

THE LOST TALES OF MILETUS

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The lost tales of Miletus by E. Bulwer Lytton

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E. BULWER LYTTON

**THE LOST TALES
OF MILETUS**

COLLECTION
OF
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VOL. 814.

THE LOST TALES OF MILETUS

BY THE RIGHT HON.

SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, BART., M.P.

IN ONE VOLUME.

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1866.

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P R E F A C E.



TIME has spared no remains, in their original form, of those famous Tales of Miletus, which are generally considered to be the remote progenitors of the modern Novel. The strongest presumption in favour of their merit rests on the evidence of the popularity they enjoyed both among Greeks and Romans in times when the imaginative literature of either people was at its highest point of cultivation. As to the materials which they employed for interest or amusement, we are not without means of reasonable conjecture. Parthenius, a poet, probably of Nicæa (though his birth-place has been called in dispute), who enjoyed a considerable reputation in the Augustan Age, and had the honour to teach Virgil Greek, has bequeathed to us a collection of short love-stories compiled from older and more elaborate legends. In making this collection he

could scarcely fail to have had recourse to sources so popular as the fictions of Miletus. Whatever might have been the gifts of Parthenius as a poet, he wastes none of them on his task of compiler. He contents himself with giving the briefest possible outline of stories that were then in popular circulation, carefully divesting them of any ornament of fancy or elegance of style. His work, dedicated to the Latin poet, Gallus, seems designed to suggest, from the themes illustrated by old tale-tellers, hints to the imitation or invention of later poets. And, indeed, Parthenius himself states that it was for such uses to Gallus that his book was composed. But what stories, thus reduced to the mere ashes of their pristine form, might have been when they took life and glow from the art of the practised tale-teller, the yet extant and animated romance of "The Golden Ass," by Apuleius, may enable us to guess. For though that romance, as well as the story of the "Ass" by Lucian, is generally supposed to have been borrowed from the earlier work of Lucius of Patra, Apuleius implies that his manner of telling it is

agreeable to that of the fictions most in vogue in his time, which were certainly the Milesian Fables, or those which the Sybarites imitated from that original. And if in "The Golden Ass" we may really trace a distinguishable vestige of the manner in which the Milesian tale-tellers diversified and adorned their fables, they must have ranged through a variety of interest little less extensive than that in which the novelists of our day display the versatility of their genius,—embracing lively satire, prodigal fancy, and stirring adventure.

Out of such indications of the character and genius of the lost Milesian Fables, and from the remnants of myth and tale once in popular favour, which may be found, not only in such repertories of ancient legend as those of Apollodorus and Conon, but scattered throughout the Scholiasts or in the pages of Pausanias and Athenæus, I have endeavoured to weave together a few stories that may serve as feeble specimens of the various kinds of subject in which these ancestral tale-tellers may have exercised their faculties of inven-