

**ANECDOTES AND
TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATIVE
OF EARLY ENGLISH
HISTORY AND LITERATURE**

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Anecdotes and Traditions Illustrative of Early English History and Literature by William J. Thoms

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WILLIAM J. THOMS

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OF
THE CAMDEN SOCIETY,
FOR THE YEAR ENDING MAY 1st, 1839.

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P R E F A C E.

IN submitting to the Members of the Camden Society the following Anecdotes and Traditions, the Editor feels called upon, before proceeding to describe the sources from which they are derived, to explain the motives which induced him to suggest to the Council the propriety of the present publication; a suggestion acceded to with a kindness which calls forth his best thanks.

In the first place, then, it appeared to the Editor very desirable that the Society should follow the example set them by Chaucer, whose intermixture of lighter matters, amidst the graver portions of his "Canterbury Tales," has been the subject of frequent and well deserved encomium; so that those Members of the Society who think Minerva looks most bewitching when her face is dimpled with a smile, may be allowed an occasional glimpse of their divinity in that mood which they deem her happiest.

In the next place, the delight with which the few works of a similar character, existing in English Literature, such

as Selden's Table Talk, Bacon's Apophthegms, Spence's Anecdotes, and though last not least in our dear love, Camden's Remains, have been perused by innumerable readers, convinced him that a volume of "*Camdeniana*," even though it should be of far inferior merit to its admirable prototypes, would not be without its admirers. He was of course aware that the scattered anecdotes to be found in its pages, would by many be looked upon as trifling contributions to our stores of knowledge, scarcely as bricks from which great buildings might be made, scarcely perhaps as the straws necessary to make the bricks. Yet on the other hand he felt persuaded, that these materials, trifling as they seemed, were worthy of preservation, and capable of being turned to good account. Had he had any scruples upon this point, they must have been removed by the following passage from the pen of Dr. Southey, which he begs to quote as a justification for the appearance of the present work, to those who may consider such justification called for. Dr. Southey having had occasion to speak of an anecdote of Cromwell's having in his youth quarrelled with Prince Charles, then Duke of York, beaten him and made his nose bleed, which is related by Mr. Noble as one of the Traditions of Hinchinbrook, proceeds, in his usual sound common-sense manner, to observe :

"Such anecdotes, relating to such a man, even though they may be of doubtful authenticity, are not unworthy of preservation. The fabulous history of every country is part of its history, and ought not to be omitted by later and more

enlightened historians; because it has been believed at one time, and while it was believed it influenced the imagination, and thereby, in some degree, the opinions and character of the people. *Biographical Fables*, on the other hand, are worthy of notice, because they show in what manner the celebrity of the personage, in whose honour or dishonour they have been invented, has acted upon his countrymen."

The Editor is content to rest his defence of the biographical portion of the following volume upon this passage. With regard to that remaining part of it which is devoted to the superstitions of the country, he feels that no apology is necessary. Of what importance an apparently trifling fact may become—in illustration of the source of National Mythology—in confirmation or disproof of the speculations of the learned upon that point,—or by comparison with cognate Traditions—all who have studied such subjects will readily admit. And, when he adds that he has been assured by very competent authority that two or three of the facts contained in the second part of this work will, in all probability, be regarded by that profound scholar Dr. Jacob Grimm, the learned author of the "Deutsche Mythologie," as of the first importance in deciding a point very essential to a right knowledge of that subject, he thinks he shall have satisfied his readers that he has not misused the confidence reposed in him by the Council, when they entrusted him with the compilation of this volume.

The first part of the following collection is entirely derived from the Harleian MS. No. 6395, entitled "Merry Passages

and Jests," compiled by Sir Nicholas Lestrangle, of Hunstanton, from the communications of his friends, and containing upwards of six hundred articles, of which the greater portion are unfit for publication. Of this manuscript further particulars are here rendered unnecessary by the kindness of John Gough Nichols, Esq. F.S.A. who has obligingly presented the Editor with the very elaborate and interesting account of its author, his relations and associates, which will be found immediately following this Preface, and for which and many other friendly offices performed during the progress of the present volume, he begs to offer his warmest acknowledgments.

The Second Part is derived from the Lansdowne MS. No. 231, written by the well-known John Aubrey, and containing his materials (with some subsequent additions by Dr. White Kennett, Bishop of Peterborough,) for a work, the publication of which he had contemplated under the title of "*Remains of Gentilism and Judaism,*" and in which, it appears, he had proposed to draw a parallel between the Superstitions of Greece and Rome, and those of his own country, finding the records, or rather traces, of the former in the works of their Poets, and collecting his English stores from the communications of his friends. Many interesting passages of this manuscript have been already transferred by Sir Henry Ellis to his edition of Brand's Popular Antiquities; these, with one exception, that of the Funeral Dirge, have been omitted in the present work, but, combined with those here printed, may be said to comprise everything deserving of publication, contained in the volume.

The Third and certainly least important part of the present Collection, has been derived from No. 3890 of the Additional MSS. in the British Museum, the commonplace-book of a Mr. John Collet, as we learn from the following inscription, which is most beautifully written on its first page :

JOHANNES COLLET,
 FILIUS
 THOMÆ COLLET,
 PATER
 THOMÆ, GULIELMI ET JOHANNIS
 OMNIUM SUPERSTES,
 NATUS
 QUARTO JUNII 1633,
 DENASCITURUS
 QUANDO DEO VISUM FUERIT,
 INTERIM HUIUS PROPRIETARIUS.

Of Mr. John Collet no further particulars than those he has himself furnished have been obtained. But it is probable he was related to "Old Mr. Collet," of the Record Office in the Tower, who is spoken of by Anthony Wood, in his memoir of Sir William Dugdale.

In submitting the selection which he has made, the Editor has endeavoured to turn the several articles of which it consists to as good an account as his abilities would admit, by identifying the parties, illustrating the customs, and showing, as far as possible, the existence of parallel superstitions. He may, perhaps, in some instances, be considered as having

given "an intolerable deal of sack" to the "one half-penny-worth of bread;" but it will, he believes, in most cases, be found upon examination that he had a purpose in doing so, a method, as it were, in his madness, and that it was not done to make a parade of his very limited reading, but rather, and that more especially in his notes to the Second Part, to call the attention of inquirers to sources of information, which are as yet too little known to the antiquarian students of this country.

It now only remains for the Editor to acknowledge his debt of gratitude to his esteemed friend John Bruce, Esq. F.S.A. for his prompt and valuable assistance upon this as upon many other occasions. He knows that, had he consulted the inclination of that gentleman, these acts of kindness must have been passed over in silence; but he really cannot consent to do so much violence to his own feelings.

WILLIAM J. THOMS.