

**CELTIC
MYTHOLOGY
AND RELIGION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649456154

Celtic Mythology and Religion by Alexander Macbain

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

ALEXANDER MACBAIN

**CELTIC
MYTHOLOGY
AND RELIGION**

CEL¹ TIC MYTHOLOGY
AND RELIGION. //

BY
ALEXANDER MACBAIN,
M.A., F.S.A. Scot.

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR.

Edinburgh:
A. & W. MACKENZIE.

1885.

8960

~~III 4904~~

~~AH 2549.85~~



Lowell fund.



P R E F A C E.

THE following work, all save from page 105 to the end, appeared in the *Celtic Magazine* in 1883-4, and is here reprinted from the *Magazine* type. Hence it is that it is reproduced "with all its imperfections on its head," and the critic must be asked, before condemning details at least, to note the list of corrections appended to this preface.

The intention of this series of papers was to popularise the subject of Mythology, and to apply its principles to the elucidation of Celtic beliefs, tales, and traditions. I wished to place clearly before my Gaelic brethren the exact position which the religious beliefs of the Celts held in the European kinship, to clear up the misty subject of "Druidism," and to reconstruct, from the shattered materials to hand, the Pantheon of their Gaelic ancestors. This I undertook, knowing that in the last part of my object—the rehabilitation of the Gaelic Olympus—my results must only be tentative, for the material for reconstruction is difficult to deal with, and much of it is in MSS. unedited.

Since these papers began to appear in print, events have travelled with more than usual rapidity both in the field of general and of Celtic Mythology. It was last year that Mr Andrew Lang delivered his lively attack against the "orthodox" school of mythologists, and it was also last year that M. D'Arbois de Jubainville's important works on Celtic Literature and Mythology appeared. Mr Lang's attack has certainly driven the older school from several of their positions, but he has by no means overthrown either the importance of language in the development of myth, or the fact that the sun, the sky, the powers of wind and storm, and the change of day and night were the most prominent factors in the creation of the deities and powers of the ancient mythologies. Despite Mr Lang, mythology is, nevertheless, a dramatic view of the course of nature,

and a personification of its forces; and language has been a most potent force in the development of myths, because it stereotyped older epithets and expressions, which in later ages were misunderstood. Mr Lang has, however, shown that language is by no means so much the cause of myth as Max Muller and Cox believe, and that many of the myths claimed as Aryan are found also among barbarous and savage tribes all over the world. What Mr Lang has proved in regard to the origin and growth of mythology does not in the least invalidate the arguments and conclusions in the following papers, for the reason that, on the whole, I followed Mr Tylor's views on Mythology, and he, like Mr Lang, is an anthropologist. But what Mr Lang has invalidated in these papers of mine is the relation in which, following Max Muller, I held myth and folk-tale. Mr Lang has made it clear in his "Custom and Myth," and better still in his introduction to Mrs Hunt's translation of "Grimm's Fairy Tales," that the old idea that the fairy or popular tale is a broken-down myth is so totally wrong, that the opposite is nearer the truth. Indeed, Mr Lang holds that the myth—the god-tale—is but a sublimated folk-tale. That, however, is not often the case. Folk-tales have been raised to myths; the Jason myth is a case in point; but myths have often, and, indeed, with change and advance of religion, they have generally become folk-tales. Another thing that Mr Lang has done is to place the folk-tale on a proper way towards explanation. The "orthodox" belief is that the hero of the folk-tale must be the sun-god, and that many incidents, including the beast-form he assumes, arose from "disease of language," that is, from after ages misunderstanding the epithets applied to the sun-god and to the incidents, by a previous age. This view is untenable. Mr Lang shows that savages now believe in men being transformed into animals; in fact, that we are kin with animals as we are with one another. Transformation of men into beasts is a fixed article of savage faith. It may be caused by witchcraft spell, or through the Pythagorean metempsychosis. Then he finds several incidents explained by savage customs, more especially the prohibitions or taboos we meet with in these tales. He instances the tale of "Cupid and Psyche," the parallel of the "Hoodie" tale at the beginning of these papers; in that tale the etiquette is that the wife must not

see the husband unclothed; if she does, he must leave her. Similar customs still exist among savages, and are not unknown in modern Europe. In the tale of the "Hoodie," there are evidently two prohibitions: first, the inmates of the house must not sleep during the first night of a child's existence; and secondly, the wife must not make mention of a "comb" to her husband. The comb's mythic connections are attested by its frequent appearance on sculptured monuments; and the vigilance during the first hours of a child's existence was of course necessary because of the evil powers that hovered around. The fairies were, in the Highlands, a constant source of dread to baby life; and the special custom of watching during the first night of the child's life, while old shoes ("logaisean") were kept burning to ward off the fairies, prevailed in the Highlands within the memory of people still living. The story was, therefore, as Mr Lang would say, invented to account for and inculcate the observance of these prohibitions.

M. D'Arbois de Jubainville's work on the "Irish Mythological Cycle and the Celtic Mythology" appeared too late to be of any assistance to me in the reconstruction of the Gaelic Olympus. I am glad to note that, in so tentative a matter, we agree so far. He points out the doublets in the Mythological cycle: Cæsair—Partolan, Tuan Mac Carill—Finntan, &c. Partolan he compares to the "Silver Age" of Hesiod; the Nemedians are the "Iron Age"; and the Tuatha-De-Danann represent the "Golden Age." But he takes stop-gaps like Cæsair, Partolan, and Nemed too seriously; nor is the order of the ages comprehensible. The Fomorians who, he observes, co-exist with all the invaders, he regards as the Titans, living far away in the Isles, and he further regards them as the powers of death, darkness, and evil. The Fer-bolgs are the inhabitants of Ireland previous to the Celts or Milesians, who conquered and absorbed them. The Tuatha-De-Danann are the gods of the Gael. The Dagda (= dago-dēvos, "bonus deus") represents Zeus or Jove; Luga corresponds to Mercury; Ogma corresponds to Lucian's Hercules Ogmios; Diancecht is god of Medicine; Gobniu answers to Hephaistos (Vulcan); Angus, son of the Dagda, he does not characterise. The god Manannan he notes as living far away, king of the land of promise, who supplies the gods with food, raiment, and plea-

sure, but he does not say how he stands in the Pantheon. Cuchulain he finds to be the counterpart of Heracles in descent and character. A remarkable feature of the Pantheon is the number of triads—three gods joined together—which appear. These are the three last kings of the Tuatha, the three sons of Danann, the three Fomorian chiefs, and so on; while Gaul presents Lucan's triad of gods, and Wales abounds in all sorts of triads.

The authors to whom I am most indebted are Mr Elton ("Origins of English History") and Professor Rhys ("Celtic Britain" and in *Academy*.) I mention also Mr Fitzgerald's article on the "Ancient Irish" in *Fraser's Magazine* for 1875, and his articles in the *Revue Celtique*. The materials—tales and myths—are chiefly from Guest's "Mabinogion," Skene's "Ancient Books of Wales," Joyce's "Celtic Romances," Kennedy's various books, O'Curry's Lectures, the *Revue Celtique*, Campbell's "Popular Tales," and editions like Windisch's "Irische Texte."

Inverness, October 1885.