

**THE QUEEN OF THE AIR:
BEING A STUDY
OF THE GREEK MYTHS
OF CLOUD AND STORM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649685158

The Queen of the Air: Being a Study of the Greek Myths of Cloud and Storm by John Ruskin

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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JOHN RUSKIN

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CLOUD AND STORM.

BY
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SEVENTEENTH THOUSAND.

LONDON:
GEORGE ALLEN, 156, CHARING CROSS ROAD.

1903.

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Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
At the Ballantyne Press

P R E F A C E .

MY days and strength have lately been much broken; and I never more felt the insufficiency of both than in preparing for the press the following desultory memoranda on a most noble subject. But I leave them now as they stand, for no time nor labour would be enough to complete them to my contentment; and I believe that they contain suggestions which may be followed with safety, by persons who are beginning to take interest in the aspects of mythology, which only recent investigation has removed from the region of conjecture into that of rational inquiry. I have some advantage, also, from my field work, in the interpretation of myths relating to natural phenomena: and I have had always near me, since we were at college together, a sure, and unweariedly kind, guide, in my friend Charles

Newton, to whom we owe the finding of more treasure in mines of marble, than, were it rightly estimated, all California could buy. I must not, however, permit the chance of his name being in any wise associated with my errors. Much of my work has been done obstinately in my own way; and he is never responsible for me, though he has often kept me right, or at least enabled me to advance in a right direction. Absolutely right no one can be in such matters; nor does a day pass without convincing every honest student of antiquity of some partial error, and showing him better how to think, and where to look. But I knew that there was no hope of my being able to enter with advantage on the fields of history opened by the splendid investigation of recent philologists; though I could qualify myself, by attention and sympathy, to understand, here and there, a verse of Homer's or Hesiod's, as the simple people did for whom they sang.

Even while I correct these sheets for press, a lecture by Professor Tyndall has been put into my hands, which I ought to have heard last 16th of January, but was hindered by mischance; and which, I now find, completes, in

two important particulars, the evidence of an instinctive truth in ancient symbolism; showing, first, that the Greek conception of an ethereal element pervading space is justified by the closest reasoning of modern physicists; and, secondly, that the blue of the sky, hitherto thought to be caused by watery vapour, is, indeed, reflected from the divided air itself; so that the bright blue of the eyes of Athena, and the deep blue of her ægis, prove to be accurate mythic expressions of natural phenomena which it is an uttermost triumph of recent science to have revealed.

Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine triumph more complete. To form, "within an experimental tube, a bit of more perfect sky than the sky itself!" here is magic of the finest sort! singularly reversed from that of old time, which only asserted its competency to enclose in bottles elementary forces that were—not of the sky.

Let me, in thanking Professor Tyndall for the true wonder of this piece of work, ask his pardon, and that of all masters in physical science, for any words of mine, either in the following pages or elsewhere, that may ever

seem to fail in the respect due to their great powers of thought, or in the admiration due to the far scope of their discovery. But I will be judged by themselves, if I have not bitter reason to ask them to teach us more than yet they have taught.

This first day of May, 1869, I am writing where my work was begun thirty-five years ago, within sight of the snows of the higher Alps. In that half of the permitted life of man, I have seen strange evil brought upon every scene that I best loved, or tried to make beloved by others. The light which once flushed those pale summits with its rose at dawn, and purple at sunset, is now umbered and faint; the air which once inlaid the clefts of all their golden crags with azure is now defiled with languid coils of smoke, belched from worse than volcanic fires; their very glacier waves are ebbing, and their snows fading, as if Hell had breathed on them; the waters that once sank at their feet into crystalline rest are now dimmed and foul, from deep to deep, and shore to shore. These are no careless words—they are accurately—horribly—true. I know what the Swiss lakes were; no pool of Alpine fountain at its source was

clearer. This morning, on the Lake of Geneva, at half a mile from the beach, I could scarcely see my oar-blade a fathom deep.

The light, the air, the waters, all defiled !
How of the earth itself? Take this one fact for type of honour done by the modern Swiss to the earth of his native land. There used to be a little rock at the end of the avenue by the port of Neuchâtel; there, the last marble of the foot of Jura, sloping to the blue water, and (at this time of year) covered with bright pink tufts of *Saponaria*. I went, three days since, to gather a blossom at the place. The goodly native rock and its flowers were covered with the dust and refuse of the town; but, in the middle of the avenue, was a newly-constructed artificial rockery, with a fountain twisted through a spinning spout, and an inscription on one of its loose-tumbled stones,—

"Aux Botanistes,
Le club Jurassique."

Ah, masters of modern science, give me back my Athena out of your vials, and seal, if it may be, once more, Asmodeus therein. You have divided the elements, and united them ;