

TALES FROM GREEK MYTHOLOGY

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Tales from Greek Mythology by George W. Cox

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GEORGE W. COX

**TALES FROM GREEK
MYTHOLOGY**

TALES
FROM
GREEK MYTHOLOGY.

BY
THE REV. GEORGE W. COX, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "THE TALE OF THE GREAT PERSIAN WAR,"
"TALES OF THE GODS AND HEROES,"
ETC.

SECOND EDITION.

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TO

THE SECOND EDITION.

THE publication of a Second Edition of this little work enables me to express my gratitude for the kindness with which these Tales have been received. I have endeavoured to correct the errors which friendly critics have pointed out, and some expressions which were considered almost too childish have been expunged. If others, to which the same objection seems to apply, have been allowed to stand, I may allege in excuse the fear that greater alterations might render the stories less fitted for very young children.

A few names are in the present edition given in a form more strictly Greek. If, as seems now to be admitted, Latin forms of Greek names are to be avoided as far as

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possible, there seems to be no reason for retaining the Latin version of any names except those which have become familiar sounds to the English ear. The number of these names is steadily diminishing: but for the present it seems advisable to adhere to the practical rule which I have ventured to lay down in a note on the Orthography of Greek Names prefixed to the Tale of the Great Persian War.

December 13, 1832.

PREFACE

TO

THE FIRST EDITION.

THE following tales were written for the use of very young children. The versions which recent writers have given of Greek legends are expressed in language which it would not be easy, and sometimes not possible, for a child to comprehend. The present stories were intended as much to be heard by children too young to be able to read them, as to be read by those of somewhat more advanced age, while they may, perhaps, be not without interest even for others whose childhood has passed away.

As a very large proportion of English boys still go through what is called a classical education, no apology would appear to be needed for presenting to them at

an early age, that with which they must afterwards, in any case, make acquaintance. Nor is it of little moment that the first impressions should be agreeable, and at the same time not inconsistent with the conclusions which have been reached by the science of comparative mythology. The latter condition it would scarcely have been possible, until recently, to fulfil; and the partial and unsystematic acquaintance which at best a boy can make with the great body of Greek legend, is as likely to repel the mind as to attract it, while not improbably he may have made good progress in the study of the classical languages before he has even an opportunity of appreciating the beauty of their mythology.

Yet there is, more particularly in Greek legend, an intrinsic beauty, of which the charm cannot be weakened, far less lost—a charm which is even heightened on the most sifting analysis, and the most critical research into its origin. But the tales of the *Odyssey*, and still more of the beautiful Homeric hymns, are seldom read until a boy's education is nearer to its close than its commencement; and yet it is from such tales as these that the impression of marvellous grace, tenderness, and beauty, may most easily and surely be left upon the mind.

This impression should, however, be unconscious and uncritical. The legends should be placed before the child without any attempt (which can hardly fail of being injurious) to determine their truth or falsehood. Such labour would be wholly wasted; nor would he need any teaching to enable him to feel their beauty, for he has in himself a surer criterion than any which his elders might impart or even possess. Mythology is the product of an age in which the historical faculty is altogether dormant, and in which the mystery of human life is solved by the personification of natural objects and phenomena, and the multiplication of supernatural agencies commingling with the ordinary course of things. This age, which is destitute of any notion of chronology, and has no tendency to apprehend any other sequence of events than that which harmonises with the mythical sense, has yet a keen discernment of the slightest deviation from the mythical character. If the legends are not history, they have still certain laws which no additions or embellishments can be permitted to violate. If there was nothing to prevent the ascribing fresh acts to Aphrodité or Athéné, still the mythical sense would have been revolted by the ascribing to them any acts which should confuse their special characteristics. Otherwise, it was as natural

and as necessary that they should accept the legendary tales of gods and heroes, as it was impossible to divest themselves of belief in the personal life of all natural objects. What are to us physical laws, were to them living and conscious beings; what are to us graceful fictions, were to them grave and serious realities.

In all this there is the closest analogy to the mind of a child. The tendency to personify outward forms, to invent extra-natural agencies, must always exist in childhood, although the character of education may more or less check, or even repress it. There must also be the same instinctive discernment of that which harmonises with the mythical character, or is inconsistent with it. It would seem better, then, that the first acquaintance with such tales should not be accompanied by any attempt to explain their origin or growth, although we may be careful to set down nothing which may contradict what they may have to learn afterwards.

The task is one which has been in a great measure stripped of its difficulty by the results already obtained in the science of comparative mythology. In the various methods of interpreting Greek or other mythological tales, there was of necessity a rude and violent separation between the legends themselves and the