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REPORT ON FOLK-TALE RESEARCH

IN 1889.

1. *The Fables of Æsop*, as first printed by William Caxton in 1484, with those of Avian, Alfonso, and Poggio, now again edited and induced by Joseph Jacobs. 2 vols. London, D. Nutt. 1889.
 2. *The Ancient History of the Maori, his Mythology and Traditions*, by John White. Vols. 2, 3, and 4. London, Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, Limited. 1889.
 3. *Teutonic Mythology*, by Viktor Rydberg, Ph.D., authorised translation from the Swedish by Rasmus B. Anderson, LL.D. London, Swan Sonnenschein and Co. 1889.
 4. *The Folk-Tales of the Magyars*. Collected by Kriza, Erdélyi, Pap, and others. Translated and edited, with Comparative Notes, by the Rev. W. Henry Jones and Lewis L. Kropf.
 5. *Sixty Folk-Tales from exclusively Slavonic Sources*. Translated, with brief Introductions and Notes, by A. H. Wratislaw, M.A. London, Elliot Stock. 1889.
 6. *A Group of Eastern Romances*. Edited by W. A. Clouston. Privately printed. 1889.
 7. *Traditions Populaires de l'Asie Mineure*, par E. Henri Carnoy et Jean Nicolaides. Paris, Maisonneuve and Ch. Leclerc. 1889.
 8. *Le Folk-lore des Hautes Vosges*, par L. F. Sauvé. Paris, Maisonneuve and Ch. Leclerc. 1889.
 9. *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition*. I.—Argyllshire Series. Edited by Lord Archibald Campbell. London, D. Nutt. 1889.
 10. *From my Verandah in New Guinea*. Sketches and Traditions by Hugh Hastings Romilly, C.M.G.; with an Introduction by Andrew Lang, M.A. London, D. Nutt. 1889.
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OF the various branches of folk-lore none has made greater progress during the past twenty years than the study of folk-tales. The first serious attempt to elucidate folk-tales in this country was made by Sir G. W. Cox, in his *Mythology of the Aryan*

Nations. In that work, following the lines laid down by Max Müller, the author endeavoured to interpret the stories current among the Indo-European nations as expansions of metaphors which were conceived as part of the original stock of expressions belonging to the race before its separation into the tribes that ultimately peopled India, Persia, and Europe. The metaphors in question were alleged to have been used of the 'phenomena of day and night, sunrise and sunset, summer and winter, and to have been misunderstood in the course of ages by the decay of language and from other causes, and so to have become crystallised into phrases that formed the foundation of tales of heroic action and suffering. In the Vedas, the earliest written poems of the Aryan race, these metaphors and phrases were found in the process of change, but as yet undisguised to the extent appearing in later times and among kindreds long severed from the original home and parentage. Cox's work was followed at no great interval by that of Professor De Gubernatis on zoological mythology. The theory which, in the hands of Max Müller and his disciple Cox was kept within moderate, if not exactly reasonable, limits fairly ran riot in the pages of the Florentine professor; and it became obvious that, with the exercise of no great amount of ingenuity, every event of history might be resolved, and every phrase of poetry might be developed, into a sun-myth. It was time, even for those who were most dazzled by the learning and ability displayed by these advocates of the philological method of interpretation, to pause and ask whether investigation in some other direction, and in a more strictly scientific manner, might not yield results of a more solid character. Dr. Tylor had already shown the way by the publication of his great work on *Primitive Culture*, in which he had dealt with a few savage myths in connection with the beliefs and practices of the people who told them, and had compared both these stories and these practices with those which have survived from an unknown past among the least cul-

tured classes in modern Europe. The clue thrown down by Tylor was, after a while, taken up ; and we owe it chiefly to the eloquence, wit, and erudition of Mr. Andrew Lang that the sun-myth has at length fallen, discredited and overwhelmed with sarcasm, and that more rational and surer methods have been generally adopted to discover the origin and meaning of folk-tales.

Meanwhile the study of Sanskrit literature has produced another theory. Benfey, in his introduction to the German version of the *Panchalauten*, had, years ago, pointed out the resemblance between the fables contained in that book and many of those passing under the name of *Æsop*. He deemed the resemblance too great to be accidental, and insisted that it could only be accounted for by transmission. On the whole he was disposed to give the palm of originality to the Greek fables ; but a further acquaintance with Buddhist writings has induced a number of scholars to argue that it is to the popularity given to parable by the teaching of Buddha and his early followers that we must trace the diffusion of stories found, in one form or another, among so many different nations. This theory has obtained advocates of great force in Professor Rhys Davids in England, and M. Cosquin in France. Moreover, the large collections of analogues, chiefly in literary form, by Mr. Clouston, have been made vehicles for conveying to the minds of his readers an impression of the strength of the case.

And, indeed, it may be admitted that direct transmission has played a considerable part in the diffusion of folk-tales, and that many stories found in modern Europe in the mouths of the peasantry have analogues astonishingly close in Sanskrit literature, as well as in Indian tradition still living. The question is how far transmission can be traced by written records, or fairly inferred from the closeness of the analogy between the tales in question, and from the historical connection between the people where borrowing is alleged. This is one of the most difficult problems with

which folk-lore students have to deal; and it must be grappled with manfully, if the study is ever to be more than an interesting literary pastime. For we must never forget that the term folk-lore embraces a very wide area, and that all traditional learning must be investigated on the same principles. To prove transmission from a centre in the case of stories involves a presumption in its favour in the case of other folk-belief, and ultimately, therefore, in the case of traditional customs. Now it would, of course, be absurd to deny that strong races have often imposed their language, laws, and practices by force or persuasion upon their weaker brethren. In like manner superstitious songs and tales have been wafted from land to land. The advocates, however, of the theory we are considering—that of transmission from a given centre—are bound by the narrow limits of historical time; and, unfortunately for them, folk-tales have been found older than Buddha, and in other lands than India. To meet this difficulty, Judea has been suggested by one set of theorists, and Egypt by another, as the starting-point. We need not further allude on this occasion to these offshoots from the main theory: the objections applicable to it are, with slight variations, applicable to them also. It is only necessary here to insist that, inasmuch as the theory has its limits within historical time, the burden of proof lies upon its advocates, and *that* in each individual instance. Now, the course of their argument demands a number of suitable vehicles of transmission. Many of these, applicable undoubtedly to limited areas, have been suggested, such as conquest, trade, literary intercourse, and the movements of that singular people known to us as the Gipsies. Of these, as it might have been predicted, literature, from the permanent character of its records, has proved the most manageable, by far; with its aid the revelationists, as they have been called, have been able to bridge more chasms, traverse greater distances, and arrive nearer to probabilities than by any other means.

I mentioned just now that the comparison of the Greek and Indian fables first drew the attention of scholars to transmission as a possible explanation of the similarity of stories. Accordingly, we should expect to find the most obvious and striking resemblances among variants of fables. This is a subject that has engaged the attention of Mr. Joseph Jacobs, and has led to the most valuable contribution, not merely to the controversy, but to the study of folk-tales, which has been made during the year 1889.

The occasion of this contribution is a reprint in a sumptuous form of Caxton's version of *Æsop's Fables*, to which Mr. Jacobs has prefixed, in a separate volume, an introduction containing an account of the development of the fables down to the end of the Middle Ages. In truly scientific manner the history is traced backwards, showing, step by step, the changes, growth, and accretions in the course of centuries. This, of course, is a purely literary history; but literary history is important, because it is on this that the advocates of the borrowing theory rely for the bulk of their facts. The result of Mr. Jacobs' inquiries is to establish the literary descent of the fable, on the one hand from Greece, where it received its first great impulse by its application to political uses during the epoch of the tyrants, when free speech was dangerous, and on the other hand from India, where Buddha and his early followers adapted the beast-tale to teach ethical lessons. I need not refer here to the many ingenious and probable conjectures, and to the patient analyses which have cleared up a number of difficult problems in the course of this brilliant essay. The question that chiefly interests us now is whether the true inference is a generalisation to be extended to all classes of tales. Are we to believe that *all* classes of tales are derived by literary, or partly by literary and partly by oral, channels from their original home among the Hindoo Aryans in Sanskrit times? The learned author does not admit that this follows from his investigations. He insists, and rightly insists, that "the fable is a highly

specialised form of the universally human tendency to tell a tale". And he infers that we are thereby prevented "from applying results obtained from consideration of its history to the more general question of origin". This is probably correct; but attention should be directed to the negro stories, of which Uncle Remus has given us the best-known series, and the analogues which have been reported from the southern continent of America. The problems connected with the origin and history of the apologue cannot be deemed to be wholly solved until these tales have been dealt with in a fashion as thorough and scholarly as that of Mr. Jacobs.

Turning from fables to the wider domain of sagas, we are met by two works deserving of the most careful study. The relations between themselves of the *märchen* and the saga, the relation of tradition to historical fact, and the influence of a different series of beliefs, historical and religious, imposed by a higher and conquering upon a lower and vanquished culture, each and all demand the student's attention. In John White's *Ancient History of the Maoris* and Viktor Rydberg's *Researches into Teutonic Mythology*, treasures of special value from two opposite ends of the world are poured at his feet.

Mr. White's first volume was published so long ago as 1887. The object of his book is to let the New Zealander speak for himself and tell his native stories. These stories are gathered from various sources, many of which have been already published or printed in the annals of local societies; while others have been taken down by Mr. White himself from the dictation of Maoris skilled in their tribal traditions: and he is careful to give the Maori text as well as the English translation. The sagas of the first volume are mythological; the remainder, published in 1889, claim to be historical. The interest of the former will be at once admitted. I venture to think that the interest of the latter is at least as great. For, dry and wearisome as are the details of many of the "historical".

sagas—recalling Milton's famous complaint concerning the history of the Heptarchy—amid much tedious matter, we may watch for ourselves how what is apparently a narrative of actual events passes gradually into the realm of imagination, and myth usurps the chair of fact.

This is the sort of inquiry undertaken by M. Rydberg with respect to Teutonic traditions. No one can open the recent translation of the first part of his work without being struck by the manner in which he tracks to its burrow and slays the mediæval tale of the Eastern origin and Trojan descent of Odin and his companions. The width of research and the acuteness here displayed are conspicuous in his treatment of other sagas. We may not accept all his conclusions. It may seem that often he deals with tales and songs but loosely connected with one another, as if they were inspired writings which had to be reconciled at the cost of any amount of special pleading. Yet, undeniably, the method he adopts has led him to brilliant conjectures, if not to discoveries, and neither the method nor the results can be safely dismissed unconsidered.

Among the collections of folk-tales published last year the most important, after the Maori tales, is the version of Magyar tales by Messrs. Jones and Kropf. This is the more welcome, because English readers have hitherto had to depend upon German translations, and these only too frequently unsatisfactory ones. It consists of a selection from the collections published by Erdélyi, Kriza, and Pap, with a single example from Merényi's *Popular Tales from the Valley of the Sajó*—in all, fifty-three out of a total of 240 stories enumerated by Ladislaus Arany in 1867 as published up to that date. But although the translators state that the work of collecting has gone steadily on since that date, none of the more recent collections are represented in the book before us. We may assume that the examples given here are the most interesting, from the point of view of the general reader, of those published up to 1867. But we cannot assume that they are the most

valuable for scientific purposes; and if we have to be thankful, as we are and must be, on behalf of English students, to have thus much from works so inaccessible as those in the different Magyar dialects, we cannot help regretting that, instead of extracts from several, the whole of one or two of the collections referred to by the translators should not have been accorded us. Given the principle of selection, however, the translators have gone about their task in a scientific fashion, and the introduction and notes add greatly to the services they have here rendered.

This cannot be said of Mr. Wratislaw's *Sixty Folk-tales from Slavonic Sources*. His notes (happily of no large extent) have been written to all appearance in entire ignorance of any other theory of interpretation than that of Max Müller and Cox. As in the case of the Magyar tales just mentioned, Mr. Wratislaw has chosen only a few out of the vast treasure of Slavonic *märchen* and sagas. It is too much, of course, to expect that any one scholar, or indeed any dozen scholars, will give us the whole; but would it not be possible by co-operation to obtain trustworthy abstracts of all the published stories of the Slav tribes? I can hardly think of any work that would be more useful.

Mr. Clouston's *Group of Eastern Romances* has been so recently noticed that in these pages I need not do more than refer to it as affording a considerable amount of interesting material. I pass on therefore to two small French collections in Maisonneuve's well-known series. New ground has been broken by Messrs. Carnoy and Nicolaides in their *Traditions Populaires de l'Asie Mineure*. In so far as the stories are concerned it consists of forty-one examples of *märchen*, sagas, apologues, and drolls. Many of the variants here found are curious; and when we consider the history of the western shores of Asia Minor and the islands adjacent, it is evident that the partisans of no theory of interpretation can afford to neglect them. The editors give, as a guarantee of good faith, particulars of the

time and place where, and the person by whom, every story was told, including his domicile of origin, present residence, occupation, and age.

The other collection is that of M. Sauvé. It includes the whole range of folk-lore, and the author seems to have undertaken his work in a thoroughly scientific spirit, and comprehending the difficulties of his task. The result is, on the whole, satisfactory, though for the purposes of the "storyologist" the arrangement is hardly to be commended. However, the tales are few, and they occupy a subordinate place in the scheme. Only two *märchen* are related, and a few sagas and beast-tales.

Lord Archibald Campbell has published, in the first volume of his *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition*, some sixteen or seventeen sagas. Some of these are clan-traditions; and the editor notes as an evidence of their antiquity the fact that none of them makes any mention of firearms. These clan-traditions all relate to feuds and vendettas; and it is in one case expressly recorded that the descendants of one of the foes of the clan, in their account of the incident narrated, "altered this tradition and reversed the main facts." Could we have had both sides of the story, here and in the other instances given, from the mouth of descendants, they would have formed most interesting and valuable studies in folk-tradition, and its ability to preserve the record of events long passed. It is worth while noting that this, or something like this, is what we do actually get in some of the Maori tales in Mr. White's collection above referred to. The value of Lord Archibald Campbell's sagas falls short of those in that they present only one version; but in saying this I am not pointing out their defect so much as laying stress on the remarkable character of Mr. White's work. Other contents of the *Waifs and Strays* are variants of well-known fairy tales, stories of the Bruce and of Michael Scott, and the questions put by Finn to the maiden. Mr. Alfred Nutt's wide

acquaintance with Celtic traditions has enabled him to add some useful notes.

In *From my Verandah in New Guinea*, Mr. Romilly has devoted a chapter to fairy tales, containing some half-dozen specimens, the salient features of which are briefly indicated in Mr. Andrew Lang's preface. I need only say of them that they illustrate the advantage of a wider collection of savage tales.

On the whole, the year will be remembered chiefly for the publication of Mr. Jacobs' essay on *Æsop*, and the distinct advance thereby made towards the solution of some of the questions that perplex us. The new material rendered serviceable is not of first-rate importance except in the case of the Maori traditions.

E. SIDNEY HARTLAND.
