

**BIBLIOTHEQUE DE CARABAS. VOL. VII.
PLUTARCH'S ROMANE QUESTIONS: WITH
DISSERTATIONS ON ITALIAN
CULTS, MYTHS, TABOOS, MAN-WORSHIP,
ARYAN MARRIAGE, SYMPATHETIC
MAGIC AND THE EATING OF BEANS**

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printed, five hundred of which are for sale.*

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Plutarch's Romane Questions. Translated
A.D. 1603 by Philemon Holland, M.A., Fellow of
Trinity College, Cambridge. Now again edited
by Frank Byron Jevons, M.A., Classical
Tutor to the University of Durham
With Dissertations on Italian
Cults, Myths, Taboos, Man-
Worship, Argan Marriage
Sympathetic Magic
and the Eating
of Beans



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PREFACE.

On the whole, with the proper qualifications, Plutarch's *Romane Questions* may fairly be said to be the earliest formal treatise written on the subject of folk-lore. The problems which Plutarch proposes for solution are mainly such as the modern science of folk-lore undertakes to solve; and though Plutarch was not the first to propound them, he was the first to make a collection and selection of them and give them a place of their own in literature. On the other hand, though Plutarch's questions are in the spirit of modern scientific inquiry, his answers—or rather the answers which he sets forth, for they are not always or usually his own—are conceived in a different strain. They are all built on the assumption that the customs which they are intended to explain were consciously and deliberately instituted by men who possessed at least as much culture

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and wisdom as Plutarch himself, or the other philosophers who busied themselves with this branch of antiquities. This assumption, however, that the primitive Italians or the pro-ethnic Aryans shared the same (erroneous) scientific and philosophical views as the savants of Plutarch's day, is an unverified and improbable hypothesis. The Aryans were in the Stone Age, and had advanced only to such rudimentary agriculture as is possible for a nomad people. If, therefore, we are to explain their customs, we must keep within the narrow circle which bounds the thought and imagination of other peoples in the same stage of development. Plutarch, however, in effect asks himself, "If I had instituted these customs, what would my motives have been?" and in reply to his own question he shows what very learned reasons might have moved him; and also, quite unconsciously, what very amiable feelings would in reality have governed him; for, if he ascribes to the authors of these customs the learning of all the many books which he had read, he also credits them with a kindness of character which belonged to himself alone. Thus, to go no further than

the first of the *Romane Questions*, viz., *What is the reason that new-wedded wives are bidden to touch fire and water?* Plutarch first gives four high philosophical reasons, which he may have borrowed, but concludes with one which we may be sure is his own: "Or laft of all [is it] becaufe man and wife ought not to forfake and abandon one another, but to take part of all fortunes; though they had no other good in the world common between them, but fire and water only?"

That this, like the rest of Plutarch's reasons, is fanciful, may not be denied, but would not be worth mentioning, were it not that here we have, implicit, the reason why no modern translation could ever vie with Philemon Holland's version of the *Romane Questions*. It is not merely because Philemon's antiquated English harmonises with Plutarch's antiquated speculation, and by that harmony disposes the reader's mind favourably towards it; but in Philemon's day, England, like the other countries of Western Europe, was discovering that all that is worth knowing is in Greek. The universal respect felt for Greek in those days, even by schoolmasters (Holland was himself

Head-master of Coventry Free School), is still apparent to those who read this translation. But things are now so changed that the English language of to-day cannot provide a seemly garb for Plutarch's ancient reasonings. To say in modern English that "five is the odd number most connected with marriage," is to expose the Pythagorean doctrine of numbers to modern ridicule. But when Philemon says, "Now among al odde numbers it seemeth that Cinque is most nuptial," even the irreverent modern cannot fail to feel that Cinque was an eminently respectable character, whose views were strictly honourable and a bright example to other odde numbers. Again, Philemon's insertion of the words "it seemeth" makes for reverence. The insertion is not apologetic; nor does it intimate that the translator hesitates to subscribe to so strange a statement. Rather, it summons the reader to give closer attention to the words which are about to follow—words of wisdom such as is to be found nowhere else but only in the fountain of all knowledge, Greek. Insertions and amplifications are indeed characteristic of Philemon as a translator. But, though his style is florid, it is lucid; his amplifications