifice for his master, who thereafter could safely handle the plant. The value of the root thus procured at so much risk, adds Josephus, consists solely in its power of expelling the so-called demons or spirits of bad men which insinuate themselves into the bodies of the living and kill such as do not receive timely assistance. But [18] a simple application of this precious root to the sufferer sufficed to drive out the foul fiend.⁷⁰

What was the plant about which these queer fables were told? Josephus speaks as if it grew only in one spot of the deep glen, the ancient Callirrhoe, the modern Zerka Ma'in. Canon Tristram, who visited the glen and has given us a vivid description of its wild scenery, its luxuriant vegetation, and its steaming sulphur springs,⁷¹ proposed to identify the plant with a strange crucifer, not unlike a wallflower in form and size, which grows beside the warm natural baths on sulphur deposits, 'with its root orange, its stem and bark sulphur colour, its leaves and fruit-pods a brick-dust orange, and its

⁶⁸ W. Hertz, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1906), p. 276, referring to Southeimer's translation of Ibn Beithar, ii. 14 sqq., 594.

⁶⁹ Josephus, *Antiquit.* xviii. 5. 2. As to the situation and ruins of Machaerus, see H. B. Tristram, *The Land of Moab* (London, 1874), pp. 253 sqq.

⁷⁰ Josephus, *Bellum Iudaicum*, vii. 6. 3.

⁷¹ H. B. Tristram, *The Land of Moab*, pp. 236 sqq. Compare C. R. Conder, *Heth and Moab* (London, 1883), pp. 144-7; (Sir) George Adam Smith, 'Callirrhoe and Machaerus,' *Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement, for 1905* (London), pp. 219 sqq.; J. Cropper, 'Madeba, M'kaur, Callirrhoe,' *Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement for 1906* (London), pp. 296 sq.; *Adonis, Allis, Osiris*, i. 214 sqq.

flowers a paler orange. Every portion of it reeked with the odour of sulphur, and altogether it had a most jaundiced look.’ The plant appeared to have a very limited range. Canon Tristram observed it nowhere but on the sulphur and the basalt rocks near it, and from its situation and appearance he named it the sulphur plant.⁷²

The yellow and orange hue of this remarkable plant would answer well to Josephus’s description of its flame-like appearance, and the apparent limitation of its range to a small area in the glen also tallies with the account of the Jewish historian, which seems to imply that the *baaras*, as he calls it, grew only at one place in the ravine. It has been plausibly proposed to derive the name *baaras* from the Hebrew *ba’ar* (בָּאָר) ‘to burn’.⁷³ The etymology would harmonize with the flame-like colour of the plant and with the light which it was believed to emit at evening.

On the other hand, the account which Josephus gives of the *baaras* agrees so closely in several respects with Ibn Beithar’s account of the mandrake that it is tempting to identify the two plants. For both of them were said to shine by night, both possessed the power of expelling demons, and both were uprooted by a dog. But if the *baaras* was the mandrake, it is difficult to understand why Josephus should not have called the plant by its ordinary name, with which he was certainly acquainted, since in the story of Jacob and the mandrakes [19] he renders the Hebrew *dudaim* by the Greek *μανδραγόρου μήλα*, ‘apples of the mandrake’. Moreover, the mandrake, as a common plant in Palestine, must have been familiar to him; how then could he assign it a particular habitat in a single ravine and tell such strange stories about it? For these reasons we can hardly suppose that Josephus himself identified the *baaras* with the mandrake; though it is possible that in Palestine as elsewhere popular superstition had woven round the humble plant a web of fable which disguised its true nature beyond recognition.

It must probably remain an open question whether the writer in Genesis, who has bequeathed to us the story of Jacob and the mandrakes, was, or was not, acquainted with the more grotesque fables which have certainly clustered round the plant in later ages. All that we can with tolerable certainty affirm is, that he knew and accepted the popular belief as to the fertilizing virtue of the fruit of the mandrake, and that he ascribed the birth of Joseph directly to the eating of a mandrake by his mother Rachel. A later editor, offended at so crude a relic of rustic superstition, carefully erased this incident from the narrative, leaving us with the picturesque but pointless story of Jacob and the mandrakes, according to which Rachel gave up her husband to her sister without receiving any return except the handful or lapful of common yellow berries which her nephew Reuben had brought back to his mother that May evening from his ramble in the fields.

Yet with regard to the gathering as well as the medicinal effect of the mandrake we may suspect that the writer of the story in Genesis was acquainted with another tradition which either he or his editor judged it better to suppress. At least this is

⁷² H. B. Tristram, *The Land of Moab* (London, 1874), pp. 249, 264.

⁷³ H. Roland, *Palaestina ex monumentis veteribus illustrata* (Traiecti Batavorum, 1714), p. 881.

suggested by a later Jewish version of the same story, which relates how Reuben obtained the mandrakes. In this account it is said that Reuben, tending his father's ass during harvest, tethered the animal to a root of mandrake and went his way. On returning to the spot he found the mandrake torn out of the ground and the ass lying dead beside it. In struggling to break loose, the animal had uprooted the plant, which, the writer tells us, has a peculiar quality: whoever tears it up must die. As it was the time of harvest, when any one is free to take a plant from the field, and as the mandrake is, moreover, a plant which the owner of a field esteems lightly, Reuben carried it home. Being a good son, he did not keep it for himself but gave it to his mother Leah.⁷⁴ The rest of the story does not differ substantially from the narrative in Genesis. [20]

Now, in this later Jewish version of the story the ass, accidentally tied to the root of the mandrake, serves the same purpose as the dog purposely tied to the root in modern folk-lore: in both cases the animal extracts the root at the sacrifice of its own life, and thereby enables a human being to obtain the valuable but dangerous plant with impunity. Can the writer in Genesis, to whom we owe the story of Jacob and the mandrakes, have been acquainted with this episode of the extraction of the root by the ass? It seems not impossible that he may have known and even related it, and that the incident may afterwards have been omitted as a vulgar superstition by the same hand which, for the same reason, struck out the reference to the fertilizing virtue of the mandrake, and to the part which the plant was said to have played in the conception and birth of Joseph. For a comparison of early Hebrew traditions with their Babylonian counterparts enables us to appreciate how carefully the authors or editors of Genesis have pruned away the grotesque and extravagant elements of legend and myth; how skilfully they have uprooted the weeds and left the flowers in the garden of literature; how deftly they have refined away the dross and kept the pure gold in the casket of history. In their handiwork we can trace the same fine literary instinct which has similarly purified the Homeric poems from many gross and absurd superstitions, which, though they bear plain marks of an antiquity far greater than that of Homer, are known to us only through writings of much later ages. And in both cases the fine literary instinct rests on and presupposes a fine moral instinct which chooses the good and rejects the evil, and fusing the chosen elements in the crucible of imagination, moulds them into 'an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection'.

Whether the incident of the ass in the later Jewish story of Jacob and the mandrakes is original or not, it helps us to understand the function of the dog in the common version of the mandrake superstition. The plant, we are told, has a peculiar quality, in virtue of which it kills whoever tears up its root; it is charged, as it were, with an electricity which will prove fatal to whoever meddles with it, but which, once discharged, leaves the plant safe for anybody to handle. Hence a prudent man who desires to procure the valuable root harnesses an animal to it; the poor animal

⁷⁴ Louis Ginsberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, i. (Philadelphia 1908) p. 366.

receives the shock and perishes, while the man profits by its death to get possession of the root at his leisure. So far as appears, therefore, the agent employed to uproot the mandrake might be any animal; an ass would serve the turn quite as well as a dog; all that is required is a living medium to bear the brunt of the fatal contact, and so render the [21] plant innocuous. This view is confirmed by a parallel Armenian superstition as to the gathering of bryony (*Bryonia alba*), which is the favourite substitute for the mandrake in countries where the mandrake does not grow. Oddly enough, in Armenia bryony is popularly regarded as the king of plants; it is deemed to be not only animated, but man-like. Its roots and berries are used to form a wishing-rod or magic wand, which confers wisdom and power over men and wild beasts. Also they heal various kinds of sickness and drive away evil spirits. Hence the plant is everywhere sought as a precious possession. But it can only be gathered in the month of May, and in gathering it you must say certain prayers. Further, in order to disarm or avert the wrath of the bryony at being uprooted, you are advised to tether a kid or a cock to it in order that the plant may vent its rage on the innocent animal or fowl instead of on you.⁷⁵ We are not told that the creature actually uproots the bryony and perishes in so doing, but on the analogy of the mandrake we may infer that such is the popular practice and the popular belief.

In this Armenian superstition the bryony is plainly described as an animated and manlike creature, who resents being uprooted, and wreaks his anger on the person or animal that does him violence. The same is, no doubt, true of the mandrake, since it is commonly believed to be shaped like a man, to shriek like a man, and sometimes like a man, to be bathed, fed, and clothed. On this view the danger of uprooting the mandrake springs simply from the human passion of the plant, and this conception is probably more primitive than that of an impersonal force pervading its fibres and discharging itself, like electricity, with fatal effect on meddling intruders.

And just as any animal, apparently, may serve to uproot a mandrake, so a dog may seemingly serve to uproot any other valuable but dangerous plant of which a man desires to obtain possession. We have seen that in ancient Greek folk-lore a dog was employed to extract the *aglaophotis* or peony. Similarly, modern gipsies of Transylvania set a black dog to uproot a kind of orchid to which they give the name of the boy-plant (*karengro*), and to which they ascribe the power of promoting conception in women. They begin by scraping away the earth about the root with a knife which has never been used before; then when the root is half laid bare, they tie a black dog by its tail to the plant, and hold out a piece of ass's flesh to the animal. He springs at it, and in doing so wrenches up the orchid by the root. Having got the root, they carve it in the shape of the male organ of generation, and hang it in a little deerskin [22] pouch on the left arm. In this way the orchid, like the mandrake, is believed to help in getting a woman with child.⁷⁶

In all these cases the plant, whether it is the mandrake, the peony, or an orchid, is

⁷⁵ Manuk Abeghian, *Der armenische Volksglaube* (Leipsic, 1699), pp. 60 sq.

⁷⁶ Heinrich von Wlislöcki, *Volksglaube und religiöser Brauch der Zigeuner* (Münster i. W., 1891), pp. 90 sq.

apparently personified as a being who feels anger at being uprooted, and whose wrath must be diverted from the human culprit to an innocent animal. Sometimes on such occasions an attempt is made not to divert but to soothe the rage of the plant by making an offering to it. Thus ancient Greek herbalists recommended that when you cut a certain healing plant, which they called after the divine physician Aesculapius, you should insert in the earth a honey-cake and a varied assortment of fruits as payment for the plant which you had uprooted; and similarly they said that when you cut gladwyn you ought to give compensation in the shape of a honey-cake baked of spring-sown wheat, while at the same time you drew three circles round the place with a sword.⁷⁷

Such beliefs and practices illustrate the primitive tendency to personify nature, to view it as an assemblage of living, sensitive, and passionate beings rather than as a system of impersonal forces. That tendency has played a great part in the evolution of religion, and even when it has been checked or suppressed in the general mass of educated society, it lingers still among the representatives of an earlier mode of thought, the peasant on the one hand and the poet on the other. No poet, perhaps, has ever felt or expressed this sense of the animation of nature more vividly than Wordsworth. He tells us that

‘Tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes’.

And with the pain which the mandrake was supposed to feel at being uprooted, we may compare the pang which Wordsworth seems instinctively to have ascribed to the hazel-trees ruthlessly stripped by him of their boughs one autumn day when, as a boy, he had gone out nutting in the woods.

‘Then up I rose,
And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash
And merciless ravage; and the shady nook
Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
Their quiet being: and, unless I now
Confound my present feelings with the past, [23]
Even then, when from the bower I turned away
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees and the intruding sky.
Then, dearest Maiden! move along these shades
In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods.’

⁷⁷ Theophrastus, *Historia Plantarum*, ix. 8. 7. Compare Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxi. 42.