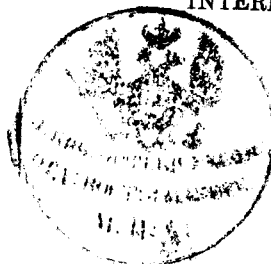


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MYTHS AND MYTH-MAKERS:

OLD TALES AND SUPERSTITIONS

INTERPRETED BY COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY.



BY

JOHN FISKE, M.A., LL.B.,

ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN, AND LATE LECTURER ON PHILOSOPHY,
AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

"La mythologie, cette science toute nouvelle, qui nous suit les croyances de nos pères, depuis le berceau du monde jusqu'aux superstitions de nos campagnes."—
EDMOND SCHERER.

LONDON:

TRÜBNER & CO., 8 & 60 PATERNOSTER ROW.

BOSTON: JAMES R. OSGOOD & CO.

1873.

TO

MY DEAR FRIEND,

WILLIAM D. HOWELLS,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF PLEASANT AUTUMN EVENINGS SPENT AMONG
WEREWOLVES AND TROLLS AND NIXIES,

I dedicate

THIS RECORD OF OUR ADVENTURES.

PREFACE.

IN publishing this somewhat rambling and unsystematic series of papers, in which I have endeavoured to touch briefly upon a great many of the most important points in the study of mythology, I think it right to observe that, in order to avoid confusing the reader with intricate discussions, I have sometimes cut the matter short, expressing myself with dogmatic definiteness where a sceptical vagueness might perhaps have seemed more becoming. In treating of popular legends and superstitions, the paths of inquiry are circuitous enough, and seldom can we reach a satisfactory conclusion until we have travelled all the way around Robin Hood's barn and back again. I am sure that the reader would not have thanked me for obstructing these crooked lanes with the thorns and brambles of philological and antiquarian discussion, to such an extent as perhaps to make him despair of ever reaching the high road. I have not attempted to review, otherwise than incidentally, the works of Grimm, Müller, Kuhn, Bréal, Dasent, and Tylor; nor can I pretend to have added anything of consequence, save now and then some bit of explanatory comment, to the results obtained by the labour of these scholars; but it has rather been my

aim to present these results in such a way as to awaken general interest in them. And accordingly, in dealing with a subject which depends upon philology almost as much as astronomy depends upon mathematics, I have omitted philological considerations wherever it has been possible to do so. Nevertheless, I believe that nothing has been advanced as established which is not now generally admitted by scholars, and that nothing has been advanced as probable for which due evidence cannot be produced. Yet among many points which are proved, and many others which are probable, there must always remain many other facts of which we cannot feel sure that our own explanation is the true one; and the student who endeavours to fathom the primitive thoughts of mankind, as enshrined in mythology, will do well to bear in mind the modest words of Jacob Grimm, — himself the greatest scholar and thinker who has ever dealt with this class of subjects, — “I shall indeed interpret all that I can, but I cannot interpret all that I should like.”

PETERSHAM, *September 6, 1872.*

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MYTHS AND MYTH-MAKERS.

I.

THE ORIGINS OF FOLK-LORE.

FEW mediæval heroes are so widely known as William Tell. His exploits have been celebrated by one of the greatest poets and one of the most popular musicians of modern times. They are doubtless familiar to many who have never heard of Stauffacher or Winkelried, who are quite ignorant of the prowess of Roland, and to whom Arthur and Lancelot, nay, even Charlemagne, are but empty names.

Nevertheless, in spite of his vast reputation, it is very likely that no such person as William Tell ever existed, and it is certain that the story of his shooting the apple from his son's head has no historical value whatever. In spite of the wrath of unlearned but patriotic Swiss, especially of those of the *cicerone* class, this conclusion is forced upon us as soon as we begin to study the legend in accordance with the canons of modern historical criticism. It is useless to point to Tell's lime-tree, standing to-day in the centre of the market-place at Altdorf, or to quote for our confusion his crossbow preserved in the arsenal at Zurich, as unimpeachable witnesses to the truth of the story. It is in vain that we are told, "The bricks are alive to this day to testify to it ;