

of the July number of our Journal, paragraph 8) it would make my meaning clearer if instead of the word *pronunciation* were substituted *local varieties of pronunciation*.

Yours faithfully,

MONIER MONIER-WILLIAMS.

The Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society.

3. HERODOTUS ON THE MAGIANS.

SIR,—It was some time ago the fashion to find fault with Herodotus and to accuse him of wilful misrepresentation; but the father of history was more often the victim of his dragoman. As noticed by Sir H. Rawlinson, the informant of Herodotus at Babylon was not a Persian, but he was probably a Median, hostile to the Persian rule, and we can often detect how the errors accepted by Herodotus sprung from the ignorance, spite, or fancy of his dragoman. On previous occasions I have shown how the names of Ninus and his wife Semiramis and the legendary hundred gates of Babylon were invented. Now I think I have found the key of the legend related by Herodotus about Smerdis the Magian.

We know from the Behistun inscription that the real name of the usurper was Gaumata, a Magian, not a priest as is generally understood, but a member of the Medic tribe of the *Magi*. Gaumata, to take possession of the throne, personified Bardia or Smerdis, brother of Cambyses. Everywhere the people, tired of the mad rule of the latter, accepted the new king with joy. But Gaumata betrayed himself when he favoured the Medians and their religion against the Persians; this would have been sufficient to raise the suspicion, and he was besides, says Herodotus, betrayed by Prexaspes. This was enough to reveal to the Persian that Gaumata was not Cambyses's brother, but an impostor, and to provoke the conspiracy of the seven Persian noblemen headed by Darius. Then how originated the legend about the usurper having no ears? This fable, like many others, is based on a play of words; *Magus*, the

Persian form of the word Magian, was interpreted by "a man having no ears" ماگوش, and from this conundrum the popular imagination built up the story related to Herodotus by his dragoman. Many popular legends have a similar origin. In this case, what proves that the story was current in the East is that we find it in Justin (i. 9), who consulted other sources than Herodotus, as is shown by his giving the real name of the usurper, Cometes (Gaumata), not preserved by Herodotus. At a later date the name Magus (Magian) was explained in the same way and applied to those who did not follow the oral tradition, who therefore had *no ears* (Darmesteter, *The Zend-Avesta*, vol. ii. p. 4). We might perhaps find that the other errors and legends reported by Herodotus have a similar origin.

G. BERTIN.

The Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society.

4. MODERN NAME OF "UR OF THE CHALDEES."

SIR,—In p. 430 of the April part of the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, l. 3, it is said that the "the modern name of the ancient city of Ur, the great city of the Sumerian race, is Mughir," and in note 2 of the same page, Prof. Sayce, "Hibbert Lectures for 1887, p. 42," is represented as having given this name as "Mugh-ir."

May I be allowed to suggest, from memory alone, and from the long bygone days when my friends, Mr. Loftus, Mr. Churchill, and Colonel Williams (afterwards General Sir W. Fenwick Williams, Bart., of Kars, G.C.B., etc.), first visited the cemeteries of that ancient city, and unearthed some of the asphalted jars in which the dead were inclosed for sepulture, and when Mr. Loftus, in his interesting work on his expedition, first gave publicly, in about 1848, the name of "Mugheir" (I think) to the place, he being no Arabic scholar, I read the word, from inference, as being derived from the Arabic name for *bitumen*, *asphalte*, and *pitch*, qīr (قير). I took it to be the passive participle of the second