

MYTHS AND MYTH-MAKERS:

OLD TALES AND SUPERSTITIONS

INTERPRETED BY COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY.

BY

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

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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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