

AN INTERESTING CONFIRMATION.

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IN an article which I wrote two years since in this BULLETIN on *The Origin and Meaning of Apple Cults*, I ventured, in my zeal for the identification of the existing, or just disappearing, practices in the apple-orchards of the West, with the long since disappeared worship of Apollo, into the region of prophecy. This will seem dangerous in itself, but still more dangerous when we reflect on the association of the vaticination with the name of Apollo, of whom Milton reminds us at this season of the year that "he can no more divine".

The occasion for my exercising the mantic gift was as follows: I repeat a few sentences which are necessary to lead up to the oracle itself. They refer to certain practices which used to occur in Manxland on the Festival of Twelfth Night. "The next thing we come across in the Manx ceremony is a combination of music and mantic, in the person of the fiddler who directs the dance. He proceeds to tell the fortunes of the coming year to the young men and maidens: this is described as follows by Waldron:—

'On twelfth day the fiddler lays his head on some one of the wenches' laps, and a third person asks who such a maid, or such a maid, shall marry, naming the girls there present one after another; to which he answers according to his own whim, or agreeable to the intimacies he has taken note of during the time of merriment. But *whatever he says is as absolutely depended on as an oracle*; and if he happens to couple two people who have an aversion to each other, tears and vexation succeed the mirth. This they call *cutting off the fiddler's head*, for after this he is dead for the whole year. This custom still continues in every parish.'"¹

¹ Cf. A. B. Cook (*Folk-lore*, 1904, xv. 402-408), for the death and resurrection of the priestly king at Delphi.

Upon this custom I remarked that "The fiddler is a primitive Apollo, with a fiddle in place of a lyre, not a wide variation in music, and the suggestion arises that Apollo was originally oracular at a particular time of the year, and that at other times he was quiescent. The girl in whose lap the fiddler lays his head is the prototype of the Pythian priestess who gives the responses for the god".

When I wrote this I did not suspect that the oracle on which I ventured, was already extant in the Greek literature. Plutarch tells us in his *Quæstiones Græcæ*, c. ix., that originally the Pythia was not a prophetess all the year round, but only on the seventh day of the month Bysios, which is the birthday of the god and the time when they celebrate the return of the god to Delphi, under the term of Theophany and Epiphany. At such a time the Pythia gave oracular responses and apparently at no other.

The confirmation is interesting, not only for its own sake, but for its relation to Christian tradition. The Twelfth-Night is known to be the original birth-day of Christ, before the December Festival was instituted; and its Christian title of Epiphany has nothing whatever to do with the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles; its real parallel is a Delphic Festival of the same name. On one hand it appears to be the return of the solar hero: on the other, it is the occasion for taking the Luck of the Year, in causes matrimonial and otherwise. For the date of the oracle we may compare further Mommsen, *Delphika*, 281.