

# **LEGENDS AND TALES**

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Legends and Tales by Annie Besant

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**ANNIE BESANT**

**LEGENDS  
AND TALES**



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# LEGENDS AND TALES.

BY  
ANNIE BESANT.



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## P R E F A C E .

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BUT few words are needed to introduce this little book. It forms the first volume of the Young Folks' Library, a series of works suitable for boys and girls, free from the superstition which spoils, for many, literature issued for the young. Herein all mythologies are placed on the same level, and the legends of one faith are regarded as neither less nor more sacred than those of any other. The two concluding tales have a historical nucleus, and tell how the dying science of the ancient world and the new born science of the modern world were alike martyred by Christianity.

ANNIE BESANT.

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## LEGENDS.

### Ganga, the River Maid.

A LEGEND OF HINDUSTAN.

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FAR away, in the vast range of mountains that close Hindustan against the barbarians of Thibet, the great God Siva lay asleep. Around him rose the sky-piercing, snow-capped peaks of the mighty Himalayas; and as he slept his tangled hair, storm-tossed, wind-driven, was played with by King Frost, and the snow-maidens and ice-maidens of his court hung ice-drops on the hairs of head and face. And Siva slept for many a hundred years, for he was weary with all his work in Hindustan; and while he slept the sun blazed down on the vast plains and slopes and valleys, and burned up cruelly the green herbs and glorious trees, for there were no rivers to water the arid soil; and the people cried aloud to Siva for water, and Siva slept unheeding.

Now in the mountains there lived a great king, King Himavat, with his fair wife, Menaka, a nymph of the air, and the king and queen had one child only, a lovely maiden whom they named Ganga. As Ganga one day wandered through her father's snowy realm, she came to a beautiful ice-cavern that she had never seen before. Long icicles hung from the glittering walls; pillars of ice held

up the lofty roof ; and as she stood at the mouth, peeping in timidly, a ray of sunlight flashed past her into the cavern, and painted its seven colors on point, and arch, and



WOMEN OF THE HIMALAYAS SEEKING WATER.

shaft. Ganga clapped her white hands with delight, and ran into the cavern ; and there she stayed, while they searched for her high and low, and never dreamed of look-

ing in the tangles of Siva's hair, where the exquisite ice-cavern had been formed. At last Himavat and Menaka went to look for her, and chid her gently for her mischief when they found her; but when she showed them the fairy cavern they forgave her, and the three made their home there for many a year.

But one day Himavat returned from a journey, and his heart was heavy and his face sad. "What ails you, king and husband?" whispered Menaka quietly, and Ganga nestled on her father's knee, and wound her soft arms round his neck. And the king spoke:

"The land suffers grievously for want of water; the crops are shrivelled, the cattle are wasting, men and women try in vain to still the moaning of their little ones. Siva sleeps and heeds not the misery, and there is no help in Gods for men."

He paused, and no word broke the silence; but from Ganga's golden hair dropped sweet water, as the ice-wreath wherewith she had crowned herself slowly melted round her head. Himavat looked at her and covered his face, and she whispered in his ear: "Is there no help for men?"

Then he raised his heavy eyes, tear-laden, and looked upon his child:

"Aye, Ganga, there is help, but it is hard to give. If a maiden pure as ice and white as snow would leave her home, and go and dwell for ever in the sultry plains, then from her life freely given would flow life for the perishing people, and her name would be sacred and beloved by all in Hindustan."

And Ganga knew that her great father bade her take this work on her fair shoulders; but she turned away and