

# **MYTHS AND MYTH-MAKERS**

## **Old Tales and Superstitions Interpreted by Comparative Mythology**

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La mythologie, cette science toute nouvelle, qui nous fait suivre les croyances de nos peres, depuis le berceau du monde jusqu'aux superstitions de nos campagnes.—EDMOND SCHERER

TO MY DEAR FRIEND, WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS, IN REMEMBRANCE OF PLEASANT AUTUMN EVENINGS SPENT AMONG WEREWOLVES AND TROLLS AND NIXIES, I dedicate THIS RECORD OF OUR ADVENTURES.

## **PREFACE.**

IN publishing this somewhat rambling and unsystematic series of papers, in which I have endeavoured to touch briefly upon a great many of the most important points in the study of mythology, I think it right

to observe that, in order to avoid confusing the reader with intricate discussions, I have sometimes cut the matter short, expressing myself with dogmatic definiteness where a sceptical vagueness might perhaps have seemed more becoming. In treating of popular legends and superstitions, the paths of inquiry are circuitous enough, and seldom can we reach a satisfactory conclusion until we have travelled all the way around Robin Hood's barn and back again. I am sure that the reader would not have thanked me for obstructing these crooked lanes with the thorns and brambles of philological and antiquarian discussion, to such an extent as perhaps to make him despair of ever reaching the high road. I have not attempted to review, otherwise than incidentally, the works of Grimm, Muller, Kuhn, Breal, Dasent, and Tylor; nor can I pretend to have added anything of consequence, save now and then some

bit of explanatory comment, to the results obtained by the labour of these scholars; but it has rather been my aim to present these results in such a way as to awaken general interest in them. And accordingly, in dealing with a subject which depends upon philology almost as much as astronomy depends upon mathematics, I have omitted philological considerations wherever it has been possible to do so. Nevertheless, I believe that nothing has been advanced as established which is not now generally admitted by scholars, and that nothing has been advanced as probable for which due evidence cannot be produced. Yet among many points which are proved, and many others which are probable, there must always remain many other facts of which we cannot feel sure that our own explanation is the true one; and the student who endeavours to fathom the primitive thoughts of mankind, as enshrined in mythology, will do well to

bear in mind the modest words of Jacob Grimm,—himself the greatest scholar and thinker who has ever dealt with this class of subjects,—"I shall indeed interpret all that I can, but I cannot interpret all that I should like."

PETERSHAM, September 6, 1872.

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## MYTHS AND MYTH-MAKERS.

### I. THE ORIGINS OF FOLK-LORE.

FEW mediaeval heroes are so widely known as William Tell. His exploits have been celebrated by one of the greatest poets and one of the most popular musicians of modern times. They are doubtless familiar to many who have never heard of Stauffacher or Winkelried, who are quite ignorant of the prowess of Roland, and to whom Arthur and Lancelot, nay, even Charlemagne, are but empty names.

Nevertheless, in spite of his vast reputation, it is very likely that no such person as William Tell ever existed, and it is certain that the story of his shooting the apple from his son's head has no historical value whatever. In spite of the wrath of unlearned but patriotic Swiss, especially of those of the cicerone class, this conclusion is forced upon us as soon as we begin to study the legend in accordance with the canons of modern historical criticism. It is useless to point to Tell's lime-tree, standing to-day in the centre of the market-place at Altdorf, or to quote for our confusion his crossbow preserved in the arsenal at Zurich, as unimpeachable witnesses to the truth of the story. It is in vain that we are told, "The bricks are alive to this day to testify to it; therefore, deny it not." These proofs are not more valid than the handkerchief of St. Veronica, or the fragments of the true cross. For if relics are to be received as evidence, we

must needs admit the truth of every miracle narrated by the Bollandists. The earliest work which makes any allusion to the adventures of William Tell is the chronicle of the younger Melchior Russ, written in 1482. As the shooting of the apple was supposed to have taken place in 1296, this leaves an interval of one hundred and eighty-six years, during which neither a Tell, nor a William, nor the apple, nor the cruelty of Gessler, received any mention. It may also be observed, parenthetically, that the charters of Kussenach, when examined, show that no man by the name of Gessler ever ruled there. The chroniclers of the fifteenth century, Faber and Hammerlin, who minutely describe the tyrannical acts by which the Duke of Austria goaded the Swiss to rebellion, do not once mention Tell's name, or betray the slightest acquaintance with his exploits or with his existence. In the Zurich chronicle of 1479

he is not alluded to. But we have still better negative evidence. John of Winterthur, one of the best chroniclers of the Middle Ages, was living at the time of the battle of Morgarten (1315), at which his father was present. He tells us how, on the evening of that dreadful day, he saw Duke Leopold himself in his flight from the fatal field, half dead with fear. He describes, with the loving minuteness of a contemporary, all the incidents of the Swiss revolution, but nowhere does he say a word about William Tell. This is sufficiently conclusive. These mediaeval chroniclers, who never failed to go out of their way after a bit of the epigrammatic and marvellous, who thought far more of a pointed story than of historical credibility, would never have kept silent about the adventures of Tell, if they had known anything about them.

After this, it is not surprising to find that no two authors who describe the deeds of

William Tell agree in the details of topography and chronology. Such discrepancies never fail to confront us when we leave the solid ground of history and begin to deal with floating legends. Yet, if the story be not historical, what could have been its origin? To answer this question we must considerably expand the discussion.

The first author of any celebrity who doubted the story of William Tell was Guillimann, in his work on Swiss Antiquities, published in 1598. He calls the story a pure fable, but, nevertheless, eating his words, concludes by proclaiming his belief in it, because the tale is so popular! Undoubtedly he acted a wise part; for, in 1760, as we are told, Uriel Freudenberger was condemned by the canton of Uri to be burnt alive, for publishing his opinion that the legend of Tell had a Danish origin. [1](#)

The bold heretic was substantially right, however, like so many other heretics, earlier and later. The Danish account of Tell is given as follows, by Saxo Grammaticus:—

"A certain Palnatoki, for some time among King Harold's body-guard, had made his bravery odious to very many of his fellow-soldiers by the zeal with which he surpassed them in the discharge of his duty. This man once, when talking tipsily over his cups, had boasted that he was so skilled an archer that he could hit the smallest apple placed a long way off on a wand at the first shot; which talk, caught up at first by the ears of backbiters, soon came to the hearing of the king. Now, mark how the wickedness of the king turned the confidence of the sire to the peril of the son, by commanding that this dearest pledge of his life should be placed instead of the wand, with a threat that, unless the author of this promise could

strike off the apple at the first flight of the arrow, he should pay the penalty of his empty boasting by the loss of his head. The king's command forced the soldier to perform more than he had promised, and what he had said, reported, by the tongues of slanderers, bound him to accomplish what he had NOT said. Yet did not his sterling courage, though caught in the snare of slander, suffer him to lay aside his firmness of heart; nay, he accepted the trial the more readily because it was hard. So Palnatoki warned the boy urgently when he took his stand to await the coming of the hurtling arrow with calm ears and unbent head, lest, by a slight turn of his body, he should defeat the practised skill of the bowman; and, taking further counsel to prevent his fear, he turned away his face, lest he should be scared at the sight of the weapon. Then, taking three arrows from the quiver, he struck the mark given him with the first he

fitted to the string..... But Palnatoki, when asked by the king why he had taken more arrows from the quiver, when it had been settled that he should only try the fortune of the bow ONCE, made answer, 'That I might avenge on thee the swerving of the first by the points of the rest, lest perchance my innocence might have been punished, while your violence escaped scot-free.'" [2](#)

This ruthless king is none other than the famous Harold Blue-tooth, and the occurrence is placed by Saxo in the year 950. But the story appears not only in Denmark, but in England, in Norway, in Finland and Russia, and in Persia, and there is some reason for supposing that it was known in India. In Norway we have the adventures of Pansa the Splay-footed, and of Hemingr, a vassal of Harold Hardrada, who invaded England in 1066. In Iceland there is the kindred legend of Egil brother of Wayland Smith, the Norse

Vulcan. In England there is the ballad of William of Cloudeslee, which supplied Scott with many details of the archery scene in "Ivanhoe." Here, says the dauntless Bowman,

"I have a sonne seven years old;  
Hee is to me full deere;  
I will tye him to a stake—

All shall see him that bee here—  
And lay an apple upon his head,  
And goe six paces him froe,  
And I myself with a broad arrowe  
Shall cleave the apple in towe."

In the *Malleus Maleficarum* a similar story is told of Puncher, a famous magician on the Upper Rhine. The great ethnologist Castren dug up the same legend in Finland. It is common, as Dr. Dasent observes, to the Turks and Mongolians; "and a legend of the wild Samoyeds, who never heard of Tell or saw a book in their lives relates it, chapter and verse, of one of their marksmen." Finally, in the Persian

poem of Farid-Uddin Attar, born in 1119, we read a story of a prince who shoots an apple from the head of a beloved page. In all these stories, names and motives of course differ; but all contain the same essential incidents. It is always an unerring archer who, at the capricious command of a tyrant, shoots from the head of some one dear to him a small object, be it an apple, a nut, or a piece of coin. The archer always provides himself with a second arrow, and, when questioned as to the use he intended to make of his extra weapon, the invariable reply is, "To kill thee, tyrant, had I slain my son." Now, when a marvellous occurrence is said to have happened everywhere, we may feel sure that it never happened anywhere. Popular fancies propagate themselves indefinitely, but historical events, especially the striking and dramatic ones, are rarely repeated. The facts here collected lead

inevitably to the conclusion that the Tell myth was known, in its general features, to our Aryan ancestors, before ever they left their primitive dwelling-place in Central Asia.

It may, indeed, be urged that some one of these wonderful marksmen may really have existed and have performed the feat recorded in the legend; and that his true story, carried about by hearsay tradition from one country to another and from age to age, may have formed the theme for all the variations above mentioned, just as the fables of La Fontaine were patterned after those of AEsop and Phaedrus, and just as many of Chaucer's tales were consciously adopted from Boccaccio. No doubt there has been a good deal of borrowing and lending among the legends of different peoples, as well as among the words of different languages; and possibly even some picturesque fragment of early history may have now and then been

carried about the world in this manner. But as the philologist can with almost unerring certainty distinguish between the native and the imported words in any Aryan language, by examining their phonetic peculiarities, so the student of popular traditions, though working with far less perfect instruments, can safely assert, with reference to a vast number of legends, that they cannot have been obtained by any process of conscious borrowing. The difficulties inseparable from any such hypothesis will become more and more apparent as we proceed to examine a few other stories current in different portions of the Aryan domain. As the Swiss must give up his Tell, so must the Welshman be deprived of his brave dog Gellert, over whose cruel fate I confess to having shed more tears than I should regard as well bestowed upon the misfortunes of many a human hero of romance. Every one knows how the dear

old brute killed the wolf which had come to devour Llewellyn's child, and how the prince, returning home and finding the cradle upset and the dog's mouth dripping blood, hastily slew his benefactor, before the cry of the child from behind the cradle and the sight of the wolf's body had rectified his error. To this day the visitor to Snowdon is told the touching story, and shown the place, called Beth-Gellert, [3](#) where the dog's grave is still to be seen. Nevertheless, the story occurs in the fireside lore of nearly every Aryan people. Under the Gellert-form it started in the Panchatantra, a collection of Sanskrit fables; and it has even been discovered in a Chinese work which dates from A. D. 668. Usually the hero is a dog, but sometimes a falcon, an ichneumon, an insect, or even a man. In Egypt it takes the following comical shape: "A Wali once smashed a pot full of herbs which a cook had prepared. The exasperated cook

thrashed the well-intentioned but unfortunate Wali within an inch of his life, and when he returned, exhausted with his efforts at belabouring the man, to examine the broken pot, he discovered amongst the herbs a poisonous snake." [4](#) Now this story of the Wali is as manifestly identical with the legend of Gellert as the English word FATHER is with the Latin pater; but as no one would maintain that the word father is in any sense derived from pater, so it would be impossible to represent either the Welsh or the Egyptian legend as a copy of the other. Obviously the conclusion is forced upon us that the stories, like the words, are related collaterally, having descended from a common ancestral legend, or having been suggested by one and the same primeval idea.

Closely connected with the Gellert myth are the stories of Faithful John and of Rama and Luxman. In the German story,

Faithful John accompanies the prince, his master, on a journey in quest of a beautiful maiden, whom he wishes to make his bride. As they are carrying her home across the seas, Faithful John hears some crows, whose language he understands, foretelling three dangers impending over the prince, from which his friend can save him only by sacrificing his own life. As soon as they land, a horse will spring toward the king, which, if he mounts it, will bear him away from his bride forever; but whoever shoots the horse, and tells the king the reason, will be turned into stone from toe to knee. Then, before the wedding a bridal garment will lie before the king, which, if he puts it on, will burn him like the Nessos-shirt of Herakles; but whoever throws the shirt into the fire and tells the king the reason, will be turned into stone from knee to heart. Finally, during the wedding-festivities, the queen will suddenly fall in a

swoon, and "unless some one takes three drops of blood from her right breast she will die"; but whoever does so, and tells the king the reason, will be turned into stone from head to foot. Thus forewarned, Faithful John saves his master from all these dangers; but the king misinterprets his motive in bleeding his wife, and orders him to be hanged. On the scaffold he tells his story, and while the king humbles himself in an agony of remorse, his noble friend is turned into stone.

In the South Indian tale Luxman accompanies Rama, who is carrying home his bride. Luxman overhears two owls talking about the perils that await his master and mistress. First he saves them from being crushed by the falling limb of a banyan-tree, and then he drags them away from an arch which immediately after gives way. By and by, as they rest under a tree, the king falls asleep. A cobra creeps up to the queen, and Luxman kills

it with his sword; but, as the owls had foretold, a drop of the cobra's blood falls on the queen's forehead. As Luxman licks off the blood, the king starts up, and, thinking that his vizier is kissing his wife, upbraids him with his ingratitude, whereupon Luxman, through grief at this unkind interpretation of his conduct, is turned into stone. [5](#)

For further illustration we may refer to the Norse tale of the "Giant who had no Heart in his Body," as related by Dr. Dasent. This burly magician having turned six brothers with their wives into stone, the seventh brother—the crafty Boots or many-witted Odysseus of European folklore—sets out to obtain vengeance if not reparation for the evil done to his kith and kin. On the way he shows the kindness of his nature by rescuing from destruction a raven, a salmon, and a wolf. The grateful wolf carries him on his back to the giant's castle, where the lovely princess whom

the monster keeps in irksome bondage promises to act, in behalf of Boots, the part of Delilah, and to find out, if possible, where her lord keeps his heart. The giant, like the Jewish hero, finally succumbs to feminine blandishments. "Far, far away in a lake lies an island; on that island stands a church; in that church is a well; in that well swims a duck; in that duck there is an egg; and in that egg there lies my heart, you darling." Boots, thus instructed, rides on the wolf's back to the island; the raven flies to the top of the steeple and gets the church-keys; the salmon dives to the bottom of the well, and brings up the egg from the place where the duck had dropped it; and so Boots becomes master of the situation. As he squeezes the egg, the giant, in mortal terror, begs and prays for his life, which Boots promises to spare on condition that his brothers and their brides should be released from their enchantment. But when all has been duly

effected, the treacherous youth squeezes the egg in two, and the giant instantly bursts.

The same story has lately been found in Southern India, and is published in Miss Frere's remarkable collection of tales entitled "Old Deccan Days." In the Hindu version the seven daughters of a rajah, with their husbands, are transformed into stone by the great magician Punchkin,—all save the youngest daughter, whom Punchkin keeps shut up in a tower until by threats or coaxing he may prevail upon her to marry him. But the captive princess leaves a son at home in the cradle, who grows up to manhood unmolested, and finally undertakes the rescue of his family. After long and weary wanderings he finds his mother shut up in Punchkin's tower, and persuades her to play the part of the princess in the Norse legend. The trick is equally successful. "Hundreds of thousands of miles away there lies a

desolate country covered with thick jungle. In the midst of the jungle grows a circle of palm-trees, and in the centre of the circle stand six jars full of water, piled one above another; below the sixth jar is a small cage which contains a little green parrot; on the life of the parrot depends my life, and if the parrot is killed I must die." [6](#) The young prince finds the place guarded by a host of dragons, but some eaglets whom he has saved from a devouring serpent in the course of his journey take him on their crossed wings and carry him to the place where the jars are standing. He instantly overturns the jars, and seizing the parrot, obtains from the terrified magician full reparation. As soon as his own friends and a stately procession of other royal or noble victims have been set at liberty, he proceeds to pull the parrot to pieces. As the wings and legs come away, so tumble off the arms and legs of the magician; and finally as

the prince wrings the bird's neck,  
Punchkin twists his own head round and  
dies.

The story is also told in the highlands of  
Scotland, and some portions of it will be  
recognized by the reader as incidents in  
the Arabian tale of the Princess Parizade.  
The union of close correspondence in  
conception with manifest independence in  
the management of the details of these  
stories is striking enough, but it is a  
phenomenon with which we become quite  
familiar as we proceed in the study of  
Aryan popular literature. The legend of the  
Master Thief is no less remarkable than  
that of Punchkin. In the Scandinavian tale  
the Thief, wishing to get possession of a  
farmer's ox, carefully hangs himself to a  
tree by the roadside. The farmer, passing  
by with his ox, is indeed struck by the  
sight of the dangling body, but thinks it  
none of his business, and does not stop to  
interfere. No sooner has he passed than

the Thief lets himself down, and running swiftly along a by-path, hangs himself with equal precaution to a second tree. This time the farmer is astonished and puzzled; but when for the third time he meets the same unwonted spectacle, thinking that three suicides in one morning are too much for easy credence, he leaves his ox and runs back to see whether the other two bodies are really where he thought he saw them. While he is framing hypotheses of witchcraft by which to explain the phenomenon, the Thief gets away with the ox. In the Hitopadesa the story receives a finer point. "A Brahman, who had vowed a sacrifice, went to the market to buy a goat. Three thieves saw him, and wanted to get hold of the goat. They stationed themselves at intervals on the high road. When the Brahman, who carried the goat on his back, approached the first thief, the thief said, 'Brahman, why do you carry a

dog on your back?' The Brahman replied, 'It is not a dog, it is a goat.' A little while after he was accosted by the second thief, who said, 'Brahman, why do you carry a dog on your back?' The Brahman felt perplexed, put the goat down, examined it, took it up again, and walked on. Soon after he was stopped by the third thief, who said, 'Brahman, why do you carry a dog on your back?' Then the Brahman was frightened, threw down the goat, and walked home to perform his ablutions for having touched an unclean animal. The thieves took the goat and ate it." The adroitness of the Norse King in "The Three Princesses of Whiteland" shows but poorly in comparison with the keen psychological insight and cynical sarcasm of these Hindu sharpers. In the course of his travels this prince met three brothers fighting on a lonely moor. They had been fighting for a hundred years about the possession of a hat, a cloak, and a pair of boots, which

would make the wearer invisible, and convey him instantly whithersoever he might wish to go. The King consents to act as umpire, provided he may once try the virtue of the magic garments; but once clothed in them, of course he disappears, leaving the combatants to sit down and suck their thumbs. Now in the "Sea of Streams of Story," written in the twelfth century by Somadeva of Cashmere, the Indian King Putraka, wandering in the Vindhya Mountains, similarly discomfits two brothers who are quarrelling over a pair of shoes, which are like the sandals of Hermes, and a bowl which has the same virtue as Aladdin's lamp. "Why don't you run a race for them?" suggests Putraka; and, as the two blockheads start furiously off, he quietly picks up the bowl, ties on the shoes, and flies away! [7](#)

It is unnecessary to cite further illustrations. The tales here quoted are fair samples of the remarkable

correspondence which holds good through all the various sections of Aryan folk-lore. The hypothesis of lateral diffusion, as we may call it, manifestly fails to explain coincidences which are maintained on such an immense scale. It is quite credible that one nation may have borrowed from another a solitary legend of an archer who performs the feats of Tell and Palnatoki; but it is utterly incredible that ten thousand stories, constituting the entire mass of household mythology throughout a dozen separate nations, should have been handed from one to another in this way. No one would venture to suggest that the old grannies of Iceland and Norway, to whom we owe such stories as the Master Thief and the Princesses of Whiteland, had ever read Somadeva or heard of the treasures of Rhampsinitos. A large proportion of the tales with which we are dealing were utterly unknown to literature until they were taken down by

Grimm and Frere and Castren and Campbell, from the lips of ignorant peasants, nurses, or house-servants, in Germany and Hindustan, in Siberia and Scotland. Yet, as Mr. Cox observes, these old men and women, sitting by the chimney-corner and somewhat timidly recounting to the literary explorer the stories which they had learned in childhood from their own nurses and grandmas, "reproduce the most subtle turns of thought and expression, and an endless series of complicated narratives, in which the order of incidents and the words of the speakers are preserved with a fidelity nowhere paralleled in the oral tradition of historical events. It may safely be said that no series of stories introduced in the form of translations from other languages could ever thus have filtered down into the lowest strata of society, and thence have sprung up again, like Antaios, with greater energy and heightened

beauty." There is indeed no alternative for us but to admit that these fireside tales have been handed down from parent to child for more than a hundred generations; that the primitive Aryan cottager, as he took his evening meal of yava and sipped his fermented mead, listened with his children to the stories of Boots and Cinderella and the Master Thief, in the days when the squat Laplander was master of Europe and the dark-skinned Sudra was as yet unmolested in the Punjab. Only such community of origin can explain the community in character between the stories told by the Aryan's descendants, from the jungles of Ceylon to the highlands of Scotland.

This conclusion essentially modifies our view of the origin and growth of a legend like that of William Tell. The case of the Tell legend is radically different from the case of the blindness of Belisarius or the burning of the Alexandrian library by order

of Omar. The latter are isolated stories or beliefs; the former is one of a family of stories or beliefs. The latter are untrustworthy traditions of doubtful events; but in dealing with the former, we are face to face with a MYTH.

What, then, is a myth? The theory of Euhemeros, which was so fashionable a century ago, in the days of the Abbe Banier, has long since been so utterly abandoned that to refute it now is but to slay the slain. The peculiarity of this theory was that it cut away all the extraordinary features of a given myth, wherein dwelt its inmost significance, and to the dull and useless residuum accorded the dignity of primeval history. In this way the myth was lost without compensation, and the student, in seeking good digestible bread, found but the hardest of pebbles. Considered merely as a pretty story, the legend of the golden fruit watched by the dragon in the garden of

the Hesperides is not without its value. But what merit can there be in the gratuitous statement which, degrading the grand Doric hero to a level with any vulgar fruit-stealer, makes Herakles break a close with force and arms, and carry off a crop of oranges which had been guarded by mastiffs? It is still worse when we come to the more homely folk-lore with which the student of mythology now has to deal. The theories of Banier, which limped and stumbled awkwardly enough when it was only a question of Hermes and Minos and Odin, have fallen never to rise again since the problems of Punchkin and Cinderella and the Blue Belt have begun to demand solution. The conclusion has been gradually forced upon the student, that the marvellous portion of these old stories is no illegitimate extrescence, but was rather the pith and centre of the whole, [8](#) in days when there was no supernatural, because it had not yet been

discovered that there was such a thing as nature. The religious myths of antiquity and the fireside legends of ancient and modern times have their common root in the mental habits of primeval humanity. They are the earliest recorded utterances of men concerning the visible phenomena of the world into which they were born. That prosaic and coldly rational temper with which modern men are wont to regard natural phenomena was in early times unknown. We have come to regard all events as taking place regularly, in strict conformity to law: whatever our official theories may be, we instinctively take this view of things. But our primitive ancestors knew nothing about laws of nature, nothing about physical forces, nothing about the relations of cause and effect, nothing about the necessary regularity of things. There was a time in the history of mankind when these things had never been inquired into, and when

no generalizations about them had been framed, tested, or established. There was no conception of an order of nature, and therefore no distinct conception of a supernatural order of things. There was no belief in miracles as infractions of natural laws, but there was a belief in the occurrence of wonderful events too mighty to have been brought about by ordinary means. There was an unlimited capacity for believing and fancying, because fancy and belief had not yet been checked and headed off in various directions by established rules of experience. Physical science is a very late acquisition of the human mind, but we are already sufficiently imbued with it to be almost completely disabled from comprehending the thoughts of our ancestors. "How Finn cosmogonists could have believed the earth and heaven to be made out of a severed egg, the upper concave shell representing heaven, the yolk being earth,

and the crystal surrounding fluid the circumambient ocean, is to us incomprehensible; and yet it remains a fact that they did so regard them. How the Scandinavians could have supposed the mountains to be the mouldering bones of a mighty Jotun, and the earth to be his festering flesh, we cannot conceive; yet such a theory was solemnly taught and accepted. How the ancient Indians could regard the rain-clouds as cows with full udders milked by the winds of heaven is beyond our comprehension, and yet their Veda contains indisputable testimony to the fact that they were so regarded." We have only to read Mr. Baring-Gould's book of "Curious Myths," from which I have just quoted, or to dip into Mr. Thorpe's treatise on "Northern Mythology," to realize how vast is the difference between our standpoint and that from which, in the later Middle Ages, our immediate forefathers regarded things. The frightful superstition

of werewolves is a good instance. In those days it was firmly believed that men could be, and were in the habit of being, transformed into wolves. It was believed that women might bring forth snakes or poodle-dogs. It was believed that if a man had his side pierced in battle, you could cure him by nursing the sword which inflicted the wound. "As late as 1600 a German writer would illustrate a thunder-storm destroying a crop of corn by a picture of a dragon devouring the produce of the field with his flaming tongue and iron teeth."

Now if such was the condition of the human intellect only three or four centuries ago, what must it have been in that dark antiquity when not even the crudest generalizations of Greek or of Oriental science had been reached? The same mighty power of imagination which now, restrained and guided by scientific principles, leads us to discoveries and

inventions, must then have wildly run riot in mythologic fictions whereby to explain the phenomena of nature. Knowing nothing whatever of physical forces, of the blind steadiness with which a given effect invariably follows its cause, the men of primeval antiquity could interpret the actions of nature only after the analogy of their own actions. The only force they knew was the force of which they were directly conscious,—the force of will. Accordingly, they imagined all the outward world to be endowed with volition, and to be directed by it. They personified everything,—sky, clouds, thunder, sun, moon, ocean, earthquake, whirlwind. [9](#) The comparatively enlightened Athenians of the age of Perikles addressed the sky as a person, and prayed to it to rain upon their gardens. [10](#) And for calling the moon a mass of dead matter, Anaxagoras came near losing his life. To the ancients the

moon was not a lifeless ball of stones and clods: it was the horned huntress, Artemis, coursing through the upper ether, or bathing herself in the clear lake; or it was Aphrodite, protectress of lovers, born of the sea-foam in the East near Cyprus. The clouds were no bodies of vaporized water: they were cows with swelling udders, driven to the milking by Hermes, the summer wind; or great sheep with moist fleeces, slain by the unerring arrows of Bellerophon, the sun; or swan-maidens, flitting across the firmament, Valkyries hovering over the battle-field to receive the souls of falling heroes; or, again, they were mighty mountains piled one above another, in whose cavernous recesses the divining-wand of the storm-god Thor revealed hidden treasures. The yellow-haired sun, Phoibos, drove westerly all day in his flaming chariot; or perhaps, as Meleagros, retired for a while in disgust from the sight of men; wedded at

eventide the violet light (Oinone, Iole), which he had forsaken in the morning; sank, as Herakles, upon a blazing funeral-pyre, or, like Agamemnon, perished in a blood-stained bath; or, as the fish-god, Dagon, swam nightly through the subterranean waters, to appear eastward again at daybreak. Sometimes Phaethon, his rash, inexperienced son, would take the reins and drive the solar chariot too near the earth, causing the fruits to perish, and the grass to wither, and the wells to dry up. Sometimes, too, the great all-seeing divinity, in his wrath at the impiety of men, would shoot down his scorching arrows, causing pestilence to spread over the land. Still other conceptions clustered around the sun. Now it was the wonderful treasure-house, into which no one could look and live; and again it was Ixion himself, bound on the fiery wheel in punishment for violence offered to Here, the queen of the blue air.

This theory of ancient mythology is not only beautiful and plausible, it is, in its essential points, demonstrated. It stands on as firm a foundation as Grimm's law in philology, or the undulatory theory in molecular physics. It is philology which has here enabled us to read the primitive thoughts of mankind. A large number of the names of Greek gods and heroes have no meaning in the Greek language; but these names occur also in Sanskrit, with plain physical meanings. In the Veda we find Zeus or Jupiter (Dyaus-pitar) meaning the sky, and Sarameias or Hermes, meaning the breeze of a summer morning. We find Athene (Ahana), meaning the light of daybreak; and we are thus enabled to understand why the Greek described her as sprung from the forehead of Zeus. There too we find Helena (Sarama), the fickle twilight, whom the Panis, or night-demons, who serve as the prototypes of the Hellenic Paris, strive to

seduce from her allegiance to the solar monarch. Even Achilles (Aharyu) again confronts us, with his captive Briseis (Brisaya's offspring); and the fierce Kerberos (Carvara) barks on Vedic ground in strict conformity to the laws of phonetics. [11](#) Now, when the Hindu talked about Father Dyaus, or the sleek kine of Siva, he thought of the personified sky and clouds; he had not outgrown the primitive mental habits of the race. But the Greek, in whose language these physical meanings were lost, had long before the Homeric epoch come to regard Zeus and Hermes, Athene, Helena, Paris, and Achilles, as mere persons, and in most cases the originals of his myths were completely forgotten. In the Vedas the Trojan War is carried on in the sky, between the bright deities and the demons of night; but the Greek poet, influenced perhaps by some dim historical tradition, has located the contest on the

shore of the Hellespont, and in his mind the actors, though superhuman, are still completely anthropomorphic. Of the true origin of his epic story he knew as little as Euhemeros, or Lord Bacon, or the Abbe Banier.

After these illustrations, we shall run no risk of being misunderstood when we define a myth as, in its origin, an explanation, by the uncivilized mind, of some natural phenomenon; not an allegory, not an esoteric symbol,—for the ingenuity is wasted which strives to detect in myths the remnants of a refined primeval science,—but an explanation. Primitive men had no profound science to perpetuate by means of allegory, nor were they such sorry pedants as to talk in riddles when plain language would serve their purpose. Their minds, we may be sure, worked like our own, and when they spoke of the far-darting sun-god, they meant just what they said, save that

where we propound a scientific theorem, they constructed a myth. [12](#) A thing is said to be explained when it is classified with other things with which we are already acquainted. That is the only kind of explanation of which the highest science is capable. We explain the origin, progress, and ending of a thunder-storm, when we classify the phenomena presented by it along with other more familiar phenomena of vaporization and condensation. But the primitive man explained the same thing to his own satisfaction when he had classified it along with the well-known phenomena of human volition, by constructing a theory of a great black dragon pierced by the unerring arrows of a heavenly archer. We consider the nature of the stars to a certain extent explained when they are classified as suns; but the Mohammedan compiler of the "Mishkat-ul-Ma'sabih" was content to explain them as missiles useful for stoning

the Devil! Now, as soon as the old Greek, forgetting the source of his conception, began to talk of a human Oidipous slaying a leonine Sphinx, and as soon as the Mussulman began, if he ever did, to tell his children how the Devil once got a good pelting with golden bullets, then both the one and the other were talking pure mythology.

We are justified, accordingly, in distinguishing between a myth and a legend. Though the words are etymologically parallel, and though in ordinary discourse we may use them interchangeably, yet when strict accuracy is required, it is well to keep them separate. And it is perhaps needless, save for the sake of completeness, to say that both are to be distinguished from stories which have been designedly fabricated. The distinction may occasionally be subtle, but is usually broad enough. Thus, the story that Philip II. murdered his wife

Elizabeth, is a misrepresentation; but the story that the same Elizabeth was culpably enamoured of her step-son Don Carlos, is a legend. The story that Queen Eleanor saved the life of her husband, Edward I., by sucking a wound made in his arm by a poisoned arrow, is a legend; but the story that Hercules killed a great robber, Cacus, who had stolen his cattle, conceals a physical meaning, and is a myth. While a legend is usually confined to one or two localities, and is told of not more than one or two persons, it is characteristic of a myth that it is spread, in one form or another, over a large part of the earth, the leading incidents remaining constant, while the names and often the motives vary with each locality. This is partly due to the immense antiquity of myths, dating as they do from a period when many nations, now widely separated, had not yet ceased to form one people. Thus many elements of the myth of the Trojan War

are to be found in the Rig-Veda; and the myth of St. George and the Dragon is found in all the Aryan nations. But we must not always infer that myths have a common descent, merely because they resemble each other. We must remember that the proceedings of the uncultivated mind are more or less alike in all latitudes, and that the same phenomenon might in various places independently give rise to similar stories. [13](#) The myth of Jack and the Beanstalk is found not only among people of Aryan descent, but also among the Zulus of South Africa, and again among the American Indians. Whenever we can trace a story in this way from one end of the world to the other, or through a whole family of kindred nations, we are pretty safe in assuming that we are dealing with a true myth, and not with a mere legend.

Applying these considerations to the Tell myth, we at once obtain a valid

explanation of its origin. The conception of infallible skill in archery, which underlies such a great variety of myths and popular fairy-tales, is originally derived from the inevitable victory of the sun over his enemies, the demons of night, winter, and tempest. Arrows and spears which never miss their mark, swords from whose blow no armour can protect, are invariably the weapons of solar divinities or heroes. The shafts of Bellerophon never fail to slay the black demon of the rain-cloud, and the bolt of Phoibos Chrysaor deals sure destruction to the serpent of winter. Odysseus, warring against the impious night-heroes, who have endeavoured throughout ten long years or hours of darkness to seduce from her allegiance his twilight-bride, the weaver of the never-finished web of violet clouds,—Odysseus, stripped of his beggar's raiment and endowed with fresh youth and beauty by the dawn-goddess, Athene, engages in no

doubtful conflict as he raises the bow which none but himself can bend. Nor is there less virtue in the spear of Achilles, in the swords of Perseus and Sigurd, in Roland's stout blade Durandal, or in the brand Excalibur, with which Sir Bedivere was so loath to part. All these are solar weapons, and so, too, are the arrows of Tell and Palnatoki, Egil and Hemingr, and William of Cloudeslee, whose surname proclaims him an inhabitant of the Phaiakian land. William Tell, whether of Cloudland or of Altdorf, is the last reflection of the beneficent divinity of daytime and summer, constrained for a while to obey the caprice of the powers of cold and darkness, as Apollo served Laomedon, and Herakles did the bidding of Eurystheus. His solar character is well preserved, even in the sequel of the Swiss legend, in which he appears no less skilful as a steersman than as an archer, and in which, after traversing, like Dagon, the

tempestuous sea of night, he leaps at daybreak in regained freedom upon the land, and strikes down the oppressor who has held him in bondage.

But the sun, though ever victorious in open contest with his enemies, is nevertheless not invulnerable. At times he succumbs to treachery, is bound by the frost-giants, or slain by the demons of darkness. The poisoned shirt of the cloud-fiend Nessos is fatal even to the mighty Herakles, and the prowess of Siegfried at last fails to save him from the craft of Hagen. In Achilles and Meleagros we see the unhappy solar hero doomed to toil for the profit of others, and to be cut off by an untimely death. The more fortunate Odysseus, who lives to a ripe old age, and triumphs again and again over all the powers of darkness, must nevertheless yield to the craving desire to visit new cities and look upon new works of strange men, until at last he is swallowed up in

the western sea. That the unrivalled navigator of the celestial ocean should disappear beneath the western waves is as intelligible as it is that the horned Venus or Astarte should rise from the sea in the far east. It is perhaps less obvious that winter should be so frequently symbolized as a thorn or sharp instrument. Achilles dies by an arrow-wound in the heel; the thigh of Adonis is pierced by the boar's tusk, while Odysseus escapes with an ugly scar, which afterwards secures his recognition by his old servant, the dawn-nymph Eurykleia; Sigurd is slain by a thorn, and Balder by a sharp sprig of mistletoe; and in the myth of the Sleeping Beauty, the earth-goddess sinks into her long winter sleep when pricked by the point of the spindle. In her cosmic palace, all is locked in icy repose, naught thriving save the ivy which defies the cold, until the kiss of the golden-

haired sun-god reawakens life and activity.

The wintry sleep of nature is symbolized in innumerable stories of spell-bound maidens and fair-featured youths, saints, martyrs, and heroes. Sometimes it is the sun, sometimes the earth, that is supposed to slumber. Among the American Indians the sun-god Michabo is said to sleep through the winter months; and at the time of the falling leaves, by way of composing himself for his nap, he fills his great pipe and divinely smokes; the blue clouds, gently floating over the landscape, fill the air with the haze of Indian summer. In the Greek myth the shepherd Endymion preserves his freshness in a perennial slumber. The German Siegfried, pierced by the thorn of winter, is sleeping until he shall be again called forth to fight. In Switzerland, by the Vierwald-stattersee, three Tells are awaiting the hour when their country shall

again need to be delivered from the oppressor. Charlemagne is reposing in the Untersberg, sword in hand, waiting for the coming of Antichrist; Olger Danske similarly dreams away his time in Avallon; and in a lofty mountain in Thuringia, the great Emperor Yrederic Barbarossa slumbers with his knights around him, until the time comes for him to sally forth and raise Germany to the first rank among the kingdoms of the world. The same story is told of Olaf Tryggvesson, of Don Sebastian of Portugal, and of the Moorish King Boabdil. The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, having taken refuge in a cave from the persecutions of the heathen Decius, slept one hundred and sixty-four years, and awoke to find a Christian emperor on the throne. The monk of Hildesheim, in the legend so beautifully rendered by Longfellow, doubting how with God a thousand years ago could be as yesterday, listened three minutes

entranced by the singing of a bird in the forest, and found, on waking from his reverie, that a thousand years had flown. To the same family of legends belong the notion that St. John is sleeping at Ephesus until the last days of the world; the myth of the enchanter Merlin, spell-bound by Vivien; the story of the Cretan philosopher Epimenides, who dozed away fifty-seven years in a cave; and Rip Van Winkle's nap in the Catskills. [14](#)

We might go on almost indefinitely citing household tales of wonderful sleepers; but, on the principle of the association of opposites, we are here reminded of sundry cases of marvellous life and wakefulness, illustrated in the Wandering Jew; the dancers of Kolbeck; Joseph of Arimathaea with the Holy Grail; the Wild Huntsman who to all eternity chases the red deer; the Captain of the Phantom Ship; the classic Tithonos; and the Man in the Moon.

The lunar spots have afforded a rich subject for the play of human fancy. Plutarch wrote a treatise on them, but the myth-makers had been before him. "Every one," says Mr. Baring-Gould, "knows that the moon is inhabited by a man with a bundle of sticks on his back, who has been exiled thither for many centuries, and who is so far off that he is beyond the reach of death. He has once visited this earth, if the nursery rhyme is to be credited when it asserts that

'The Man in the Moon  
Came down too soon  
And asked his way to Norwich';

but whether he ever reached that city the same authority does not state." Dante calls him Cain; Chaucer has him put up there as a punishment for theft, and gives him a thorn-bush to carry; Shakespeare also loads him with the thorns, but by way of compensation gives him a dog for a companion. Ordinarily, however, his

offence is stated to have been, not stealing, but Sabbath-breaking,—an idea derived from the Old Testament. Like the man mentioned in the Book of Numbers, he is caught gathering sticks on the Sabbath; and, as an example to mankind, he is condemned to stand forever in the moon, with his bundle on his back.

Instead of a dog, one German version places with him a woman, whose crime was churning butter on Sunday. She carries her butter-tub; and this brings us to Mother Goose again:—

"Jack and Jill went up the hill

To get a pail of water.

Jack fell down and broke his crown,

And Jill came tumbling after."

This may read like mere nonsense; but there is a point of view from which it may be safely said that there is very little absolute nonsense in the world. The story of Jack and Jill is a venerable one. In Icelandic mythology we read that Jack and

Jill were two children whom the moon once kidnapped and carried up to heaven. They had been drawing water in a bucket, which they were carrying by means of a pole placed across their shoulders; and in this attitude they have stood to the present day in the moon. Even now this explanation of the moon-spots is to be heard from the mouths of Swedish peasants. They fall away one after the other, as the moon wanes, and their water-pail symbolizes the supposed connection of the moon with rain-storms. Other forms of the myth occur in Sanskrit. The moon-goddess, or Aphrodite, of the ancient Germans, was called Horsel, or Ursula, who figures in Christian mediaeval mythology as a persecuted saint, attended by a troop of eleven thousand virgins, who all suffer martyrdom as they journey from England to Cologne. The meaning of the myth is obvious. In German mythology, England is the Phaiakian land of clouds

and phantoms; the succubus, leaving her lover before daybreak, excuses herself on the plea that "her mother is calling her in England." [15](#)The companions of Ursula are the pure stars, who leave the cloudland and suffer martyrdom as they approach the regions of day. In the Christian tradition, Ursula is the pure Artemis; but, in accordance with her ancient character, she is likewise the sensual Aphrodite, who haunts the Venusberg; and this brings us to the story of Tannhauser.

The Horselberg, or mountain of Venus, lies in Thuringia, between Eisenach and Gotha. High up on its slope yawns a cavern, the Horselloch, or cave of Venus within which is heard a muffled roar, as of subterranean water. From this cave, in old times, the frightened inhabitants of the neighbouring valley would hear at night wild moans and cries issuing, mingled with peals of demon-like laughter. Here it was believed that Venus held her court; "and

there were not a few who declared that they had seen fair forms of female beauty beckoning them from the mouth of the chasm." [16](#) Tannhauser was a Frankish knight and famous minnesinger, who, travelling at twilight past the Horselberg, "saw a white glimmering figure of matchless beauty standing before him and beckoning him to her." Leaving his horse, he went up to meet her, whom he knew to be none other than Venus. He descended to her palace in the heart of the mountain, and there passed seven years in careless revelry. Then, stricken with remorse and yearning for another glimpse of the pure light of day, he called in agony upon the Virgin Mother, who took compassion on him and released him. He sought a village church, and to priest after priest confessed his sin, without obtaining absolution, until finally he had recourse to the Pope. But the holy father, horrified at the enormity of his misdoing, declared

that guilt such as his could never be remitted sooner should the staff in his hand grow green and blossom. "Then Tannhauser, full of despair and with his soul darkened, went away, and returned to the only asylum open to him, the Venusberg. But lo! three days after he had gone, Pope Urban discovered that his pastoral staff had put forth buds and had burst into flower. Then he sent messengers after Tannhauser, and they reached the Horsel vale to hear that a wayworn man, with haggard brow and bowed head, had just entered the Horselloch. Since then Tannhauser has not been seen." (p. 201.)

As Mr. Baring-Gould rightly observes, this sad legend, in its Christianized form, is doubtless descriptive of the struggle between the new and the old faiths. The knightly Tannhauser, satiated with pagan sensuality, turns to Christianity for relief, but, repelled by the hypocrisy, pride, and

lack of sympathy of its ministers, gives up in despair, and returns to drown his anxieties in his old debauchery.

But this is not the primitive form of the myth, which recurs in the folk-lore of every people of Aryan descent. Who, indeed, can read it without being at once reminded of Thomas of Erceldoune (or Horsel-hill), entranced by the sorceress of the Eilden; of the nightly visits of Numa to the grove of the nymph Egeria; of Odysseus held captive by the Lady Kalypso; and, last but not least, of the delightful Arabian tale of Prince Ahmed and the Peri Banou? On his westward journey, Odysseus is ensnared and kept in temporary bondage by the amorous nymph of darkness, Kalypso (kalnptw, to veil or cover). So the zone of the moon-goddess Aphrodite inveigles all-seeing Zeus to treacherous slumber on Mount Ida; and by a similar sorcery Tasso's great hero is lulled in unseemly idleness in

Armida's golden paradise, at the western verge of the world. The disappearance of Tannhauser behind the moonlit cliff, lured by Venus Ursula, the pale goddess of night, is a precisely parallel circumstance. But solar and lunar phenomena are by no means the only sources of popular mythology. Opposite my writing-table hangs a quaint German picture, illustrating Goethe's ballad of the Erlking, in which the whole wild pathos of the story is compressed into one supreme moment; we see the fearful, half-gliding rush of the Erlking, his long, spectral arms outstretched to grasp the child, the frantic gallop of the horse, the alarmed father clasping his darling to his bosom in convulsive embrace, the siren-like elves hovering overhead, to lure the little soul with their weird harps. There can be no better illustration than is furnished by this terrible scene of the magic power of mythology to invest the simplest physical

phenomena with the most intense human interest; for the true significance of the whole picture is contained in the father's address to his child,

"Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind;

In durren Blattern sauselt der Wind."

The story of the Piper of Hamelin, well known in the version of Robert Browning, leads to the same conclusion. In 1284 the good people of Hamelin could obtain no rest, night or day, by reason of the direful host of rats which infested their town. One day came a strange man in a bunting-suit, and offered for five hundred guilders to rid the town of the vermin. The people agreed: whereupon the man took out a pipe and piped, and instantly all the rats in town, in an army which blackened the face of the earth, came forth from their haunts, and followed the piper until he piped them to the river Weser, where they all jumped in and were drowned. But as soon as the torment was gone, the

townsfolk refused to pay the piper on the ground that he was evidently a wizard. He went away, vowing vengeance, and on St. John's day reappeared, and putting his pipe to his mouth blew a different air. Whereat all the little, plump, rosy-cheeked, golden-haired children came merrily running after him, their parents standing aghast, not knowing what to do, while he led them up a hill in the neighbourhood. A door opened in the mountain-side, through which he led them in, and they never were seen again; save one lame boy, who hobbled not fast enough to get in before the door shut, and who lamented for the rest of his life that he had not been able to share the rare luck of his comrades. In the street through which this procession passed no music was ever afterwards allowed to be played. For a long time the town dated its public documents from this fearful calamity, and many authorities have treated it as an

historical event. [17](#) Similar stories are told of other towns in Germany, and, strange to say, in remote Abyssinia also. Wesleyan peasants in England believe that angels pipe to children who are about to die; and in Scandinavia, youths are said to have been enticed away by the songs of elf-maidens. In Greece, the sirens by their magic lay allured voyagers to destruction; and Orpheus caused the trees and dumb beasts to follow him. Here we reach the explanation. For Orpheus is the wind sighing through untold acres of pine forest. "The piper is no other than the wind, and the ancients held that in the wind were the souls of the dead." To this day the English peasantry believe that they hear the wail of the spirits of unbaptized children, as the gale sweeps past their cottage doors. The Greek Hermes resulted from the fusion of two deities. He is the sun and also the wind; and in the latter capacity he bears away

the souls of the dead. So the Norse Odin, who like Hermes fills a double function, is supposed to rush at night over the tree-tops, "accompanied by the scudding train of brave men's spirits." And readers of recent French literature cannot fail to remember Erokmann-Chatrian's terrible story of the wild huntsman Vittikab, and how he sped through the forest, carrying away a young girl's soul.

Thus, as Tannhauser is the Northern Ulysses, so is Goethe's Erlking none other than the Piper of Hamelin. And the piper, in turn, is the classic Hermes or Orpheus, the counterpart of the Finnish Wainamoinen and the Sanskrit Gunadhya. His wonderful pipe is the horn of Oberon, the lyre of Apollo (who, like the piper, was a rat-killer), the harp stolen by Jack when he climbed the bean-stalk to the ogre's castle. [18](#) And the father, in Goethe's ballad, is no more than right when he assures his child that the siren voice which

tempts him is but the rustle of the wind among the dried leaves; for from such a simple class of phenomena arose this entire family of charming legends.

But why does the piper, who is a leader of souls (Psychopompos), also draw rats after him? In answering this we shall have occasion to note that the ancients by no means shared that curious prejudice against the brute creation which is indulged in by modern anti-Darwinians. In many countries, rats and mice have been regarded as sacred animals; but in Germany they were thought to represent the human soul. One story out of a hundred must suffice to illustrate this. "In Thuringia, at Saalfeld, a servant-girl fell asleep whilst her companions were shelling nuts. They observed a little red mouse creep from her mouth and run out of the window. One of the fellows present shook the sleeper, but could not wake her, so he moved her to another place.

Presently the mouse ran back to the former place and dashed about, seeking the girl; not finding her, it vanished; at the same moment the girl died." [19](#) This completes the explanation of the piper, and it also furnishes the key to the horrible story of Bishop Hatto.

This wicked prelate lived on the bank of the Rhine, in the middle of which stream he possessed a tower, now pointed out to travellers as the Mouse Tower. In the year 970 there was a dreadful famine, and people came from far and near craving sustenance out of the Bishop's ample and well-filled granaries. Well, he told them all to go into the barn, and when they had got in there, as many as could stand, he set fire to the barn and burnt them all up, and went home to eat a merry supper. But when he arose next morning, he heard that an army of rats had eaten all the corn in his granaries, and was now advancing to storm the palace. Looking from his

window, he saw the roads and fields dark with them, as they came with fell purpose straight toward his mansion. In frenzied terror he took his boat and rowed out to the tower in the river. But it was of no use: down into the water marched the rats, and swam across, and scaled the walls, and gnawed through the stones, and came swarming in about the shrieking Bishop, and ate him up, flesh, bones, and all. Now, bearing in mind what was said above, there can be no doubt that these rats were the souls of those whom the Bishop had murdered. There are many versions of the story in different Teutonic countries, and in some of them the avenging rats or mice issue directly, by a strange metamorphosis, from the corpses of the victims. St. Gertrude, moreover, the heathen Holda, was symbolized as a mouse, and was said to lead an army of mice; she was the receiver of children's souls. Odin, also, in his character of a

Psychopompos, was followed by a host of rats. [20](#)

As the souls of the departed are symbolized as rats, so is the psychopomp himself often figured as a dog. Sarameias, the Vedic counterpart of Hermes and Odin, sometimes appears invested with canine attributes; and countless other examples go to show that by the early Aryan mind the howling wind was conceived as a great dog or wolf. As the fearful beast was heard speeding by the windows or over the house-top, the inmates trembled, for none knew but his own soul might forthwith be required of him. Hence, to this day, among ignorant people, the howling of a dog under the window is supposed to portend a death in the family. It is the fleet greyhound of Hermes, come to escort the soul to the river Styx. [21](#)

But the wind-god is not always so terrible. Nothing can be more transparent than the phraseology of the Homeric Hymn, in

which Hermes is described as acquiring the strength of a giant while yet a babe in the cradle, as sallying out and stealing the cattle (clouds) of Apollo, and driving them helter-skelter in various directions, then as crawling through the keyhole, and with a mocking laugh shrinking into his cradle. He is the Master Thief, who can steal the burgomaster's horse from under him and his wife's mantle from off her back, the prototype not only of the crafty architect of Rhampsinitos, but even of the ungrateful slave who robs Sancho of his mule in the Sierra Morena. He furnishes in part the conceptions of Boots and Reynard; he is the prototype of Paul Pry and peeping Tom of Coventry; and in virtue of his ability to contract or expand himself at pleasure, he is both the Devil in the Norse Tale, [22](#)whom the lad persuades to enter a walnut, and the Arabian Efreet, whom the fisherman releases from the bottle.

The very interesting series of myths and popular superstitions suggested by the storm-cloud and the lightning must be reserved for a future occasion. When carefully examined, they will richly illustrate the conclusion which is the result of the present inquiry, that the marvellous tales and quaint superstitions current in every Aryan household have a common origin with the classic legends of gods and heroes, which formerly were alone thought worthy of the student's serious attention. These stories—some of them familiar to us in infancy, others the delight of our maturer years—constitute the debris, or alluvium, brought down by the stream of tradition from the distant highlands of ancient mythology.

September, 1870.

## II. THE DESCENT OF FIRE.

IN the course of my last summer's vacation, which was spent at a small inland village, I came upon an unexpected illustration of the tenacity with which conceptions descended from prehistoric antiquity have now and then kept their hold upon life. While sitting one evening under the trees by the roadside, my attention was called to the unusual conduct of half a dozen men and boys who were standing opposite. An elderly man was moving slowly up and down the road, holding with both hands a forked twig of hazel, shaped like the letter Y inverted. With his palms turned upward, he held in each hand a branch of the twig in such a way that the shank pointed upward; but every few moments, as he halted over a certain spot, the twig would gradually bend downwards until it had assumed the likeness of a Y in its natural position, where it would remain pointing to something in the ground beneath. One by

one the bystanders proceeded to try the experiment, but with no variation in the result. Something in the ground seemed to fascinate the bit of hazel, for it could not pass over that spot without bending down and pointing to it.

My thoughts reverted at once to Jacques Aymar and Dousterswivel, as I perceived that these men were engaged in sorcery. During the long drought more than half the wells in the village had become dry, and here was an attempt to make good the loss by the aid of the god Thor. These men were seeking water with a divining-rod. Here, alive before my eyes, was a superstitious observance, which I had supposed long since dead and forgotten by all men except students interested in mythology.

As I crossed the road to take part in the ceremony a farmer's boy came up, stoutly affirming his incredulity,

and offering to show the company how he could carry the rod motionless across the charmed spot. But when he came to take the weird twig he trembled with an ill-defined feeling of insecurity as to the soundness of his conclusions, and when he stood over the supposed rivulet the rod bent in spite of him,—as was not so very strange. For, with all his vague scepticism, the honest lad had not, and could not be supposed to have, the *foi scientifique* of which Littré speaks. [23](#)

Hereupon I requested leave to try the rod; but something in my manner seemed at once to excite the suspicion and scorn of the sorcerer. "Yes, take it," said he, with uncalled-for vehemence, "but you can't stop it; there's water below here, and you can't help its bending, if you break your back trying to hold it." So he gave me the twig, and awaited, with a smile which was meant to express withering sarcasm, the discomfiture of the supposed scoffer. But

when I proceeded to walk four or five times across the mysterious place, the rod pointing steadfastly toward the zenith all the while, our friend became grave and began to philosophize. "Well," said he, "you see, your temperament is peculiar; the conditions ain't favourable in your case; there are some people who never can work these things. But there's water below here, for all that, as you'll find, if you dig for it; there's nothing like a hazel-rod for finding out water."

Very true: there are some persons who never can make such things work; who somehow always encounter "unfavourable conditions" when they wish to test the marvellous powers of a clairvoyant; who never can make "Planchette" move in conformity to the requirements of any known alphabet; who never see ghosts, and never have "presentiments," save such as are obviously due to association of ideas. The ill-success of these persons is

commonly ascribed to their lack of faith; but, in the majority of cases, it might be more truly referred to the strength of their faith,—faith in the constancy of nature, and in the adequacy of ordinary human experience as interpreted by science. [24](#) La foi scientifique is an excellent preventive against that obscure, though not uncommon, kind of self-deception which enables wooden tripods to write and tables to tip and hazel-twigs to twist upside-down, without the conscious intervention of the performer. It was this kind of faith, no doubt, which caused the discomfiture of Jacques Aymar on his visit to Paris, [25](#) and which has in late years prevented persons from obtaining the handsome prize offered by the French Academy for the first authentic case of clairvoyance. But our village friend, though perhaps constructively right in his philosophizing, was certainly very defective in his

acquaintance with the time-honoured art of rhabdomancy. Had he extended his inquiries so as to cover the field of Indo-European tradition, he would have learned that the mountain-ash, the mistletoe, the white and black thorn, the Hindu asvattha, and several other woods, are quite as efficient as the hazel for the purpose of detecting water in times of drought; and in due course of time he would have perceived that the divining-rod itself is but one among a large class of things to which popular belief has ascribed, along with other talismanic properties, the power of opening the ground or cleaving rocks, in order to reveal hidden treasures. Leaving him in peace, then, with his bit of forked hazel, to seek for cooling springs in some future thirsty season, let us endeavour to elucidate the origin of this curious superstition.

The detection of subterranean water is by no means the only use to which the

divining-rod has been put. Among the ancient Frisians it was regularly used for the detection of criminals; and the reputation of Jacques Aymar was won by his discovery of the perpetrator of a horrible murder at Lyons. Throughout Europe it has been used from time immemorial by miners for ascertaining the position of veins of metal; and in the days when talents were wrapped in napkins and buried in the field, instead of being exposed to the risks of financial speculation, the divining-rod was employed by persons covetous of their neighbours' wealth. If Boulatruelle had lived in the sixteenth century, he would have taken a forked stick of hazel when he went to search for the buried treasures of Jean Valjean. It has also been applied to the cure of disease, and has been kept in households, like a wizard's charm, to insure general good-fortune and immunity from disaster.

As we follow the conception further into the elf-land of popular tradition, we come upon a rod which not only points out the situation of hidden treasure, but even splits open the ground and reveals the mineral wealth contained therein. In German legend, "a shepherd, who was driving his flock over the Ilsenstein, having stopped to rest, leaning on his staff, the mountain suddenly opened, for there was a springwort in his staff without his knowing it, and the princess [Ilse] stood before him. She bade him follow her, and when he was inside the mountain she told him to take as much gold as he pleased. The shepherd filled all his pockets, and was going away, when the princess called after him, 'Forget not the best.' So, thinking she meant that he had not taken enough, he filled his hat also; but what she meant was his staff with the springwort, which he had laid against the wall as soon as he stepped in. But now,

just as he was going out at the opening, the rock suddenly slammed together and cut him in two." [26](#)

Here the rod derives its marvellous properties from the enclosed springwort, but in many cases a leaf or flower is itself competent to open the hillside. The little blue flower, forget-me-not, about which so many sentimental associations have clustered, owes its name to the legends told of its talismanic virtues. [27](#) A man, travelling on a lonely mountain, picks up a little blue flower and sticks it in his hat. Forthwith an iron door opens, showing up a lighted passage-way, through which the man advances into a magnificent hall, where rubies and diamonds and all other kinds of gems are lying piled in great heaps on the floor. As he eagerly fills his pockets his hat drops from his head, and when he turns to go out the little flower calls after him, "Forget me not!" He turns back and looks around, but is too

bewildered with his good fortune to think of his bare head or of the luck-flower which he has let fall. He selects several more of the finest jewels he can find, and again starts to go out; but as he passes through the door the mountain closes amid the crashing of thunder, and cuts off one of his heels. Alone, in the gloom of the forest, he searches in vain for the mysterious door: it has disappeared forever, and the traveller goes on his way, thankful, let us hope, that he has fared no worse.

Sometimes it is a white lady, like the Princess Ilse, who invites the finder of the luck-flower to help himself to her treasures, and who utters the enigmatical warning. The mountain where the event occurred may be found almost anywhere in Germany, and one just like it stood in Persia, in the golden prime of Haroun Alraschid. In the story of the Forty Thieves, the mere name of the plant

sesame serves as a talisman to open and shut the secret door which leads into the robbers' cavern; and when the avaricious Cassim Baba, absorbed in the contemplation of the bags of gold and bales of rich merchandise, forgets the magic formula, he meets no better fate than the shepherd of the Ilsenstein. In the story of Prince Ahmed, it is an enchanted arrow which guides the young adventurer through the hillside to the grotto of the Peri Banou. In the tale of Baba Abdallah, it is an ointment rubbed on the eyelid which reveals at a single glance all the treasures hidden in the bowels of the earth.

The ancient Romans also had their rock-breaking plant, called Saxifraga, or "sassafras." And the further we penetrate into this charmed circle of traditions the more evident does it appear that the power of cleaving rocks or shattering hard substances enters, as a primitive element, into the conception of these treasure-

showing talismans. Mr. Baring-Gould has given an excellent account of the rabbinical legends concerning the wonderful schamir, by the aid of which Solomon was said to have built his temple. From Asmodeus, prince of the Jann, Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, wrested the secret of a worm no bigger than a barley-corn, which could split the hardest substance. This worm was called schamir. "If Solomon desired to possess himself of the worm, he must find the nest of the moor-hen, and cover it with a plate of glass, so that the mother bird could not get at her young without breaking the glass. She would seek schamir for the purpose, and the worm must be obtained from her." As the Jewish king did need the worm in order to hew the stones for that temple which was to be built without sound of hammer, or axe, or any tool of iron, [28](#) he sent Benaiah to obtain it. According to another account, schamir

was a mystic stone which enabled Solomon to penetrate the earth in search of mineral wealth. Directed by a Jinni, the wise king covered a raven's eggs with a plate of crystal, and thus obtained schamir which the bird brought in order to break the plate. [29](#)

In these traditions, which may possibly be of Aryan descent, due to the prolonged intercourse between the Jews and the Persians, a new feature is added to those before enumerated: the rock-splitting talisman is always found in the possession of a bird. The same feature in the myth reappears on Aryan soil. The springwort, whose marvellous powers we have noticed in the case of the Ilsenstein shepherd, is obtained, according to Pliny, by stopping up the hole in a tree where a woodpecker keeps its young. The bird flies away, and presently returns with the springwort, which it applies to the plug, causing it to shoot out with a loud explosion. The same

account is given in German folk-lore. Elsewhere, as in Iceland, Normandy, and ancient Greece, the bird is an eagle, a swallow, an ostrich, or a hoopoe. In the Icelandic and Pomeranian myths the schamir, or "raven-stone," also renders its possessor invisible,—a property which it shares with one of the treasure-finding plants, the fern. [30](#) In this respect it resembles the ring of Gyges, as in its divining and rock-splitting qualities it resembles that other ring which the African magrician gave to Aladdin, to enable him to descend into the cavern where stood the wonderful lamp. According to one North German tradition, the luck-flower also will make its finder invisible at pleasure. But, as the myth shrewdly adds, it is absolutely essential that the flower be found by accident: he who seeks for it never finds it! Thus all cavils are skilfully forestalled, even if not satisfactorily disposed of. The same kind

of reasoning is favoured by our modern dealers in mystery: somehow the "conditions" always are askew whenever a scientific observer wishes to test their pretensions.

In the North of Europe schamir appears strangely and grotesquely metamorphosed. The hand of a man that has been hanged, when dried and prepared with certain weird unguents and set on fire, is known as the Hand of Glory; and as it not only bursts open all safe-locks, but also lulls to sleep all persons within the circle of its influence, it is of course invaluable to thieves and burglars. I quote the following story from Thorpe's "Northern Mythology": "Two fellows once came to Huy, who pretended to be exceedingly fatigued, and when they had supped would not retire to a sleeping-room, but begged their host would allow them to take a nap on the hearth. But the maid-servant, who did not like the looks of

the two guests, remained by the kitchen door and peeped through a chink, when she saw that one of them drew a thief's hand from his pocket, the fingers of which, after having rubbed them with an ointment, he lighted, and they all burned except one. Again they held this finger to the fire, but still it would not burn, at which they appeared much surprised, and one said, 'There must surely be some one in the house who is not yet asleep.' They then hung the hand with its four burning fingers by the chimney, and went out to call their associates. But the maid followed them instantly and made the door fast, then ran up stairs, where the landlord slept, that she might wake him, but was unable, notwithstanding all her shaking and calling. In the mean time the thieves had returned and were endeavouring to enter the house by a window, but the maid cast them down from the ladder. They then took a different course, and

would have forced an entrance, had it not occurred to the maid that the burning fingers might probably be the cause of her master's profound sleep. Impressed with this idea she ran to the kitchen and blew them out, when the master and his men-servants instantly awoke, and soon drove away the robbers." The same event is said to have occurred at Stainmore in England; and Torquermada relates of Mexican thieves that they carry with them the left hand of a woman who has died in her first childbed, before which talisman all bolts yield and all opposition is benumbed. In 1831 "some Irish thieves attempted to commit a robbery on the estate of Mr. Naper, of Loughcrew, county Meath. They entered the house armed with a dead man's hand with a lighted candle in it, believing in the superstitious notion that a candle placed in a dead man's hand will not be seen by any but those by whom it is used; and also that if a candle in a dead

hand be introduced into a house, it will prevent those who may be asleep from awaking. The inmates, however, were alarmed, and the robbers fled, leaving the hand behind them." [31](#)

In the Middle Ages the hand of glory was used, just like the divining-rod, for the detection of buried treasures.

Here, then, we have a large and motley group of objects—the forked rod of ash or hazel, the springwort and the luck-flower, leaves, worms, stones, rings, and dead men's hands—which are for the most part competent to open the way into cavernous rocks, and which all agree in pointing out hidden wealth. We find, moreover, that many of these charmed objects are carried about by birds, and that some of them possess, in addition to their generic properties, the specific power of benumbing people's senses. What, now, is the common origin of this whole group of superstitions? And since mythology has

been shown to be the result of primeval attempts to explain the phenomena of nature, what natural phenomenon could ever have given rise to so many seemingly wanton conceptions? Hopeless as the problem may at first sight seem, it has nevertheless been solved. In his great treatise on "The Descent of Fire," Dr. Kuhn has shown that all these legends and traditions are descended from primitive myths explanatory of the lightning and the storm-cloud. [32](#)

To us, who are nourished from childhood on the truths revealed by science, the sky is known to be merely an optical appearance due to the partial absorption of the solar rays in passing through a thick stratum of atmospheric air; the clouds are known to be large masses of watery vapour, which descend in rain-drops when sufficiently condensed; and the lightning is known to be a flash of light accompanying an electric discharge. But these

conceptions are extremely recondite, and have been attained only through centuries of philosophizing and after careful observation and laborious experiment. To the untaught mind of a child or of an uncivilized man, it seems far more natural and plausible to regard the sky as a solid dome of blue crystal, the clouds as snowy mountains, or perhaps even as giants or angels, the lightning as a flashing dart or a fiery serpent. In point of fact, we find that the conceptions actually entertained are often far more grotesque than these. I can recollect once framing the hypothesis that the flaming clouds of sunset were transient apparitions, vouchsafed us by way of warning, of that burning Calvinistic hell with which my childish imagination had been unwisely terrified; [33](#) and I have known of a four-year-old boy who thought that the snowy clouds of noonday were the white robes of the angels hung out to dry in the sun. [34](#) My little daughter is

anxious to know whether it is necessary to take a balloon in order to get to the place where God lives, or whether the same end can be accomplished by going to the horizon and crawling up the sky; [35](#) the Mohammedan of old was working at the same problem when he called the rainbow the bridge Es-Sirat, over which souls must pass on their way to heaven. According to the ancient Jew, the sky was a solid plate, hammered out by the gods, and spread over the earth in order to keep up the ocean overhead; [36](#) but the plate was full of little windows, which were opened whenever it became necessary to let the rain come through. [37](#) With equal plausibility the Greek represented the rainy sky as a sieve in which the daughters of Danaos were vainly trying to draw water; while to the Hindu the rain-clouds were celestial cattle milked by the wind-god. In primitive Aryan lore, the sky itself was a blue sea, and the clouds were

ships sailing over it; and an English legend tells how one of these ships once caught its anchor on a gravestone in the churchyard, to the great astonishment of the people who were coming out of church. Charon's ferry-boat was one of these vessels, and another was Odin's golden ship, in which the souls of slain heroes were conveyed to Valhalla. Hence it was once the Scandinavian practice to bury the dead in boats; and in Altmark a penny is still placed in the mouth of the corpse, that it may have the means of paying its fare to the ghostly ferryman. [38](#) In such a vessel drifted the Lady of Shalott on her fatal voyage; and of similar nature was the dusky barge, "dark as a funeral-scarf from stem to stern," in which Arthur was received by the black-hooded queens. [39](#) But the fact that a natural phenomenon was explained in one way did not hinder it from being explained in a dozen other

ways. The fact that the sun was generally regarded as an all-conquering hero did not prevent its being called an egg, an apple, or a frog squatting on the waters, or Ixion's wheel, or the eye of Polyphemos, or the stone of Sisyphos, which was no sooner pushed to the zenith than it rolled down to the horizon. So the sky was not only a crystal dome, or a celestial ocean, but it was also the Aleian land through which Bellerophon wandered, the country of the Lotos-eaters, or again the realm of the Graiai beyond the twilight; and finally it was personified and worshipped as Dyaus or Varuna, the Vedic prototypes of the Greek Zeus and Ouranos. The clouds, too, had many other representatives besides ships and cows. In a future paper it will be shown that they were sometimes regarded as angels or houris; at present it more nearly concerns us to know that they appear, throughout all Aryan mythology, under the form of birds. It

used to be a matter of hopeless wonder to me that Aladdin's innocent request for a roc's egg to hang in the dome of his palace should have been regarded as a crime worthy of punishment by the loss of the wonderful lamp; the obscurest part of the whole affair being perhaps the Jinni's passionate allusion to the egg as his master: "Wretch! dost thou command me to bring thee my master, and hang him up in the midst of this vaulted dome?" But the incident is to some extent cleared of its mystery when we learn that the roc's egg is the bright sun, and that the roc itself is the rushing storm-cloud which, in the tale of Sindbad, haunts the sparkling starry firmament, symbolized as a valley of diamonds. [40](#) According to one Arabic authority, the length of its wings is ten thousand fathoms. But in European tradition it dwindles from these huge dimensions to the size of an eagle, a raven, or a woodpecker. Among the birds

enumerated by Kuhn and others as representing the storm-cloud are likewise the wren or "kinglet" (French roitelet); the owl, sacred to Athene; the cuckoo, stork, and sparrow; and the red-breasted robin, whose name Robert was originally an epithet of the lightning-god Thor. In certain parts of France it is still believed that the robbing of a wren's nest will render the culprit liable to be struck by lightning. The same belief was formerly entertained in Teutonic countries with respect to the robin; and I suppose that from this superstition is descended the prevalent notion, which I often encountered in childhood, that there is something peculiarly wicked in killing robins.

Now, as the raven or woodpecker, in the various myths of schamir, is the dark storm-cloud, so the rock-splitting worm or plant or pebble which the bird carries in its beak and lets fall to the ground is nothing

more or less than the flash of lightning carried and dropped by the cloud. "If the cloud was supposed to be a great bird, the lightnings were regarded as writhing worms or serpents in its beak. These fiery serpents, elikiai gram-moeidws feromenoi, are believed in to this day by the Canadian Indians, who call the thunder their hissing." [41](#)

But these are not the only mythical conceptions which are to be found wrapped up in the various myths of schamir and the divining-rod. The persons who told these stories were not weaving ingenious allegories about thunderstorms; they were telling stories, or giving utterance to superstitions, of which the original meaning was forgotten. The old grannies who, along with a stoical indifference to the fate of quails and partridges, used to impress upon me the wickedness of killing robins, did not add that I should be struck by lightning if I

failed to heed their admonitions. They had never heard that the robin was the bird of Thor; they merely rehearsed the remnant of the superstition which had survived to their own times, while the essential part of it had long since faded from recollection. The reason for regarding a robin's life as more sacred than a partridge's had been forgotten; but it left behind, as was natural, a vague recognition of that mythical sanctity. The primitive meaning of a myth fades away as inevitably as the primitive meaning of a word or phrase; and the rabbins who told of a worm which shatters rocks no more thought of the writhing thunderbolts than the modern reader thinks of oyster-shells when he sees the word ostracism, or consciously breathes a prayer as he writes the phrase good bye. It is only in its callow infancy that the full force of a myth is felt, and its period of luxuriant development dates from the time when its physical

significance is lost or obscured. It was because the Greek had forgotten that Zeus meant the bright sky, that he could make him king over an anthropomorphic Olympos. The Hindu Dyaus, who carried his significance in his name as plainly as the Greek Helios, never attained such an exalted position; he yielded to deities of less obvious pedigree, such as Brahma and Vishnu.

Since, therefore, the myth-tellers recounted merely the wonderful stories which their own nurses and grandmas had told them, and had no intention of weaving subtle allegories or wrapping up a physical truth in mystic emblems, it follows that they were not bound to avoid incongruities or to preserve a philosophical symmetry in their narratives. In the great majority of complex myths, no such symmetry is to be found. A score of different mythical conceptions would get wrought into the same story, and the

attempt to pull them apart and construct a single harmonious system of conceptions out of the pieces must often end in ingenious absurdity. If Odysseus is unquestionably the sun, so is the eye of Polyphemos, which Odysseus puts out. [42](#) But the Greek poet knew nothing of the incongruity, for he was thinking only of a superhuman hero freeing himself from a giant cannibal; he knew nothing of Sanskrit, or of comparative mythology, and the sources of his myths were as completely hidden from his view as the sources of the Nile.

We need not be surprised, then, to find that in one version of the schamir-myth the cloud is the bird which carries the worm, while in another version the cloud is the rock or mountain which the talisman cleaves open; nor need we wonder at it, if we find stories in which the two conceptions are mingled together without

regard to an incongruity which in the mind of the myth-teller no longer exists. [43](#) In early Aryan mythology there is nothing by which the clouds are more frequently represented than by rocks or mountains. Such were the Symplegades, which, charmed by the harp of the wind-god Orpheus, parted to make way for the talking ship Argo, with its crew of solar heroes. [44](#) Such, too, were the mountains Ossa and Pelion, which the giants piled up one upon another in their impious assault upon Zeus, the lord of the bright sky. As Mr. Baring-Gould observes: "The ancient Aryan had the same name for cloud and mountain. To him the piles of vapour on the horizon were so like Alpine ranges, that he had but one word whereby to designate both. [45](#) These great mountains of heaven were opened by the lightning. In the sudden flash he beheld the dazzling splendour within, but only for a moment, and then, with a crash, the celestial rocks

closed again. Believing these vaporous piles to contain resplendent treasures of which partial glimpse was obtained by mortals in a momentary gleam, tales were speedily formed, relating the adventures of some who had succeeded in entering these treasure-mountains."

This sudden flash is the smiting of the cloud-rock by the arrow of Ahmed, the resistless hammer of Thor, the spear of Odin, the trident of Poseidon, or the rod of Hermes. The forked streak of light is the archetype of the divining-rod in its oldest form,—that in which it not only indicates the hidden treasures, but, like the staff of the Ilsestein shepherd, bursts open the enchanted crypt and reveals them to the astonished wayfarer. Hence the one thing essential to the divining-rod, from whatever tree it be chosen, is that it shall be forked.

It is not difficult to comprehend the reasons which led the ancients to speak of

the lightning as a worm, serpent, trident, arrow, or forked wand; but when we inquire why it was sometimes symbolized as a flower or leaf; or when we seek to ascertain why certain trees, such as the ash, hazel, white-thorn, and mistletoe, were supposed to be in a certain sense embodiments of it, we are entering upon a subject too complicated to be satisfactorily treated within the limits of the present paper. It has been said that the point of resemblance between a cow and a comet, that both have tails, was quite enough for the primitive word-maker: it was certainly enough for the primitive myth-teller. [46](#) Sometimes the pinnate shape of a leaf, the forking of a branch, the tri-cleft corolla, or even the red colour of a flower, seems to have been sufficient to determine the association of ideas. The Hindu commentators of the Veda certainly lay great stress on the fact that the palasa, one of their lightning-trees, is

trident-leaved. The mistletoe branch is forked, like a wish-bone, [47](#) and so is the stem which bears the forget-me-not or wild scorpion grass. So too the leaves of the Hindu ficus religiosa resemble long spear-heads. [48](#) But in many cases it is impossible for us to determine with confidence the reasons which may have guided primitive men in their choice of talismanic plants. In the case of some of these stories, it would no doubt be wasting ingenuity to attempt to assign a mythical origin for each point of detail. The ointment of the dervise, for instance, in the Arabian tale, has probably no special mythical significance, but was rather suggested by the exigencies of the story, in an age when the old mythologies were so far disintegrated and mingled together that any one talisman would serve as well as another the purposes of the narrator. But the lightning-plants of Indo-European folk-lore cannot be thus

summarily disposed of; for however difficult it may be for us to perceive any connection between them and the celestial phenomena which they represent, the myths concerning them are so numerous and explicit as to render it certain that some such connection was imagined by the myth-makers. The superstition concerning the hand of glory is not so hard to interpret. In the mythology of the Finns, the storm-cloud is a black man with a bright copper hand; and in Hindustan, Indra Savitar, the deity who slays the demon of the cloud, is golden-handed. The selection of the hand of a man who has been hanged is probably due to the superstition which regarded the storm-god Odin as peculiarly the lord of the gallows. The man who is raised upon the gallows is placed directly in the track of the wild huntsman, who comes with his hounds to carry off the victim; and hence the notion, which, according to Mr. Kelly, is "very

common in Germany and not extinct in England," that every suicide by hanging is followed by a storm.

The paths of comparative mythology are devious, but we have now pursued them long enough I believe, to have arrived at a tolerably clear understanding of the original nature of the divining-rod. Its power of revealing treasures has been sufficiently explained; and its affinity for water results so obviously from the character of the lightning-myth as to need no further comment. But its power of detecting criminals still remains to be accounted for.

In Greek mythology, the being which detects and punishes crime is the Erinyes, the prototype of the Latin Fury, figured by late writers as a horrible monster with serpent locks. But this is a degradation of the original conception. The name Erinyes did not originally mean Fury, and it cannot be explained from Greek sources alone. It

appears in Sanskrit as Saranyu, a word which signifies the light of morning creeping over the sky. And thus we are led to the startling conclusion that, as the light of morning reveals the evil deeds done under the cover of night, so the lovely Dawn, or Erinys, came to be regarded under one aspect as the terrible detector and avenger of iniquity. Yet startling as the conclusion is, it is based on established laws of phonetic change, and cannot be gainsaid.

But what has the avenging daybreak to do with the lightning and the divining-rod? To the modern mind the association is not an obvious one: in antiquity it was otherwise. Myths of the daybreak and myths of the lightning often resemble each other so closely that, except by a delicate philological analysis, it is difficult to distinguish the one from the other. The reason is obvious. In each case the phenomenon to be explained is the

struggle between the day-god and one of the demons of darkness. There is essentially no distinction to the mind of the primitive man between the Panis, who steal Indra's bright cows and keep them in a dark cavern all night, and the throttling snake Ahi or Echidna, who imprisons the waters in the stronghold of the thunder-cloud and covers the earth with a short-lived darkness. And so the poisoned arrows of Bellerophon, which slay the storm-dragon, differ in no essential respect from the shafts with which Odysseus slaughters the night-demons who have for ten long hours beset his mansion. Thus the divining-rod, representing as it does the weapon of the god of day, comes legitimately enough by its function of detecting and avenging crime.

But the lightning not only reveals strange treasures and gives water to the thirsty land and makes plain what is doing under

cover of darkness; it also sometimes kills, benumbs, or paralyzes. Thus the head of the Gorgon Medusa turns into stone those who look upon it. Thus the ointment of the dervise, in the tale of Baba Abdallah, not only reveals all the treasures of the earth, but instantly thereafter blinds the unhappy man who tests its powers. And thus the hand of glory, which bursts open bars and bolts, benumbs also those who happen to be near it. Indeed, few of the favoured mortals who were allowed to visit the caverns opened by sesame or the luck-flower, escaped without disaster. The monkish tale of "The Clerk and the Image," in which the primeval mythical features are curiously distorted, well illustrates this point.

In the city of Rome there formerly stood an image with its right hand extended and on its forefinger the words "strike here." Many wise men puzzled in vain over the meaning of the inscription; but at last a

certain priest observed that whenever the sun shone on the figure, the shadow of the finger was discernible on the ground at a little distance from the statue. Having marked the spot, he waited until midnight, and then began to dig. At last his spade struck upon something hard. It was a trap-door, below which a flight of marble steps descended into a spacious hall, where many men were sitting in solemn silence amid piles of gold and diamonds and long rows of enamelled vases. Beyond this he found another room, a gynaecium filled with beautiful women reclining on richly embroidered sofas; yet here, too, all was profound silence. A superb banqueting-hall next met his astonished gaze; then a silent kitchen; then granaries loaded with forage; then a stable crowded with motionless horses. The whole place was brilliantly lighted by a carbuncle which was suspended in one corner of the reception-room; and opposite stood an

archer, with his bow and arrow raised, in the act of taking aim at the jewel. As the priest passed back through this hall, he saw a diamond-hilted knife lying on a marble table; and wishing to carry away something wherewith to accredit his story, he reached out his hand to take it; but no sooner had he touched it than all was dark. The archer had shot with his arrow, the bright jewel was shivered into a thousand pieces, the staircase had fled, and the priest found himself buried alive. [49](#)

Usually, however, though the lightning is wont to strike dead, with its basilisk glance, those who rashly enter its mysterious caverns, it is regarded rather as a benefactor than as a destroyer. The feelings with which the myth-making age contemplated the thunder-shower as it revived the earth paralyzed by a long drought, are shown in the myth of Oidipous. The Sphinx, whose name

signifies "the one who binds," is the demon who sits on the cloud-rock and imprisons the rain, muttering, dark sayings which none but the all-knowing sun may understand. The flash of solar light which causes the monster to fling herself down from the cliff with a fearful roar, restores the land to prosperity. But besides this, the association of the thunder-storm with the approach of summer has produced many myths in which the lightning is symbolized as the life-renewing wand of the victorious sun-god. Hence the use of the divining-rod in the cure of disease; and hence the large family of schamir-myths in which the dead are restored to life by leaves or herbs. In Grimm's tale of the "Three Snake Leaves," a prince is buried alive (like Sindbad) with his dead wife, and seeing a snake approaching her body, he cuts it in three pieces. Presently another snake, crawling from the corner, saw the other lying dead,

and going, away soon returned with three green leaves in its mouth; then laying the parts of the body together so as to join, it put one leaf on each wound, and the dead snake was alive again. The prince, applying the leaves to his wife's body, restores her also to life." [50](#)In the Greek story, told by Aelian and Apollodoros, Polyidos is shut up with the corpse of Glaukos, which he is ordered to restore to life. He kills a dragon which is approaching the body, but is presently astonished at seeing another dragon come with a blade of grass and place it upon its dead companion, which instantly rises from the ground. Polyidos takes the same blade of grass, and with it resuscitates Glaukos. The same incident occurs in the Hindu story of Panch Phul Ranee, and in Fouque's "Sir Elidoc," which is founded on a Breton legend.

We need not wonder, then, at the extraordinary therapeutic properties which

are in all Aryan folk-lore ascribed to the various lightning-plants. In Sweden sanitary amulets are made of mistletoe-twigs, and the plant is supposed to be a specific against epilepsy and an antidote for poisons. In Cornwall children are passed through holes in ash-trees in order to cure them of hernia. Ash rods are used in some parts of England for the cure of diseased sheep, cows, and horses; and in particular they are supposed to neutralize the venom of serpents. The notion that snakes are afraid of an ash-tree is not extinct even in the United States. The other day I was told, not by an old granny, but by a man fairly educated and endowed with a very unusual amount of good common-sense, that a rattlesnake will sooner go through fire than creep over ash leaves or into the shadow of an ash-tree. Exactly the same statement is made by Piny, who adds that if you draw a circle with an ash rod around the spot of ground

on which a snake is lying, the animal must die of starvation, being as effectually imprisoned as Ugolino in the dungeon at Pisa. In Cornwall it is believed that a blow from an ash stick will instantly kill any serpent. The ash shares this virtue with the hazel and fern. A Swedish peasant will tell you that snakes may be deprived of their venom by a touch with a hazel wand; and when an ancient Greek had occasion to make his bed in the woods, he selected fern leaves if possible, in the belief that the smell of them would drive away poisonous animals. [51](#)

But the beneficent character of the lightning appears still more clearly in another class of myths. To the primitive man the shaft of light coming down from heaven was typical of the original descent of fire for the benefit and improvement of the human race. The Sioux Indians account for the origin of fire by a myth of unmistakable kinship; they say that "their

first ancestor obtained his fire from the sparks which a friendly panther struck from the rocks as he scampered up a stony hill." [52](#) This panther is obviously the counterpart of the Aryan bird which drops schamir. But the Aryan imagination hit upon a far more remarkable conception. The ancient Hindus obtained fire by a process similar to that employed by Count Rumford in his experiments on the generation of heat by friction. They first wound a couple of cords around a pointed stick in such a way that the unwinding of the one would wind up the other, and then, placing the point of the stick against a circular disk of wood, twirled it rapidly by alternate pulls on the two strings. This instrument is called a chark, and is still used in South Africa, [53](#) in Australia, in Sumatra, and among the Veddahs of Ceylon. The Russians found it in Kamtchatka; and it was formerly employed in America, from

Labrador to the Straits of Magellan. [54](#) The Hindus churned milk by a similar process; [55](#) and in order to explain the thunder-storm, a Sanskrit poem tells how "once upon a time the Devas, or gods, and their opponents, the Asuras, made a truce, and joined together in churning the ocean to procure amrita, the drink of immortality. They took Mount Mandara for a churning-stick, and, wrapping the great serpent Sesha round it for a rope, they made the mountain spin round to and fro, the Devas pulling at the serpent's tail, and the Asuras at its head." [56](#) In this myth the churning-stick, with its flying serpent-cords, is the lightning, and the amrita, or drink of immortality, is simply the rain-water, which in Aryan folk-lore possesses the same healing virtues as the lightning. "In Slavonic myths it is the water of life which restores the dead earth, a water brought by a bird from the depths of a

gloomy cave." [57](#) It is the celestial soma or mead which Indra loves to drink; it is the ambrosial nectar of the Olympian gods; it is the charmed water which in the Arabian Nights restores to human shape the victims of wicked sorcerers; and it is the elixir of life which mediaeval philosophers tried to discover, and in quest of which Ponce de Leon traversed the wilds of Florida. [58](#)

"Jacky's next proceeding was to get some dry sticks and wood, and prepare a fire, which, to George's astonishment, he lighted thus. He got a block of wood, in the middle of which he made a hole; then he cut and pointed a long stick, and inserting the point into the block, worked it round between his palms for some time and with increasing rapidity. Presently there came a smell of burning wood, and soon after it burst into a flame at the point of contact. Jacky cut slices of shark and

roasted them."—Reade, *Never too Late to Mend*, chap. xxxviii.

The most interesting point in this Hindu myth is the name of the peaked mountain Mandara, or Manthara, which the gods and devils took for their churning-stick. The word means "a churning-stick," and it appears also, with a prefixed preposition, in the name of the fire-drill, pramantha. Now Kuhn has proved that this name, pramantha, is etymologically identical with Prometheus, the name of the beneficent Titan, who stole fire from heaven and bestowed it upon mankind as the richest of boons. This sublime personage was originally nothing but the celestial drill which churns fire out of the clouds; but the Greeks had so entirely forgotten his origin that they interpreted his name as meaning "the one who thinks beforehand," and accredited him with a brother, Epimetheus, or "the one who thinks too late." The Greeks had adopted another

name, trypanon, for their fire-drill, and thus the primitive character of Prometheus became obscured.

I have said above that it was regarded as absolutely essential that the divining-rod should be forked. To this rule, however, there was one exception, and if any further evidence be needed to convince the most sceptical that the divining-rod is nothing but a symbol of the lightning, that exception will furnish such evidence. For this exceptional kind of divining-rod was made of a pointed stick rotating in a block of wood, and it was the presence of hidden water or treasure which was supposed to excite the rotatory motion. In the myths relating to Prometheus, the lightning-god appears as the originator of civilization, sometimes as the creator of the human race, and always as its friend, [59](#) suffering in its behalf the most fearful tortures at the hands of the jealous Zeus. In one story he creates man by

making a clay image and infusing into it a spark of the fire which he had brought from heaven; in another story he is himself the first man. In the Peloponnesian myth Phoroneus, who is Prometheus under another name, is the first man, and his mother was an ash-tree. In Norse mythology, also, the gods were said to have made the first man out of the ash-tree Yggdrasil. The association of the heavenly fire with the life-giving forces of nature is very common in the myths of both hemispheres, and in view of the facts already cited it need not surprise us. Hence the Hindu Agni and the Norse Thor were patrons of marriage, and in Norway, the most lucky day on which to be married is still supposed to be Thursday, which in old times was the day of the fire-god. [60](#) Hence the lightning-plants have divers virtues in matters pertaining to marriage. The Romans made their wedding torches of whitethorn;

hazel-nuts are still used all over Europe in divinations relating to the future lover or sweetheart; [61](#) and under a mistletoe bough it is allowable for a gentleman to kiss a lady. A vast number of kindred superstitions are described by Mr. Kelly, to whom I am indebted for many of these examples. [62](#)

Thus we reach at last the completed conception of the divining-rod, or as it is called in this sense the wish-rod, with its kindred talismans, from Aladdin's lamp and the purse of Bedreddin Hassan, to the Sangreal, the philosopher's stone, and the goblets of Oberon and Tristram. These symbols of the reproductive energies of nature, which give to the possessor every good and perfect gift, illustrate the uncurbed belief in the power of wish which the ancient man shared with modern children. In the Norse story of Frodi's quern, the myth assumes a whimsical shape. The prose Edda tells of a primeval

age of gold, when everybody had whatever he wanted. This was because the giant Frodi had a mill which ground out peace and plenty and abundance of gold withal, so that it lay about the roads like pebbles. Through the inexcusable avarice of Frodi, this wonderful implement was lost to the world. For he kept his maid-servants working at the mill until they got out of patience, and began to make it grind out hatred and war. Then came a mighty sea-rover by night and slew Frodi and carried away the maids and the quern. When he got well out to sea, he told them to grind out salt, and so they did with a vengeance. They ground the ship full of salt and sank it, and so the quern was lost forever, but the sea remains salt unto this day.

Mr. Kelly rightly identifies Frodi with the sun-god Fro or Freyr, and observes that the magic mill is only another form of the fire-churn, or chark. According to another

version the quern is still grinding away and keeping the sea salt, and over the place where it lies there is a prodigious whirlpool or maelstrom which sucks down ships.

In its completed shape, the lightning-wand is the caduceus, or rod of Hermes. I observed, in the preceding paper, that in the Greek conception of Hermes there have been fused together the attributes of two deities who were originally distinct. The Hermes of the Homeric Hymn is a wind-god; but the later Hermes Agoraios, the patron of gymnasia, the mutilation of whose statues caused such terrible excitement in Athens during the Peloponnesian War, is a very different personage. He is a fire-god, invested with many solar attributes, and represents the quickening forces of nature. In this capacity the invention of fire was ascribed to him as well as to Prometheus; he was said to be the friend of mankind, and was

surnamed Ploutodotes, or "the giver of wealth."

The Norse wind-god Odin has in like manner acquired several of the attributes of Freyr and Thor. [63](#) His lightning-spear, which is borrowed from Thor, appears by a comical metamorphosis as a wish-rod which will administer a sound thrashing to the enemies of its possessor. Having cut a hazel stick, you have only to lay down an old coat, name your intended victim, wish he was there, and whack away: he will howl with pain at every blow. This wonderful cudgel appears in Dasent's tale of "The Lad who went to the North Wind," with which we may conclude this discussion. The story is told, with little variation, in Hindustan, Germany, and Scandinavia.

The North Wind, representing the mischievous Hermes, once blew away a poor woman's meal. So her boy went to the North Wind and demanded his rights

for the meal his mother had lost. "I have n't got your meal," said the Wind, "but here's a tablecloth which will cover itself with an excellent dinner whenever you tell it to." So the lad took the cloth and started for home. At nightfall he stopped at an inn, spread his cloth on the table, and ordered it to cover itself with good things, and so it did. But the landlord, who thought it would be money in his pocket to have such a cloth, stole it after the boy had gone to bed, and substituted another just like it in appearance. Next day the boy went home in great glee to show off for his mother's astonishment what the North Wind had given him, but all the dinner he got that day was what the old woman cooked for him. In his despair he went back to the North Wind and called him a liar, and again demanded his rights for the meal he had lost. "I have n't got your meal," said the Wind, "but here's a ram which will drop money out of its

fleece whenever you tell it to." So the lad travelled home, stopping over night at the same inn, and when he got home he found himself with a ram which did n't drop coins out of its fleece. A third time he visited the North Wind, and obtained a bag with a stick in it which, at the word of command, would jump out of the bag and lay on until told to stop. Guessing how matters stood as to his cloth and ram, he turned in at the same tavern, and going to a bench lay down as if to sleep. The landlord thought that a stick carried about in a bag must be worth something, and so he stole quietly up to the bag, meaning to get the stick out and change it. But just as he got within whacking distance, the boy gave the word, and out jumped the stick and beat the thief until he promised to give back the ram and the tablecloth. And so the boy got his rights for the meal which the North Wind had blown away. October, 1870.

III. WEREWOLVES AND SWAN-MAIDENS. IT is related by Ovid that Lykaon, king of Arkadia, once invited Zeus to dinner, and served up for him a dish of human flesh, in order to test the god's omniscience. But the trick miserably failed, and the impious monarch received the punishment which his crime had merited. He was transformed into a wolf, that he might henceforth feed upon the viands with which he had dared to pollute the table of the king of Olympos. From that time forth, according to Pliny, a noble Arkadian was each year, on the festival of Zeus Lykaios, led to the margin of a certain lake. Hanging his clothes upon a tree, he then plunged into the water and became a wolf. For the space of nine years he roamed about the adjacent woods, and then, if he had not tasted human flesh during all this

time, he was allowed to swim back to the place where his clothes were hanging, put them on, and return to his natural form. It is further related of a certain Demainetos, that, having once been present at a human sacrifice to Zeus Lykaios, he ate of the flesh, and was transformed into a wolf for a term of ten years. [64](#)

These and other similar mythical germs were developed by the mediaeval imagination into the horrible superstition of werewolves.

A werewolf, or loup-garou [65](#) was a person who had the power of transforming himself into a wolf, being endowed, while in the lupine state, with the intelligence of a man, the ferocity of a wolf, and the irresistible strength of a demon. The ancients believed in the existence of such persons; but in the Middle Ages the metamorphosis was supposed to be a phenomenon of daily occurrence, and even at the present day, in secluded

portions of Europe, the superstition is still cherished by peasants. The belief, moreover, is supported by a vast amount of evidence, which can neither be argued nor pooh-poohed into insignificance. It is the business of the comparative mythologist to trace the pedigree of the ideas from which such a conception may have sprung; while to the critical historian belongs the task of ascertaining and classifying the actual facts which this particular conception was used to interpret.

The mediaeval belief in werewolves is especially adapted to illustrate the complicated manner in which divers mythical conceptions and misunderstood natural occurrences will combine to generate a long-enduring superstition. Mr. Cox, indeed, would have us believe that the whole notion arose from an unintentional play upon words; but the careful survey of the field, which has been

taken by Hertz and Baring-Gould, leads to the conclusion that many other circumstances have been at work. The delusion, though doubtless purely mythical in its origin, nevertheless presents in its developed state a curious mixture of mythical and historical elements.

With regard to the Arkadian legend, taken by itself, Mr. Cox is probably right. The story seems to belong to that large class of myths which have been devised in order to explain the meaning of equivocal words whose true significance has been forgotten. The epithet *Lykaios*, as applied to Zeus, had originally no reference to wolves: it means "the bright one," and gave rise to lycanthropic legends only because of the similarity in sound between the names for "wolf" and "brightness." Aryan mythology furnishes numerous other instances of this confusion. The solar deity, *Phoibos Lykegenes*, was originally the "offspring of light"; but

popular etymology made a kind of werewolf of him by interpreting his name as the "wolf-born." The name of the hero Autolykos means simply the "self-luminous"; but it was more frequently interpreted as meaning "a very wolf," in allusion to the supposed character of its possessor. Bazra, the name of the citadel of Carthage, was the Punic word for "fortress"; but the Greeks confounded it with byrsa, "a hide," and hence the story of the ox-hides cut into strips by Dido in order to measure the area of the place to be fortified. The old theory that the Irish were Phoenicians had a similar origin. The name Fena, used to designate the old Scoti or Irish, is the plural of Fion, "fair," seen in the name of the hero Fion Gall, or "Fingal"; but the monkish chroniclers identified Fena with phoinix, whence arose the myth; and by a like misunderstanding of the epithet Miledh, or "warrior," applied to Fion by the Gaelic bards, there was

generated a mythical hero, Milesius, and the soubriquet "Milesian," colloquially employed in speaking of the Irish. [66](#) So the Franks explained the name of the town Daras, in Mesopotamia, by the story that the Emperor Justinian once addressed the chief magistrate with the exclamation, daras, "thou shalt give": [67](#) the Greek chronicler, Malalas, who spells the name Doras, informs us with equal complacency that it was the place where Alexander overcame Codomannus with dorn, "the spear." A certain passage in the Alps is called Scaletta, from its resemblance to a staircase; but according to a local tradition it owes its name to the bleaching skeletons of a company of Moors who were destroyed there in the eighth century, while attempting to penetrate into Northern Italy. The name of Antwerp denotes the town built at a "wharf"; but it sounds very much like the Flemish handt werpen, "hand-throwing": "hence arose

the legend of the giant who cut off the hands of those who passed his castle without paying him black-mail, and threw them into the Scheldt." [68](#) In the myth of Bishop Hatto, related in a previous paper, the Mause-thurm is a corruption of maut-thurm; it means "customs-tower," and has nothing to do with mice or rats. Doubtless this etymology was the cause of the floating myth getting fastened to this particular place; that it did not give rise to the myth itself is shown by the existence of the same tale in other places.

Somewhere in England there is a place called Chateau Vert; the peasantry have corrupted it into Shotover, and say that it has borne that name ever since Little John shot over a high hill in the neighbourhood. [69](#) Latium means "the flat land"; but, according to Virgil, it is the place where Saturn once hid (latuisset) from the wrath of his usurping son Jupiter. [70](#)

It was in this way that the constellation of the Great Bear received its name. The Greek word *arktos*, answering to the Sanskrit *riksha*, meant originally any bright object, and was applied to the bear—for what reason it would not be easy to state—and to that constellation which was most conspicuous in the latitude of the early home of the Aryans. When the Greeks had long forgotten why these stars were called *arktoi*, they symbolized them as a Great Bear fixed in the sky. So that, as Max Muller observes, "the name of the Arctic regions rests on a misunderstanding of a name framed thousands of years ago in Central Asia, and the surprise with which many a thoughtful observer has looked at these seven bright stars, wondering why they were ever called the Bear, is removed by a reference to the early annals of human speech." Among the Algonquins the sun-god Michabo was represented as a hare,

his name being compounded of michi, "great," and wabos, "a hare"; yet wabos also meant "white," so that the god was doubtless originally called simply "the Great White One." The same naive process has made bears of the Arkadians, whose name, like that of the Lykians, merely signified that they were "children of light"; and the metamorphosis of Kallisto, mother of Arkas, into a bear, and of Lykaon into a wolf, rests apparently upon no other foundation than an erroneous etymology. Originally Lykaon was neither man nor wolf; he was but another form of Phoibos Lykegenes, the light-born sun, and, as Mr. Cox has shown, his legend is but a variation of that of Tantalos, who in time of drought offers to Zeus the flesh of his own offspring, the withered fruits, and is punished for his impiety.

It seems to me, however, that this explanation, though valid as far as it goes,

is inadequate to explain all the features of the werewolf superstition, or to account for its presence in all Aryan countries and among many peoples who are not of Aryan origin. There can be no doubt that the myth-makers transformed Lykaon into a wolf because of his unlucky name; because what really meant "bright man" seemed to them to mean "wolf-man"; but it has by no means been proved that a similar equivocation occurred in the case of all the primitive Aryan werewolves, nor has it been shown to be probable that among each people the being with the uncanny name got thus accidentally confounded with the particular beast most dreaded by that people. Etymology alone does not explain the fact that while Gaul has been the favourite haunt of the man-wolf, Scandinavia has been preferred by the man-bear, and Hindustan by the man-tiger. To account for such a widespread

phenomenon we must seek a more general cause.

Nothing is more strikingly characteristic of primitive thinking than the close community of nature which it assumes between man and brute. The doctrine of metempsychosis, which is found in some shape or other all over the world, implies a fundamental identity between the two; the Hindu is taught to respect the flocks browsing in the meadow, and will on no account lift his hand against a cow, for who knows but it may be his own grandmother? The recent researches of Mr. M`Lennan and Mr. Herbert Spencer have served to connect this feeling with the primeval worship of ancestors and with the savage customs of totemism. [71](#) The worship of ancestors seems to have been every where the oldest systematized form of fetichistic religion. The reverence paid to the chieftain of the tribe while living was continued and exaggerated

after his death The uncivilized man is everywhere incapable of grasping the idea of death as it is apprehended by civilized people. He cannot understand that a man should pass away so as to be no longer capable of communicating with his fellows. The image of his dead chief or comrade remains in his mind, and the savage's philosophic realism far surpasses that of the most extravagant mediaeval schoolmen; to him the persistence of the idea implies the persistence of the reality. The dead man, accordingly, is not really dead; he has thrown off his body like a husk, yet still retains his old appearance, and often shows himself to his old friends, especially after nightfall. He is no doubt possessed of more extensive powers than before his transformation, [72](#) and may very likely have a share in regulating the weather, granting or withholding rain. Therefore, argues the uncivilized mind, he is to be cajoled and propitiated more

sedulously now than before his strange transformation.

This kind of worship still maintains a languid existence as the state religion of China, and it still exists as a portion of Brahmanism; but in the Vedic religion it is to be seen in all its vigour and in all its naive simplicity. According to the ancient Aryan, the pitris, or "Fathers" (Lat. patres), live in the sky along with Yama, the great original Pitri of mankind. This first man came down from heaven in the lightning, and back to heaven both himself and all his offspring must have gone. There they distribute light unto men below, and they shine themselves as stars; and hence the Christianized German peasant, fifty centuries later, tells his children that the stars are angels' eyes, and the English cottager impresses it on the youthful mind that it is wicked to point at the stars, though why he cannot tell. But the Pitris are not stars only, nor do

they content themselves with idly looking down on the affairs of men, after the fashion of the laissez-faire divinities of Lucretius. They are, on the contrary, very busy with the weather; they send rain, thunder, and lightning; and they especially delight in rushing over the housetops in a great gale of wind, led on by their chief, the mysterious huntsman, Hermes or Odin.

It has been elsewhere shown that the howling dog, or wish-hound of Hermes, whose appearance under the windows of a sick person is such an alarming portent, is merely the tempest personified.

Throughout all Aryan mythology the souls of the dead are supposed to ride on the night-wind, with their howling dogs, gathering into their throng the souls of those just dying as they pass by their houses. [73](#) Sometimes the whole complex conception is wrapped up in the notion of a single dog, the messenger of the god of

shades, who comes to summon the departing soul. Sometimes, instead of a dog, we have a great ravening wolf who comes to devour its victim and extinguish the sunlight of life, as that old wolf of the tribe of Fenrir devoured little Red Riding-Hood with her robe of scarlet twilight. [74](#) Thus we arrive at a true werewolf myth. The storm-wind, or howling Rakshasa of Hindu folk-lore, is "a great misshapen giant with red beard and red hair, with pointed protruding teeth, ready to lacerate and devour human flesh; his body is covered with coarse, bristling hair, his huge mouth is open, he looks from side to side as he walks, lusting after the flesh and blood of men, to satisfy his raging hunger and quench his consuming thirst. Towards nightfall his strength increases manifold; he can change his shape at will; he haunts the woods, and roams howling through the jungle." [75](#)

Now if the storm-wind is a host of Pitris, or one great Pitri who appears as a fearful giant, and is also a pack of wolves or wish-hounds, or a single savage dog or wolf, the inference is obvious to the mythopoeic mind that men may become wolves, at least after death. And to the uncivilized thinker this inference is strengthened, as Mr. Spencer has shown, by evidence registered on his own tribal totem or heraldic emblem. The bears and lions and leopards of heraldry are the degenerate descendants of the totem of savagery which designated the tribe by a beast-symbol. To the untutored mind there is everything in a name; and the descendant of Brown Bear or Yellow Tiger or Silver Hyaena cannot be pronounced unfaithful to his own style of philosophizing, if he regards his ancestors, who career about his hut in the darkness of night, as belonging to whatever order of

beasts his totem associations may suggest.

Thus we not only see a ray of light thrown on the subject of metempsychosis, but we get a glimpse of the curious process by which the intensely realistic mind of antiquity arrived at the notion that men could be transformed into beasts. For the belief that the soul can temporarily quit the body during lifetime has been universally entertained; and from the conception of wolf-like ghosts it was but a short step to the conception of corporeal werewolves. In the Middle Ages the phenomena of trance and catalepsy were cited in proof of the theory that the soul can leave the body and afterwards return to it. Hence it was very difficult for a person accused of witchcraft to prove an alibi; for to any amount of evidence showing that the body was innocently reposing at home and in bed, the rejoinder was obvious that the soul may

nevertheless have been in attendance at the witches' Sabbath or busied in maiming a neighbour's cattle. According to one mediaeval notion, the soul of the werewolf quit its human body, which remained in a trance until its return. [76](#)

The mythological basis of the werewolf superstition is now, I believe, sufficiently indicated. The belief, however, did not reach its complete development, or acquire its most horrible features, until the pagan habits of thought which had originated it were modified by contact with Christian theology. To the ancient there was nothing necessarily diabolical in the transformation of a man into a beast. But Christianity, which retained such a host of pagan conceptions under such strange disguises, which degraded the "All-father" Odin into the ogre of the castle to which Jack climbed on his bean-stalk, and which blended the beneficent lightning-god Thor and the mischievous Hermes and the

faun-like Pan into the grotesque Teutonic Devil, did not fail to impart a new and fearful character to the belief in werewolves. Lycanthropy became regarded as a species of witchcraft; the werewolf was supposed to have obtained his peculiar powers through the favour or connivance of the Devil; and hundreds of persons were burned alive or broken on the wheel for having availed themselves of the privilege of beast-metamorphosis. The superstition, thus widely extended and greatly intensified, was confirmed by many singular phenomena which cannot be omitted from any thorough discussion of the nature and causes of lycanthropy. The first of these phenomena is the Berserker insanity, characteristic of Scandinavia, but not unknown in other countries. In times when killing one's enemies often formed a part of the necessary business of life, persons were frequently found who killed for the mere

love of the thing; with whom slaughter was an end desirable in itself, not merely a means to a desirable end. What the miser is in an age which worships mammon, such was the Berserker in an age when the current idea of heaven was that of a place where people could hack each other to pieces through all eternity, and when the man who refused a challenge was punished with confiscation of his estates. With these Northmen, in the ninth century, the chief business and amusement in life was to set sail for some pleasant country, like Spain or France, and make all the coasts and navigable rivers hideous with rapine and massacre. When at home, in the intervals between their freebooting expeditions, they were liable to become possessed by a strange homicidal madness, during which they would array themselves in the skins of wolves or bears, and sally forth by night to crack the backbones, smash the skulls,

and sometimes to drink with fiendish glee the blood of unwary travellers or loiterers. These fits of madness were usually followed by periods of utter exhaustion and nervous depression. [77](#)

Such, according to the unanimous testimony of historians, was the celebrated "Berserker rage," not peculiar to the Northland, although there most conspicuously manifested. Taking now a step in advance, we find that in comparatively civilized countries there have been many cases of monstrous homicidal insanity. The two most celebrated cases, among those collected by Mr. Baring-Gould, are those of the Marechal de Retz, in 1440, and of Elizabeth, a Hungarian countess, in the seventeenth century. The Countess Elizabeth enticed young girls into her palace on divers pretexts, and then coolly murdered them, for the purpose of bathing in their blood. The spectacle of

human suffering became at last such a delight to her, that she would apply with her own hands the most excruciating tortures, relishing the shrieks of her victims as the epicure relishes each sip of his old Chateau Margaux. In this way she is said to have murdered six hundred and fifty persons before her evil career was brought to an end; though, when one recollects the famous men in buckram and the notorious trio of crows, one is inclined to strike off a cipher, and regard sixty-five as a sufficiently imposing and far less improbable number. But the case of the Marechal de Retz is still more frightful. A marshal of France, a scholarly man, a patriot, and a man of holy life, he became suddenly possessed by an uncontrollable desire to murder children. During seven years he continued to inveigle little boys and girls into his castle, at the rate of about TWO EACH WEEK, (?) and then put them to death in various ways, that he

might witness their agonies and bathe in their blood; experiencing after each occasion the most dreadful remorse, but led on by an irresistible craving to repeat the crime. When this unparalleled iniquity was finally brought to light, the castle was found to contain bins full of children's bones. The horrible details of the trial are to be found in the histories of France by Michelet and Martin.

Going a step further, we find cases in which the propensity to murder has been accompanied by cannibalism. In 1598 a tailor of Chalons was sentenced by the parliament of Paris to be burned alive for lycanthropy. "This wretched man had decoyed children into his shop, or attacked them in the gloaming when they strayed in the woods, had torn them with his teeth and killed them, after which he seems calmly to have dressed their flesh as ordinary meat, and to have eaten it with a great relish. The number of little

innocents whom he destroyed is unknown. A whole caskful of bones was discovered in his house." [78](#) About 1850 a beggar in the village of Polomyia, in Galicia, was proved to have killed and eaten fourteen children. A house had one day caught fire and burnt to the ground, roasting one of the inmates, who was unable to escape. The beggar passed by soon after, and, as he was suffering from excessive hunger, could not resist the temptation of making a meal off the charred body. From that moment he was tormented by a craving for human flesh. He met a little orphan girl, about nine years old, and giving her a pinchbeck ring told her to seek for others like it under a tree in the neighbouring wood. She was slain, carried to the beggar's hovel, and eaten. In the course of three years thirteen other children mysteriously disappeared, but no one knew whom to suspect. At last an innkeeper missed a pair of ducks, and

having no good opinion of this beggar's honesty, went unexpectedly to his cabin, burst suddenly in at the door, and to his horror found him in the act of hiding under his cloak a severed head; a bowl of fresh blood stood under the oven, and pieces of a thigh were cooking over the fire. [79](#)

This occurred only about twenty years ago, and the criminal, though ruled by an insane appetite, is not known to have been subject to any mental delusion. But there have been a great many similar cases, in which the homicidal or cannibal craving has been accompanied by genuine hallucination. Forms of insanity in which the afflicted persons imagine themselves to be brute animals are not perhaps very common, but they are not unknown. I once knew a poor demented old man who believed himself to be a horse, and would stand by the hour together before a manger, nibbling hay, or deluding himself with the presence of so doing. Many of the

cannibals whose cases are related by Mr. Baring-Gould, in his chapter of horrors, actually believed themselves to have been transformed into wolves or other wild animals. Jean Grenier was a boy of thirteen, partially idiotic, and of strongly marked canine physiognomy; his jaws were large and projected forward, and his canine teeth were unnaturally long, so as to protrude beyond the lower lip. He believed himself to be a werewolf. One evening, meeting half a dozen young girls, he scared them out of their wits by telling them that as soon as the sun had set he would turn into a wolf and eat them for supper. A few days later, one little girl, having gone out at nightfall to look after the sheep, was attacked by some creature which in her terror she mistook for a wolf, but which afterwards proved to be none other than Jean Grenier. She beat him off with her sheep-staff, and fled home. As several children had mysteriously

disappeared from the neighbourhood, Grenier was at once suspected. Being brought before the parliament of Bordeaux, he stated that two years ago he had met the Devil one night in the woods and had signed a compact with him and received from him a wolf-skin. Since then he had roamed about as a wolf after dark, resuming his human shape by daylight. He had killed and eaten several children whom he had found alone in the fields, and on one occasion he had entered a house while the family were out and taken the baby from its cradle. A careful investigation proved the truth of these statements, so far as the cannibalism was concerned. There is no doubt that the missing children were eaten by Jean Grenier, and there is no doubt that in his own mind the halfwitted boy was firmly convinced that he was a wolf. Here the lycanthropy was complete.

In the year 1598, "in a wild and unfrequented spot near Caude, some countrymen came one day upon the corpse of a boy of fifteen, horribly mutilated and bespattered with blood. As the men approached, two wolves, which had been rending the body, bounded away into the thicket. The men gave chase immediately, following their bloody tracks till they lost them; when, suddenly crouching among the bushes, his teeth chattering with fear, they found a man half naked, with long hair and beard, and with his hands dyed in blood. His nails were long as claws, and were clotted with fresh gore and shreds of human flesh." [80](#)

This man, Jacques Roulet, was a poor, half-witted creature under the dominion of a cannibal appetite. He was employed in tearing to pieces the corpse of the boy when these countrymen came up. Whether there were any wolves in the case, except what the excited

imagination of the men may have conjured up, I will not presume to determine; but it is certain that Roulet supposed himself to be a wolf, and killed and ate several persons under the influence of the delusion. He was sentenced to death, but the parliament of Paris reversed the sentence, and charitably shut him up in a madhouse. The annals of the Middle Ages furnish many cases similar to these of Grenier and Roulet. Their share in maintaining the werewolf superstition is undeniable; but modern science finds in them nothing that cannot be readily explained. That stupendous process of breeding, which we call civilization, has been for long ages strengthening those kindly social feelings by the possession of which we are chiefly distinguished from the brutes, leaving our primitive bestial impulses to die for want of exercise, or checking in every possible way their further expansion by legislative

enactments. But this process, which is transforming us from savages into civilized men, is a very slow one; and now and then there occur cases of what physiologists call atavism, or reversion to an ancestral type of character. Now and then persons are born, in civilized countries, whose intellectual powers are on a level with those of the most degraded Australian savage, and these we call idiots. And now and then persons are born possessed of the bestial appetites and cravings of primitive man, his fiendish cruelty and his liking for human flesh. Modern physiology knows how to classify and explain these abnormal cases, but to the unscientific mediaeval mind they were explicable only on the hypothesis of a diabolical metamorphosis. And there is nothing strange in the fact that, in an age when the prevailing habits of thought rendered the transformation of men into beasts an easily admissible notion, these

monsters of cruelty and depraved appetite should have been regarded as capable of taking on bestial forms. Nor is it strange that the hallucination under which these unfortunate wretches laboured should have taken such a shape as to account to their feeble intelligence for the existence of the appetites which they were conscious of not sharing with their neighbours and contemporaries. If a myth is a piece of unscientific philosophizing, it must sometimes be applied to the explanation of obscure psychological as well as of physical phenomena. Where the modern calmly taps his forehead and says, "Arrested development," the terrified ancient made the sign of the cross and cried, "Werewolf."

We shall be assisted in this explanation by turning aside for a moment to examine the wild superstitions about "changelings," which contributed, along with so many others, to make the lives of our ancestors

anxious and miserable. These superstitions were for the most part attempts to explain the phenomena of insanity, epilepsy, and other obscure nervous diseases. A man who has hitherto enjoyed perfect health, and whose actions have been consistent and rational, suddenly loses all self-control and seems actuated by a will foreign to himself. Modern science possesses the key to this phenomenon; but in former times it was explicable only on the hypothesis that a demon had entered the body of the lunatic, or else that the fairies had stolen the real man and substituted for him a diabolical phantom exactly like him in stature and features. Hence the numerous legends of changelings, some of which are very curious. In Irish folk-lore we find the story of one Rickard, surnamed the Rake, from his worthless character. A good-natured, idle fellow, he spent all his evenings in dancing,—an accomplishment

in which no one in the village could rival him. One night, in the midst of a lively reel, he fell down in a fit. "He's struck with a fairy-dart," exclaimed all the friends, and they carried him home and nursed him; but his face grew so thin and his manner so morose that by and by all began to suspect that the true Rickard was gone and a changeling put in his place. Rickard, with all his accomplishments, was no musician; and so, in order to put the matter to a crucial test, a bagpipe was left in the room by the side of his bed. The trick succeeded. One hot summer's day, when all were supposed to be in the field making hay, some members of the family secreted in a clothes-press saw the bedroom door open a little way, and a lean, foxy face, with a pair of deep-sunken eyes, peer anxiously about the premises. Having satisfied itself that the coast was clear, the face withdrew, the door was closed, and

presently such ravishing strains of music were heard as never proceeded from a bagpipe before or since that day. Soon was heard the rustle of innumerable fairies, come to dance to the changeling's music. Then the "fairy-man" of the village, who was keeping watch with the family, heated a pair of tongs red-hot, and with deafening shouts all burst at once into the sick-chamber. The music had ceased and the room was empty, but in at the window glared a fiendish face, with such fearful looks of hatred, that for a moment all stood motionless with terror. But when the fairy-man, recovering himself, advanced with the hot tongs to pinch its nose, it vanished with an unearthly yell, and there on the bed was Rickard, safe and sound, and cured of his epilepsy. [81](#)

Comparing this legend with numerous others relating to changelings, and stripping off the fantastic garb of fairy-lore with which popular imagination has

invested them, it seems impossible to doubt that they have arisen from myths devised for the purpose of explaining the obscure phenomena of mental disease. If this be so, they afford an excellent collateral illustration of the belief in werewolves. The same mental habits which led men to regard the insane or epileptic person as a changeling, and which allowed them to explain catalepsy as the temporary departure of a witch's soul from its body, would enable them to attribute a wolf's nature to the maniac or idiot with cannibal appetites. And when the myth-forming process had got thus far, it would not stop short of assigning to the unfortunate wretch a tangible lupine body; for all ancient mythology teemed with precedents for such a transformation. It remains for us to sum up,—to tie into a bunch the keys which have helped us to penetrate into the secret causes of the werewolf superstition. In a previous paper

we saw what a host of myths, fairy-tales, and superstitious observances have sprung from attempts to interpret one simple natural phenomenon,—the descent of fire from the clouds. Here, on the other hand, we see what a heterogeneous multitude of mythical elements may combine to build up in course of time a single enormous superstition, and we see how curiously fact and fancy have co-operated in keeping the superstition from falling. In the first place the worship of dead ancestors with wolf totems originated the notion of the transformation of men into divine or superhuman wolves; and this notion was confirmed by the ambiguous explanation of the storm-wind as the rushing of a troop of dead men's souls or as the howling of wolf-like monsters. Mediaeval Christianity retained these conceptions, merely changing the superhuman wolves into evil demons; and finally the occurrence of cases of

Berserker madness and cannibalism, accompanied by lycanthropic hallucinations, being interpreted as due to such demoniacal metamorphosis, gave rise to the werewolf superstition of the Middle Ages. The etymological proceedings, to which Mr. Cox would incontinently ascribe the origin of the entire superstition, seemed to me to have played a very subordinate part in the matter. To suppose that Jean Grenier imagined himself to be a wolf, because the Greek word for wolf sounded like the word for light, and thus gave rise to the story of a light-deity who became a wolf, seems to me quite inadmissible. Yet as far as such verbal equivocations may have prevailed, they doubtless helped to sustain the delusion.

Thus we need no longer regard our werewolf as an inexplicable creature of undetermined pedigree. But any account of him would be quite imperfect which

should omit all consideration of the methods by which his change of form was accomplished. By the ancient Romans the werewolf was commonly called a "skin-changer" or "turn-coat" (*versipellis*), and similar epithets were applied to him in the Middle Ages. The mediaeval theory was that, while the werewolf kept his human form, his hair grew inwards; when he wished to become a wolf, he simply turned himself inside out. In many trials on record, the prisoners were closely interrogated as to how this inversion might be accomplished; but I am not aware that any one of them ever gave a satisfactory answer. At the moment of change their memories seem to have become temporarily befogged. Now and then a poor wretch had his arms and legs cut off, or was partially flayed, in order that the ingrowing hair might be detected. [82](#) Another theory was, that the possessed person had merely to put on a

wolf's skin, in order to assume instantly the lupine form and character; and in this may perhaps be seen a vague reminiscence of the alleged fact that Berserkers were in the habit of haunting the woods by night, clothed in the hides of wolves or bears. [83](#) Such a wolfskin was kept by the boy Grenier. Roulet, on the other hand, confessed to using a magic salve or ointment. A fourth method of becoming a werewolf was to obtain a girdle, usually made of human skin. Several cases are related in Thorpe's "Northern Mythology." One hot day in harvest-time some reapers lay down to sleep in the shade; when one of them, who could not sleep, saw the man next him arise quietly and gird him with a strap, whereupon he instantly vanished, and a wolf jumped up from among the sleepers and ran off across the fields. Another man, who possessed such a girdle, once went away from home without

remembering to lock it up. His little son climbed up to the cupboard and got it, and as he proceeded to buckle it around his waist, he became instantly transformed into a strange-looking beast. Just then his father came in, and seizing the girdle restored the child to his natural shape. The boy said that no sooner had he buckled it on than he was tormented with a raging hunger.

Sometimes the werewolf transformation led to unlucky accidents. At Caseburg, as a man and his wife were making hay, the woman threw down her pitchfork and went away, telling her husband that if a wild beast should come to him during her absence he must throw his hat at it. Presently a she-wolf rushed towards him. The man threw his hat at it, but a boy came up from another part of the field and stabbed the animal with his pitchfork, whereupon it vanished, and the woman's dead body lay at his feet.

A parallel legend shows that this woman wished to have the hat thrown at her, in order that she might be henceforth free from her liability to become a werewolf. A man was one night returning with his wife from a merry-making when he felt the change coming on. Giving his wife the reins, he jumped from the wagon, telling her to strike with her apron at any animal which might come to her. In a few moments a wolf ran up to the side of the vehicle, and, as the woman struck out with her apron, it bit off a piece and ran away. Presently the man returned with the piece of apron in his mouth and consoled his terrified wife with the information that the enchantment had left him forever. A terrible case at a village in Auvergne has found its way into the annals of witchcraft. "A gentleman while hunting was suddenly attacked by a savage wolf of monstrous size. Impenetrable by his shot, the beast made a spring upon the helpless

hunter, who in the struggle luckily, or unluckily for the unfortunate lady, contrived to cut off one of its fore-paws. This trophy he placed in his pocket, and made the best of his way homewards in safety. On the road he met a friend, to whom he exhibited a bleeding paw, or rather (as it now appeared) a woman's hand, upon which was a wedding-ring. His wife's ring was at once recognized by the other. His suspicions aroused, he immediately went in search of his wife, who was found sitting by the fire in the kitchen, her arm hidden beneath her apron, when the husband, seizing her by the arm, found his terrible suspicions verified. The bleeding stump was there, evidently just fresh from the wound. She was given into custody, and in the event was burned at Riom, in presence of thousands of spectators." [84](#)

Sometimes a werewolf was cured merely by recognizing him while in his brute

shape. A Swedish legend tells of a cottager who, on entering the forest one day without recollecting to say his Patter Noster, got into the power of a Troll, who changed him into a wolf. For many years his wife mourned him as dead. But one Christmas eve the old Troll, disguised as a beggarwoman, came to the house for alms; and being taken in and kindly treated, told the woman that her husband might very likely appear to her in wolf-shape. Going at night to the pantry to lay aside a joint of meat for tomorrow's dinner, she saw a wolf standing with its paws on the window-sill, looking wistfully in at her. "Ah, dearest," said she, "if I knew that thou wert really my husband, I would give thee a bone." Whereupon the wolf-skin fell off, and her husband stood before her in the same old clothes which he had on the day that the Troll got hold of him.

In Denmark it was believed that if a woman were to creep through a colt's placental membrane stretched between four sticks, she would for the rest of her life bring forth children without pain or illness; but all the boys would in such case be werewolves, and all the girls Maras, or nightmares. In this grotesque superstition appears that curious kinship between the werewolf and the wife or maiden of supernatural race, which serves admirably to illustrate the nature of both conceptions, and the elucidation of which shall occupy us throughout the remainder of this paper.

It is, perhaps, needless to state that in the personality of the nightmare, or Mara, there was nothing equine. The Mara was a female demon, [85](#) who would come at night and torment men or women by crouching on their chests or stomachs and stopping their respiration. The scene is well enough represented in Fuseli's

picture, though the frenzied-looking horse which there accompanies the demon has no place in the original superstition. A Netherlandish story illustrates the character of the Mara. Two young men were in love with the same damsel. One of them, being tormented every night by a Mara, sought advice from his rival, and it was a treacherous counsel that he got. "Hold a sharp knife with the point towards your breast, and you'll never see the Mara again," said this false friend. The lad thanked him, but when he lay down to rest he thought it as well to be on the safe side, and so held the knife handle downward. So when the Mara came, instead of forcing the blade into his breast, she cut herself badly, and fled howling; and let us hope, though the legend here leaves us in the dark, that this poor youth, who is said to have been the comelier of the two, revenged himself

on his malicious rival by marrying the young lady.

But the Mara sometimes appeared in less revolting shape, and became the mistress or even the wife of some mortal man to whom she happened to take a fancy. In such cases she would vanish on being recognized. There is a well-told monkish tale of a pious knight who, journeying one day through the forest, found a beautiful lady stripped naked and tied to a tree, her back all covered with deep gashes streaming with blood, from a flogging which some bandits had given her. Of course he took her home to his castle and married her, and for a while they lived very happily together, and the fame of the lady's beauty was so great that kings and emperors held tournaments in honor of her. But this pious knight used to go to mass every Sunday, and greatly was he scandalized when he found that his wife would never stay to assist in the Credo,

but would always get up and walk out of church just as the choir struck up. All her husband's coaxing was of no use; threats and entreaties were alike powerless even to elicit an explanation of this strange conduct. At last the good man determined to use force; and so one Sunday, as the lady got up to go out, according to custom, he seized her by the arm and sternly commanded her to remain. Her whole frame was suddenly convulsed, and her dark eyes gleamed with weird, unearthly brilliancy. The services paused for a moment, and all eyes were turned toward the knight and his lady. "In God's name, tell me what thou art," shouted the knight; and instantly, says the chronicler, "the bodily form of the lady melted away, and was seen no more; whilst, with a cry of anguish and of terror, an evil spirit of monstrous form rose from the ground, clave the chapel roof asunder, and disappeared in the air."

In a Danish legend, the Mara betrays her affinity to the Nixies, or Swan-maidens. A peasant discovered that his sweetheart was in the habit of coming to him by night as a Mara. He kept strict watch until he discovered her creeping into the room through a small knot-hole in the door. Next day he made a peg, and after she had come to him, drove in the peg so that she was unable to escape. They were married and lived together many years; but one night it happened that the man, joking with his wife about the way in which he had secured her, drew the peg from the knot-hole, that she might see how she had entered his room. As she peeped through, she became suddenly quite small, passed out, and was never seen again.

The well-known pathological phenomena of nightmare are sufficient to account for the mediaeval theory of a fiend who sits upon one's bosom and hinders respiration;

but as we compare these various legends relating to the Mara, we see that a more recondite explanation is needed to account for all her peculiarities. Indigestion may interfere with our breathing, but it does not make beautiful women crawl through keyholes, nor does it bring wives from the spirit-world. The Mara belongs to an ancient family, and in passing from the regions of monkish superstition to those of pure mythology we find that, like her kinsman the werewolf, she had once seen better days. Christianity made a demon of the Mara, and adopted the theory that Satan employed these seductive creatures as agents for ruining human souls. Such is the character of the knight's wife, in the monkish legend just cited. But in the Danish tale the Mara appears as one of that large family of supernatural wives who are permitted to live with mortal men under certain conditions, but who are compelled to flee away when these

conditions are broken, as is always sure to be the case. The eldest and one of the loveliest of this family is the Hindu nymph Urvasi, whose love adventures with Pururavas are narrated in the Puranas, and form the subject of the well-known and exquisite Sanskrit drama by Kalidasa. Urvasi is allowed to live with Pururavas so long as she does not see him undressed. But one night her kinsmen, the Gandharvas, or cloud-demons, vexed at her long absence from heaven, resolved to get her away from her mortal companion, They stole a pet lamb which had been tied at the foot of her couch, whereat she bitterly upbraided her husband. In rage and mortification, Pururavas sprang up without throwing on his tunic, and grasping his sword sought the robber. Then the wicked Gandharvas sent a flash of lightning, and Urvasi, seeing her naked husband, instantly vanished.

The different versions of this legend, which have been elaborately analyzed by comparative mythologists, leave no doubt that Urvasi is one of the dawn-nymphs or bright fleecy clouds of early morning, which vanish as the splendour of the sun is unveiled. We saw, in the preceding paper, that the ancient Aryans regarded the sky as a sea or great lake, and that the clouds were explained variously as Phaiakian ships with bird-like beaks sailing over this lake, or as bright birds of divers shapes and hues. The light fleecy cirrhi were regarded as mermaids, or as swans, or as maidens with swan's plumage. In Sanskrit they are called Apsaras, or "those who move in the water," and the Elves and Maras of Teutonic mythology have the same significance. Urvasi appears in one legend as a bird; and a South German prescription for getting rid of the Mara asserts that if she be wrapped up in the bedclothes and firmly held, a white dove

will forthwith fly from the room, leaving the bedclothes empty. [86](#)

In the story of Melusina the cloud-maiden appears as a kind of mermaid, but in other respects the legend resembles that of Urvashi. Raymond, Count de la Foret, of Poitou, having by an accident killed his patron and benefactor during a hunting excursion, fled in terror and despair into the deep recesses of the forest. All the afternoon and evening he wandered through the thick dark woods, until at midnight he came upon a strange scene. All at once "the boughs of the trees became less interlaced, and the trunks fewer; next moment his horse, crashing through the shrubs, brought him out on a pleasant glade, white with rime, and illumined by the new moon; in the midst bubbled up a limpid fountain, and flowed away over a pebbly-floor with a soothing murmur. Near the fountain-head sat three maidens in glimmering white dresses, with

long waving golden hair, and faces of inexpressible beauty." [87](#) One of them advanced to meet Raymond, and according to all mythological precedent, they were betrothed before daybreak. In due time the fountain-nymph [88](#) became Countess de la Foret, but her husband was given to understand that all her Saturdays would be passed in strictest seclusion, upon which he must never dare to intrude, under penalty of losing her forever. For many years all went well, save that the fair Melusina's children were, without exception, misshapen or disfigured. But after a while this strange weekly seclusion got bruited about all over the neighbourhood, and people shook their heads and looked grave about it. So many gossiping tales came to the Count's ears, that he began to grow anxious and suspicious, and at last he determined to know the worst. He went one Saturday to Melusina's private apartments, and going

through one empty room after another, at last came to a locked door which opened into a bath; looking through a keyhole, there he saw the Countess transformed from the waist downwards into a fish, disporting herself like a mermaid in the water. Of course he could not keep the secret, but when some time afterwards they quarrelled, must needs address her as "a vile serpent, contaminator of his honourable race." So she disappeared through the window, but ever afterward hovered about her husband's castle of Lusignan, like a Banshee, whenever one of its lords was about to die.

The well-known story of Undine is similar to that of Melusina, save that the naiad's desire to obtain a human soul is a conception foreign to the spirit of the myth, and marks the degradation which Christianity had inflicted upon the denizens of fairy-land. In one of Dasent's tales the water-maiden is replaced by a

kind of werewolf. A white bear marries a young girl, but assumes the human shape at night. She is never to look upon him in his human shape, but how could a young bride be expected to obey such an injunction as that? She lights a candle while he is sleeping, and discovers the handsomest prince in the world; unluckily she drops tallow on his shirt, and that tells the story. But she is more fortunate than poor Raymond, for after a tiresome journey to the "land east of the sun and west of the moon," and an arduous washing-match with a parcel of ugly Trolls, she washes out the spots, and ends her husband's enchantment. [89](#)

In the majority of these legends, however, the Apsaras, or cloud-maiden, has a shirt of swan's feathers which plays the same part as the wolfskin cape or girdle of the werewolf. If you could get hold of a werewolf's sack and burn it, a permanent cure was effected. No danger of a relapse,

unless the Devil furnished him with a new wolfskin. So the swan-maiden kept her human form, as long as she was deprived of her tunic of feathers. Indo-European folk-lore teems with stories of swan-maidens forcibly wooed and won by mortals who had stolen their clothes. A man travelling along the road passes by a lake where several lovely girls are bathing; their dresses, made of feathers curiously and daintily woven, lie on the shore. He approaches the place cautiously and steals one of these dresses. [90](#) When the girls have finished their bathing, they all come and get their dresses and swim away as swans; but the one whose dress is stolen must needs stay on shore and marry the thief. It is needless to add that they live happily together for many years, or that finally the good man accidentally leaves the cupboard door unlocked, whereupon his wife gets back her swan-shirt and flies away from him, never to

return. But it is not always a shirt of feathers. In one German story, a nobleman hunting deer finds a maiden bathing in a clear pool in the forest. He runs stealthily up to her and seizes her necklace, at which she loses the power to flee. They are married, and she bears seven sons at once, all of whom have gold chains about their necks, and are able to transform themselves into swans whenever they like. A Flemish legend tells of three Nixies, or water-sprites, who came out of the Meuse one autumn evening, and helped the villagers celebrate the end of the vintage. Such graceful dancers had never been seen in Flanders, and they could sing as well as they could dance. As the night was warm, one of them took off her gloves and gave them to her partner to hold for her. When the clock struck twelve the other two started off in hot haste, and then there was a hue and cry for gloves. The lad

would keep them as love-tokens, and so the poor Nixie had to go home without them; but she must have died on the way, for next morning the waters of the Meuse were blood-red, and those damsels never returned.

In the Faro Islands it is believed that seals cast off their skins every ninth night, assume human forms, and sing and dance like men and women until daybreak, when they resume their skins and their seal natures. Of course a man once found and hid one of these sealskins, and so got a mermaid for a wife; and of course she recovered the skin and escaped. [91](#) On the coasts of Ireland it is supposed to be quite an ordinary thing for young sea-fairies to get human husbands in this way; the brazen things even come to shore on purpose, and leave their red caps lying around for young men to pick up; but it behoves the husband to keep a strict

watch over the red cap, if he would not see his children left motherless.

This mermaid's cap has contributed its quota to the superstitions of witchcraft. An Irish story tells how Red James was aroused from sleep one night by noises in the kitchen. Going down to the door, he saw a lot of old women drinking punch around the fireplace, and laughing and joking with his housekeeper. When the punchbowl was empty, they all put on red caps, and singing

"By yarrow and rue,  
And my red cap too,  
Hie me over to England,"

they flew up chimney. So Jimmy burst into the room, and seized the housekeeper's cap, and went along with them. They flew across the sea to a castle in England, passed through the keyholes from room to room and into the cellar, where they had a famous carouse. Unluckily Jimmy, being unused to such good cheer, got drunk,

and forgot to put on his cap when the others did. So next morning the lord's butler found him dead-drunk on the cellar floor, surrounded by empty casks. He was sentenced to be hung without any trial worth speaking of; but as he was carted to the gallows an old woman cried out, "Ach, Jimmy alanna! Would you be afther dyin' in a strange land without your red birredh?" The lord made no objections, and so the red cap was brought and put on him. Accordingly when Jimmy had got to the gallows and was making his last speech for the edification of the spectators, he unexpectedly and somewhat irrelevantly exclaimed, "By yarrow and rue," etc., and was off like a rocket, shooting through the blue air en route for old Ireland. [92](#)

In another Irish legend an enchanted ass comes into the kitchen of a great house every night, and washes the dishes and scours the tins, so that the servants lead

an easy life of it. After a while in their exuberant gratitude they offer him any present for which he may feel inclined to ask. He desires only "an ould coat, to keep the chill off of him these cold nights"; but as soon as he gets into the coat he resumes his human form and bids them good by, and thenceforth they may wash their own dishes and scour their own tins, for all him.

But we are diverging from the subject of swan-maidens, and are in danger of losing ourselves in that labyrinth of popular fancies which is more intricate than any that Daidalos ever planned. The significance of all these sealskins and feather-dresses and mermaid caps and werewolf-girdles may best be sought in the etymology of words like the German *leichnam*, in which the body is described as a garment of flesh for the soul. [93](#) In the naive philosophy of primitive thinkers, the soul, in passing from one visible shape

to another, had only to put on the outward integument of the creature in which it wished to incarnate itself. With respect to the mode of metamorphosis, there is little difference between the werewolf and the swan-maiden; and the similarity is no less striking between the genesis of the two conceptions. The original werewolf is the night-wind, regarded now as a manlike deity and now as a howling lupine fiend; and the original swan-maiden is the light fleecy cloud, regarded either as a womanlike goddess or as a bird swimming in the sky sea. The one conception has been productive of little else but horrors; the other has given rise to a great variety of fanciful creations, from the treacherous mermaid and the fiendish nightmare to the gentle Undine, the charming Nausikaa, and the stately Muse of classic antiquity. We have seen that the original werewolf, howling in the wintry blast, is a kind of psychopomp, or leader of departed souls;

he is the wild ancestor of the death-dog, whose voice under the window of a sick-chamber is even now a sound of ill-omen. The swan-maiden has also been supposed to summon the dying to her home in the Phaiakian land. The Valkyries, with their shirts of swan-plumage, who hovered over Scandinavian battle-fields to receive the souls of falling heroes, were identical with the Hindu Apsaras; and the Houris of the Mussulman belong to the same family. Even for the angels,—women with large wings, who are seen in popular pictures bearing mortals on high towards heaven,—we can hardly claim a different kinship. Melusina, when she leaves the castle of Lusignan, becomes a Banshee; and it has been a common superstition among sailors, that the appearance of a mermaid, with her comb and looking-glass, foretokens shipwreck, with the loss of all on board.

October, 1870.

#### IV. LIGHT AND DARKNESS.

WHEN Maitland blasphemously asserted that God was but "a Bogie of the nursery," he unwittingly made a remark as suggestive in point of philology as it was crude and repulsive in its atheism. When examined with the lenses of linguistic science, the "Bogie" or "Bug-a-boo" or "Bugbear" of nursery lore turns out to be identical, not only with the fairy "Puck," whom Shakespeare has immortalized, but also with the Slavonic "Bog" and the "Baga" of the Cuneiform Inscriptions, both of which are names for the Supreme Being. If we proceed further, and inquire after the ancestral form of these epithets,—so strangely incongruous in their significations,—we shall find it in the Old Aryan "Bhaga," which reappears unchanged in the Sanskrit of the Vedas,

and has left a memento of itself in the surname of the Phrygian Zeus "Bagaios." It seems originally to have denoted either the unclouded sun or the sky of noonday illumined by the solar rays. In Sayana's commentary on the Rig-Veda, Bhaga is enumerated among the seven (or eight) sons of Aditi, the boundless Orient; and he is elsewhere described as the lord of life, the giver of bread, and the bringer of happiness. [94](#)

Thus the same name which, to the Vedic poet, to the Persian of the time of Xerxes, and to the modern Russian, suggests the supreme majesty of deity, is in English associated with an ugly and ludicrous fiend, closely akin to that grotesque Northern Devil of whom Southey was unable to think without laughing. Such is the irony of fate toward a deposed deity. The German name for idol—Abgott, that is, "ex-god," or "dethroned god"—sums up in a single etymology the history of the

havoc wrought by monotheism among the ancient symbols of deity. In the hospitable Pantheon of the Greeks and Romans a niche was always in readiness for every new divinity who could produce respectable credentials; but the triumph of monotheism converted the stately mansion into a Pandemonium peopled with fiends. To the monotheist an "ex-god" was simply a devilish deceiver of mankind whom the true God had succeeded in vanquishing; and thus the word demon, which to the ancient meant a divine or semi-divine being, came to be applied to fiends exclusively. Thus the Teutonic races, who preserved the name of their highest divinity, Odin,—originally, Guodan,—by which to designate the God of the Christian, [95](#) were unable to regard the Bog of ancient tradition as anything but an "ex-god," or vanquished demon. The most striking illustration of this process is to be found in the word devil

itself: To a reader unfamiliar with the endless tricks which language delights in playing, it may seem shocking to be told that the Gypsies use the word devil as the name of God. [96](#) This, however, is not because these people have made the archfiend an object of worship, but because the Gypsy language, descending directly from the Sanskrit, has retained in its primitive exalted sense a word which the English language has received only in its debased and perverted sense. The Teutonic words devil, teufel, diuval, djofull, djevful, may all be traced back to the Zend dev, [97](#) a name in which is implicitly contained the record of the oldest monotheistic revolution known to history. The influence of the so-called Zoroastrian reform upon the long-subsequent development of Christianity will receive further notice in the course of this paper; for the present it is enough to know that it furnished for all Christendom

the name by which it designates the author of evil. To the Parsee follower of Zarathustra the name of the Devil has very nearly the same signification as to the Christian; yet, as Grimm has shown, it is nothing else than a corruption of deva, the Sanskrit name for God. When Zarathustra overthrew the primeval Aryan nature-worship in Bactria, this name met the same evil fate which in early Christian times overtook the word demon, and from a symbol of reverence became henceforth a symbol of detestation. [98](#) But throughout the rest of the Aryan world it achieved a nobler career, producing the Greek theos, the Lithuanian diewas, the Latin deus, and hence the modern French Dieu, all meaning God. If we trace back this remarkable word to its primitive source in that once lost but now partially recovered mother-tongue from which all our Aryan languages are descended, we find a root div or dyu,

meaning "to shine." From the first-mentioned form comes deva, with its numerous progeny of good and evil appellatives; from the latter is derived the name of Dyaus, with its brethren, Zeus and Jupiter. In Sanskrit dyu, as a noun, means "sky" and "day"; and there are many passages in the Rig-Veda where the character of the god Dyaus, as the personification of the sky or the brightness of the ethereal heavens, is unmistakably apparent. This key unlocks for us one of the secrets of Greek mythology. So long as there was for Zeus no better etymology than that which assigned it to the root zen, "to live," [99](#) there was little hope of understanding the nature of Zeus. But when we learn that Zeus is identical with Dyaus, the bright sky, we are enabled to understand Horace's expression, "sub Jove frigido," and the prayer of the Athenians, "Rain, rain, dear Zeus, on the land of the Athenians, and on the fields." [100](#) Such

expressions as these were retained by the Greeks and Romans long after they had forgotten that their supreme deity was once the sky. Yet even the Brahman, from whose mind the physical significance of the god's name never wholly disappeared, could speak of him as Father Dyaus, the great Pitri, or ancestor of gods and men; and in this reverential name Dyaus pitar may be seen the exact equivalent of the Roman's Jupiter, or Jove the Father. The same root can be followed into Old German, where Zio is the god of day; and into Anglo-Saxon, where Tiwsdaeg, or the day of Zeus, is the ancestral form of Tuesday.

Thus we again reach the same results which were obtained from the examination of the name Bhaga. These various names for the supreme Aryan god, which without the help afforded by the Vedas could never have been interpreted, are seen to have been originally applied to the sun-

illuminated firmament. Countless other examples, when similarly analyzed, show that the earliest Aryan conception of a Divine Power, nourishing man and sustaining the universe, was suggested by the light of the mighty Sun; who, as modern science has shown, is the originator of all life and motion upon the globe, and whom the ancients delighted to believe the source, not only of "the golden light," [101](#) but of everything that is bright, joy-giving, and pure. Nevertheless, in accepting this conclusion as well established by linguistic science, we must be on our guard against an error into which writers on mythology are very liable to fall. Neither sky nor sun nor light of day, neither Zeus nor Apollo, neither Dyaus nor Indra, was ever worshipped by the ancient Aryan in anything like a monotheistic sense. To interpret Zeus or Jupiter as originally the supreme Aryan god, and to regard classic paganism as

one of the degraded remnants of a primeval monotheism, is to sin against the canons of a sound inductive philosophy. Philology itself teaches us that this could not have been so. Father Dyaus was originally the bright sky and nothing more. Although his name became generalized, in the classic languages, into deus, or God, it is quite certain that in early days, before the Aryan separation, it had acquired no such exalted significance. It was only in Greece and Rome—or, we may say, among the still united Italo-Hellenic tribes—that Jupiter-Zeus attained a pre-eminence over all other deities. The people of Iran quite rejected him, the Teutons preferred Thor and Odin, and in India he was superseded, first by Indra, afterwards by Brahma and Vishnu. We need not, therefore, look for a single supreme divinity among the old Aryans; nor may we expect to find any sense, active or dormant, of monotheism in the

primitive intelligence of uncivilized men. [102](#) The whole fabric of comparative mythology, as at present constituted, and as described above, in the first of these papers, rests upon the postulate that the earliest religion was pure fetichism. In the unsystematic nature-worship of the old Aryans the gods are presented to us only as vague powers, with their nature and attributes dimly defined, and their relations to each other fluctuating and often contradictory. There is no theogony, no regular subordination of one deity to another. The same pair of divinities appear now as father and daughter, now as brother and sister, now as husband and wife; and again they quite lose their personality, and are represented as mere natural phenomena. As Muller observes, "The poets of the Veda indulged freely in theogonic speculations without being frightened by any contradictions. They knew of Indra as the greatest of gods,

they knew of Agni as the god of gods, they knew of Varuna as the ruler of all; but they were by no means startled at the idea that their Indra had a mother, or that their Agni [Latin ignis] was born like a babe from the friction of two fire-sticks, or that Varuna and his brother Mitra were nursed in the lap of Aditi." [103](#) Thus we have seen Bhaga, the daylight, represented as the offspring, of Aditi, the boundless Orient; but he had several brothers, and among them were Mitra, the sun, Varuna, the overarching firmament, and Vivasvat, the vivifying sun. Manifestly we have here but so many different names for what is at bottom one and the same conception. The common element which, in Dyaus and Varuna, in Bhaga and Indra, was made an object of worship, is the brightness, warmth, and life of day, as contrasted with the darkness, cold, and seeming death of the night-time. And this common element was personified in as

many different ways as the unrestrained fancy of the ancient worshipper saw fit to devise. [104](#)

Thus we begin to see why a few simple objects, like the sun, the sky, the dawn, and the night, should be represented in mythology by such a host of gods, goddesses, and heroes. For at one time the Sun is represented as the conqueror of hydras and dragons who hide away from men the golden treasures of light and warmth, and at another time he is represented as a weary voyager traversing the sky-sea amid many perils, with the steadfast purpose of returning to his western home and his twilight bride; hence the different conceptions of Herakles, Bellerophon, and Odysseus. Now he is represented as the son of the Dawn, and again, with equal propriety, as the son of the Night, and the fickle lover of the Dawn; hence we have, on the one hand, stories of a virgin mother who dies

in giving birth to a hero, and, on the other hand, stories of a beautiful maiden who is forsaken and perhaps cruelly slain by her treacherous lover. Indeed, the Sun's adventures with so many dawn-maidens have given him quite a bad character, and the legends are numerous in which he appears as the prototype of Don Juan. Yet again his separation from the bride of his youth is described as due to no fault of his own, but to a resistless decree of fate, which hurries him away as Aeneas was compelled to abandon Dido. Or, according to a third and equally plausible notion, he is a hero of ascetic virtues, and the dawn-maiden is a wicked enchantress, daughter of the sensual Aphrodite, who vainly endeavours to seduce him. In the story of Odysseus these various conceptions are blended together. When enticed by artful women, [105](#) he yields for a while to the temptation; but by and by his longing to see Penelope takes him homeward, albeit

with a record which Penelope might not altogether have liked. Again, though the Sun, "always roaming with a hungry heart," has seen many cities and customs of strange men, he is nevertheless confined to a single path,—a circumstance which seems to have occasioned much speculation in the primeval mind.

Garcilaso de la Vega relates of a certain Peruvian Inca, who seems to have been an "infidel" with reference to the orthodox mythology of his day, that he thought the Sun was not such a mighty god after all; for if he were, he would wander about the heavens at random instead of going forever, like a horse in a treadmill, along the same course. The American Indians explained this circumstance by myths which told how the Sun was once caught and tied with a chain which would only let him swing a little way to one side or the other. The ancient Aryan developed the nobler myth of the labours of Herakles,

performed in obedience to the bidding of Eurystheus. Again, the Sun must needs destroy its parents, the Night and the Dawn; and accordingly his parents, forewarned by prophecy, expose him in infancy, or order him to be put to death; but his tragic destiny never fails to be accomplished to the letter. And again the Sun, who engages in quarrels not his own, is sometimes represented as retiring moodily from the sight of men, like Achilles and Meleagros: he is short-lived and ill-fated, born to do much good and to be repaid with ingratitude; his life depends on the duration of a burning brand, and when that is extinguished he must die.

The myth of the great Theban hero, Oidipous, well illustrates the multiplicity of conceptions which clustered about the daily career of the solar orb. His father, Laios, had been warned by the Delphic oracle that he was in danger of death from

his own son. The newly born Oidipous was therefore exposed on the hillside, but, like Romulus and Remus, and all infants similarly situated in legend, was duly rescued. He was taken to Corinth, where he grew up to manhood. Journeying once to Thebes, he got into a quarrel with an old man whom he met on the road, and slew him, who was none other than his father, Laios. Reaching Thebes, he found the city harassed by the Sphinx, who afflicted the land with drought until she should receive an answer to her riddles. Oidipous destroyed the monster by solving her dark sayings, and as a reward received the kingdom, with his own mother, Iokaste, as his bride. Then the Erinyes hastened the discovery of these dark deeds; Iokaste died in her bridal chamber; and Oidipous, having blinded himself, fled to the grove of the Eumenides, near Athens, where, amid

flashing lightning and peals of thunder, he died.

Oidipous is the Sun. Like all the solar heroes, from Herakles and Perseus to Sigurd and William Tell, he performs his marvellous deeds at the behest of others. His father, Laios, is none other than the Vedic Dasyu, the night-demon who is sure to be destroyed by his solar offspring. In the evening, Oidipous is united to the Dawn, the mother who had borne him at daybreak; and here the original story doubtless ended. In the Vedic hymns we find Indra, the Sun, born of Dahana (Daphne), the Dawn, whom he afterwards, in the evening twilight, marries. To the Indian mind the story was here complete; but the Greeks had forgotten and outgrown the primitive signification of the myth. To them Oidipous and Iokaste were human, or at least anthropomorphic beings; and a marriage between them was a fearful

crime which called for bitter expiation. Thus the latter part of the story arose in the effort to satisfy a moral feeling. As the name of Laios denotes the dark night, so, like Iole, Oinone, and Iamos, the word Iokaste signifies the delicate violet tints of the morning and evening clouds. Oidipous was exposed, like Paris upon Ida (a Vedic word meaning "the earth"), because the sunlight in the morning lies upon the hillside. [106](#) He is borne on to the destruction of his father and the incestuous marriage with his mother by an irresistible Moira, or Fate; the sun cannot but slay the darkness and hasten to the couch of the violet twilight. [107](#) The Sphinx is the storm-demon who sits on the cloud-rock and imprisons the rain; she is the same as Medusa, Ahi, or Echidna, and Chimaira, and is akin to the throttling snakes of darkness which the jealous Here sent to destroy Herakles in his cradle. The idea was not derived from Egypt, but the

Greeks, on finding Egyptian figures resembling their conception of the Sphinx, called them by the same name. The omniscient Sun comprehends the sense of her dark mutterings, and destroys her, as Indra slays Vritra, bringing down rain upon the parched earth. The Erinyes, who bring to light the crimes of Oidipous, have been explained, in a previous paper, as the personification of daylight, which reveals the evil deeds done under the cover of night. The grove of the Erinyes, like the garden of the Hyperboreans, represents "the fairy network of clouds, which are the first to receive and the last to lose the light of the sun in the morning and in the evening; hence, although Oidipous dies in a thunder-storm, yet the Eumenides are kind to him, and his last hour is one of deep peace and tranquillity." [108](#) To the last remains with him his daughter Antigone, "she who is

born opposite," the pale light which springs up opposite to the setting sun. These examples show that a story-root may be as prolific of heterogeneous offspring as a word-root. Just as we find the root *spak*, "to look," begetting words so various as *sceptic*, *bishop*, *speculate*, *conspicuous*, *species*, and *spice*, we must expect to find a simple representation of the diurnal course of the sun, like those lyrically given in the Veda, branching off into stories as diversified as those of *Oidipous*, *Herakles*, *Odysseus*, and *Siegfried*. In fact, the types upon which stories are constructed are wonderfully few. Some clever playwright—I believe it was *Scribe*—has said that there are only seven possible dramatic situations; that is, all the plays in the world may be classed with some one of seven archetypal dramas. [109](#) If this be true, the astonishing complexity of mythology taken in the concrete, as compared with its

extreme simplicity when analyzed, need not surprise us.

The extreme limits of divergence between stories descended from a common root are probably reached in the myths of light and darkness with which the present discussion is mainly concerned. The subject will be best elucidated by taking a single one of these myths and following its various fortunes through different regions of the Aryan world. The myth of Hercules and Cacus has been treated by M. Breal in an essay which is one of the most valuable contributions ever made to the study of comparative mythology; and while following his footsteps our task will be an easy one.

The battle between Hercules and Cacus, although one of the oldest of the traditions common to the whole Indo-European race, appears in Italy as a purely local legend, and is narrated as such by Virgil, in the eighth book of the *Aeneid*; by Livy, at the

beginning of his history; and by Propertius and Ovid. Hercules, journeying through Italy after his victory over Geryon, stops to rest by the bank of the Tiber. While he is taking his repose, the three-headed monster Cacus, a son of Vulcan and a formidable brigand, comes and steals his cattle, and drags them tail-foremost to a secret cavern in the rocks. But the lowing of the cows arouses Hercules, and he runs toward the cavern where the robber, already frightened, has taken refuge. Armed with a huge flinty rock, he breaks open the entrance of the cavern, and confronts the demon within, who vomits forth flames at him and roars like the thunder in the storm-cloud. After a short combat, his hideous body falls at the feet of the invincible hero, who erects on the spot an altar to Jupiter Inventor, in commemoration of the recovery of his cattle. Ancient Rome teemed with reminiscences of this event, which Livy

regarded as first in the long series of the exploits of his countrymen. The place where Hercules pastured his oxen was known long after as the Forum Boarium; near it the Porta Trigemina preserved the recollection of the monster's triple head; and in the time of Diodorus Siculus sight-seers were shown the cavern of Cacus on the slope of the Aventine. Every tenth day the earlier generations of Romans celebrated the victory with solemn sacrifices at the Ara Maxima; and on days of triumph the fortunate general deposited there a tithe of his booty, to be distributed among the citizens.

In this famous myth, however, the god Hercules did not originally figure. The Latin Hercules was an essentially peaceful and domestic deity, watching over households and enclosures, and nearly akin to Terminus and the Penates. He does not appear to have been a solar divinity at all. But the purely accidental

resemblance of his name to that of the Greek deity Herakles, [110](#) and the manifest identity of the Cacus-myth with the story of the victory of Herakles over Geryon, led to the substitution of Hercules for the original hero of the legend, who was none other than Jupiter, called by his Sabine name Sancus. Now Johannes Lydus informs us that, in Sabine, Sancus signified "the sky," a meaning which we have already seen to belong to the name Jupiter. The same substitution of the Greek hero for the Roman divinity led to the alteration of the name of the demon overcome by his thunderbolts. The corrupted title Cacus was supposed to be identical with the Greek word kakos, meaning "evil" and the corruption was suggested by the epithet of Herakles, Alexikakos, or "the averter of ill." Originally, however, the name was Caecius, "he who blinds or darkens," and it corresponds literally to the name of the

Greek demon Kaikias, whom an old proverb, preserved by Aulus Gellius, describes as a stealer of the clouds. [111](#) Thus the significance of the myth becomes apparent. The three-headed Cacus is seen to be a near kinsman of Geryon's three-headed dog Orthros, and of the three-headed Kerberos, the hell-hound who guards the dark regions below the horizon. He is the original werewolf or Rakshasa, the fiend of the storm who steals the bright cattle of Helios, and hides them in the black cavernous rock, from which they are afterwards rescued by the schamir or lightning-stone of the solar hero. The physical character of the myth is apparent even in the description of Virgil, which reads wonderfully like a Vedic hymn in celebration of the exploits of Indra. But when we turn to the Veda itself, we find the correctness of the interpretation demonstrated again and again, with inexhaustible prodigality of

evidence. Here we encounter again the three-headed Orthros under the identical title of Vritra, "he who shrouds or envelops," called also Cushna, "he who parches," Pani, "the robber," and Ahi, "the strangler." In many hymns of the Rig-Veda the story is told over and over, like a musical theme arranged with variations. Indra, the god of light, is a herdsman who tends a herd of bright golden or violet-coloured cattle. Vritra, a snake-like monster with three heads, steals them and hides them in a cavern, but Indra slays him as Jupiter slew Caecius, and the cows are recovered. The language of the myth is so significant, that the Hindu commentators of the Veda have themselves given explanations of it similar to those proposed by modern philologists. To them the legend never became devoid of sense, as the myth of Geryon appeared to Greek scholars like Apollodoros. [112](#)

These celestial cattle, with their resplendent coats of purple and gold, are the clouds lit up by the solar rays; but the demon who steals them is not always the fiend of the storm, acting in that capacity. They are stolen every night by Vritra the concealer, and Caecius the darkener, and Indra is obliged to spend hours in looking for them, sending Sarama, the inconstant twilight, to negotiate for their recovery. Between the storm-myth and the myth of night and morning the resemblance is sometimes so close as to confuse the interpretation of the two. Many legends which Max Muller explains as myths of the victory of day over night are explained by Dr. Kuhn as storm-myths; and the disagreement between two such powerful champions would be a standing reproach to what is rather prematurely called the SCIENCE of comparative mythology, were it not easy to show that the difference is merely apparent and non-essential. It is

the old story of the shield with two sides; and a comparison of the ideas fundamental to these myths will show that there is no valid ground for disagreement in the interpretation of them. The myths of schamir and the divining-rod, analyzed in a previous paper, explain the rending of the thunder-cloud and the procuring of water without especial reference to any struggle between opposing divinities. But in the myth of Hercules and Cacus, the fundamental idea is the victory of the solar god over the robber who steals the light. Now whether the robber carries off the light in the evening when Indra has gone to sleep, or boldly rears his black form against the sky during the daytime, causing darkness to spread over the earth, would make little difference to the framers of the myth. To a chicken a solar eclipse is the same thing as nightfall, and he goes to roost accordingly. Why, then, should the primitive thinker have made a

distinction between the darkening of the sky caused by black clouds and that caused by the rotation of the earth? He had no more conception of the scientific explanation of these phenomena than the chicken has of the scientific explanation of an eclipse. For him it was enough to know that the solar radiance was stolen, in the one case as in the other, and to suspect that the same demon was to blame for both robberies.

The Veda itself sustains this view. It is certain that the victory of Indra over Vritra is essentially the same as his victory over the Panis. Vritra, the storm-fiend, is himself called one of the Panis; yet the latter are uniformly represented as night-demons. They steal Indra's golden cattle and drive them by circuitous paths to a dark hiding-place near the eastern horizon. Indra sends the dawn-nymph, Sarama, to search for them, but as she comes within sight of the dark stable, the

Panis try to coax her to stay with them: "Let us make thee our sister, do not go away again; we will give thee part of the cows, O darling." [113](#) According to the text of this hymn, she scorns their solicitations, but elsewhere the fickle dawn-nymph is said to coquet with the powers of darkness. She does not care for their cows, but will take a drink of milk, if they will be so good as to get it for her. Then she goes back and tells Indra that she cannot find the cows. He kicks her with his foot, and she runs back to the Panis, followed by the god, who smites them all with his unerring arrows and recovers the stolen light. From such a simple beginning as this has been deduced the Greek myth of the faithlessness of Helen. [114](#)

These night-demons, the Panis, though not apparently regarded with any strong feeling of moral condemnation, are nevertheless hated and dreaded as the

authors of calamity. They not only steal the daylight, but they parch the earth and wither the fruits, and they slay vegetation during the winter months. As Caecius, the "darkener," became ultimately changed into Cacus, the "evil one," so the name of Vritra, the "concealer," the most famous of the Panis, was gradually generalized until it came to mean "enemy," like the English word fiend, and began to be applied indiscriminately to any kind of evil spirit. In one place he is called Adeva, the "enemy of the gods," an epithet exactly equivalent to the Persian dev.

In the Zendavesta the myth of Hercules and Cacus has given rise to a vast system of theology. The fiendish Panis are concentrated in Ahriman or Anro-mainyas, whose name signifies the "spirit of darkness," and who carries on a perpetual warfare against Ormuzd or Ahuramazda, who is described by his ordinary surname, Spentomainyas, as the "spirit of light."

The ancient polytheism here gives place to a refined dualism, not very different from what in many Christian sects has passed current as monotheism. Ahriman is the archfiend, who struggles with Ormuzd, not for the possession of a herd of perishable cattle, but for the dominion of the universe. Ormuzd creates the world pure and beautiful, but Ahriman comes after him and creates everything that is evil in it. He not only keeps the earth covered with darkness during half of the day, and withholds the rain and destroys the crops, but he is the author of all evil thoughts and the instigator of all wicked actions. Like his progenitor Vritra and his offspring Satan, he is represented under the form of a serpent; and the destruction which ultimately awaits these demons is also in reserve for him. Eventually there is to be a day of reckoning, when Ahriman will be bound in chains and rendered powerless, or when, according to another account, he

will be converted to righteousness, as Burns hoped and Origen believed would be the case with Satan.

This dualism of the ancient Persians has exerted a powerful influence upon the development of Christian theology. The very idea of an archfiend Satan, which Christianity received from Judaism, seems either to have been suggested by the Persian Ahriman, or at least to have derived its principal characteristics from that source. There is no evidence that the Jews, previous to the Babylonish captivity, possessed the conception of a Devil as the author of all evil. In the earlier books of the Old Testament Jehovah is represented as dispensing with his own hand the good and the evil, like the Zeus of the Iliad. [115](#) The story of the serpent in Eden—an Aryan story in every particular, which has crept into the Pentateuch—is not once alluded to in the Old Testament; and the notion of Satan as the author of

evil appears only in the later books, composed after the Jews had come into close contact with Persian ideas. [116](#) In the Book of Job, as Reville observes, Satan is "still a member of the celestial court, being one of the sons of the Elohim, but having as his special office the continual accusation of men, and having become so suspicious by his practice as public accuser, that he believes in the virtue of no one, and always presupposes interested motives for the purest manifestations of human piety." In this way the character of this angel became injured, and he became more and more an object of dread and dislike to men, until the later Jews ascribed to him all the attributes of Ahriman, and in this singularly altered shape he passed into Christian theology. Between the Satan of the Book of Job and the mediaeval Devil the metamorphosis is as great as that which degraded the stern Erinys, who

brings evil deeds to light, into the demon-like Fury who torments wrong-doers in Tartarus; and, making allowance for difference of circumstances, the process of degradation has been very nearly the same in the two cases.

The mediaeval conception of the Devil is a grotesque compound of elements derived from all the systems of pagan mythology which Christianity superseded. He is primarily a rebellious angel, expelled from heaven along with his followers, like the giants who attempted to scale Olympos, and like the impious Efreets of Arabian legend who revolted against the beneficent rule of Solomon. As the serpent prince of the outer darkness, he retains the old characteristics of Vritra, Ahi, Typhon, and Echidna. As the black dog which appears behind the stove in Dr. Faust's study, he is the classic hell-hound Kerberos, the Vedic Carvara. From the sylvan deity Pan he gets his goat-like

body, his horns and cloven hoofs. Like the wind-god Orpheus, to whose music the trees bent their heads to listen, he is an unrivalled player on the bagpipes. Like those other wind-gods the psychopomp Hermes and the wild huntsman Odin, he is the prince of the powers of the air: his flight through the midnight sky, attended by his troop of witches mounted on their brooms, which sometimes break the boughs and sweep the leaves from the trees, is the same as the furious chase of the Erlking Odin or the Burckar Vittikab. He is Dionysos, who causes red wine to flow from the dry wood, alike on the deck of the Tyrrhenian pirate-ship and in Auerbach's cellar at Leipzig. He is Wayland, the smith, a skilful worker in metals and a wonderful architect, like the classic fire-god Hephaistos or Vulcan; and, like Hephaistos, he is lame from the effects of his fall from heaven. From the lightning-god Thor he obtains his red

beard, his pitchfork, and his power over thunderbolts; and, like that ancient deity, he is in the habit of beating his wife behind the door when the rain falls during sunshine. Finally, he takes a hint from Poseidon and from the swan-maidens, and appears as a water-imp or Nixy (whence probably his name of Old Nick), and as the Davy (deva) whose "locker" is situated at the bottom of the sea. [117](#)

According to the Scotch divines of the seventeenth century, the Devil is a learned scholar and profound thinker. Having profited by six thousand years of intense study and meditation, he has all science, philosophy, and theology at his tongue's end; and, as his skill has increased with age, he is far more than a match for mortals in cunning. [118](#) Such, however, is not the view taken by mediaeval mythology, which usually represents his stupidity as equalling his malignity. The victory of Hercules over

Cacus is repeated in a hundred mediaeval legends in which the Devil is overreached and made a laughing-stock. The germ of this notion may be found in the blinding of Polyphemos by Odysseus, which is itself a victory of the sun-hero over the night-demon, and which curiously reappears in a Middle-Age story narrated by Mr. Cox. "The Devil asks a man who is moulding buttons what he may be doing; and when the man answers that he is moulding eyes, asks him further whether he can give him a pair of new eyes. He is told to come again another day; and when he makes his appearance accordingly, the man tells him that the operation cannot be performed rightly unless he is first tightly bound with his back fastened to a bench. While he is thus pinioned he asks the man's name. The reply is Issi ('himself'). When the lead is melted, the Devil opens his eyes wide to receive the deadly stream. As soon as he is blinded, he starts

up in agony, bearing away the bench to which he had been bound; and when some workpeople in the fields ask him who had thus treated him, his answer is, 'Issi teggi' ('Self did it'). With a laugh they bid him lie on the bed which he has made: 'selbst gethan, selbst habe.' The Devil died of his new eyes, and was never seen again."

In his attempts to obtain human souls the Devil is frequently foiled by the superior cunning of mortals. Once, he agreed to build a house for a peasant in exchange for the peasant's soul; but if the house were not finished before cockcrow, the contract was to be null and void. Just as the Devil was putting on the last tile the man imitated a cockcrow and waked up all the roosters in the neighbourhood, so that the fiend had his labour for his pains. A merchant of Louvain once sold himself to the Devil, who heaped upon him all manner of riches for seven years, and

then came to get him. The merchant "took the Devil in a friendly manner by the hand and, as it was just evening, said, 'Wife, bring a light quickly for the gentleman.' 'That is not at all necessary,' said the Devil; 'I am merely come to fetch you.' 'Yes, yes, that I know very well,' said the merchant, 'only just grant me the time till this little candle-end is burnt out, as I have a few letters to sign and to put on my coat.' 'Very well,' said the Devil, 'but only till the candle is burnt out.' 'Good,' said the merchant, and going into the next room, ordered the maid-servant to place a large cask full of water close to a very deep pit that was dug in the garden. The men-servants also carried, each of them, a cask to the spot; and when all was done, they were ordered each to take a shovel, and stand round the pit. The merchant then returned to the Devil, who seeing that not more than about an inch of candle remained, said, laughing, 'Now

get yourself ready, it will soon be burnt out.' 'That I see, and am content; but I shall hold you to your word, and stay till it IS burnt.' 'Of course,' answered the Devil; 'I stick to my word.' 'It is dark in the next room,' continued the merchant, 'but I must find the great book with clasps, so let me just take the light for one moment.' 'Certainly,' said the Devil, 'but I'll go with you.' He did so, and the merchant's trepidation was now on the increase. When in the next room he said on a sudden, 'Ah, now I know, the key is in the garden door.' And with these words he ran out with the light into the garden, and before the Devil could overtake him, threw it into the pit, and the men and the maids poured water upon it, and then filled up the hole with earth. Now came the Devil into the garden and asked, 'Well, did you get the key? and how is it with the candle? where is it?' 'The candle?' said the merchant. 'Yes, the candle.' 'Ha, ha, ha! it

is not yet burnt out,' answered the merchant, laughing, 'and will not be burnt out for the next fifty years; it lies there a hundred fathoms deep in the earth.' When the Devil heard this he screamed awfully, and went off with a most intolerable stench." [119](#)

One day a fowler, who was a terrible bungler and could n't hit a bird at a dozen paces, sold his soul to the Devil in order to become a Freischutz. The fiend was to come for him in seven years, but must be always able to name the animal at which he was shooting, otherwise the compact was to be nullified. After that day the fowler never missed his aim, and never did a fowler command such wages. When the seven years were out the fowler told all these things to his wife, and the twain hit upon an expedient for cheating the Devil. The woman stripped herself, daubed her whole body with molasses, and rolled herself up in a feather-bed, cut open for

this purpose. Then she hopped and skipped about the field where her husband stood parleying with Old Nick. "there's a shot for you, fire away," said the Devil. "Of course I'll fire, but do you first tell me what kind of a bird it is; else our agreement is cancelled, Old Boy." There was no help for it; the Devil had to own himself nonplussed, and off he fled, with a whiff of brimstone which nearly suffocated the Freischutz and his good woman. [120](#)

In the legend of Gambrinus, the fiend is still more ingloriously defeated.

Gambrinus was a fiddler, who, being jilted by his sweetheart, went out into the woods to hang himself. As he was sitting on the bough, with the cord about his neck, preparatory to taking the fatal plunge, suddenly a tall man in a green coat appeared before him, and offered his services. He might become as wealthy as he liked, and make his sweetheart burst with vexation at her own folly, but in

thirty years he must give up his soul to Beelzebub. The bargain was struck, for Gambrinus thought thirty years a long time to enjoy one's self in, and perhaps the Devil might get him in any event; as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb. Aided by Satan, he invented chiming-bells and lager-beer, for both of which achievements his name is held in grateful remembrance by the Teuton. No sooner had the Holy Roman Emperor quaffed a gallon or two of the new beverage than he made Gambrinus Duke of Brabant and Count of Flanders, and then it was the fiddler's turn to laugh at the discomfiture of his old sweetheart. Gambrinus kept clear of women, says the legend, and so lived in peace. For thirty years he sat beneath his belfry with the chimes, meditatively drinking beer with his nobles and burghers around him. Then Beelzebub sent Jocko, one of his imps, with orders to bring back Gambrinus before midnight.

But Jocko was, like Swiveller's Marchioness, ignorant of the taste of beer, never having drunk of it even in a sip, and the Flemish schoppen were too much for him. He fell into a drunken sleep, and did not wake up until noon next day, at which he was so mortified that he had not the face to go back to hell at all. So Gambrinus lived on tranquilly for a century or two, and drank so much beer that he turned into a beer-barrel.[121](#)

The character of gullibility attributed to the Devil in these legends is probably derived from the Trolls, or "night-folk," of Northern mythology. In most respects the Trolls resemble the Teutonic elves and fairies, and the Jinn or Efreets of the Arabian Nights; but their pedigree is less honourable. The fairies, or "White Ladies," were not originally spirits of darkness, but were nearly akin to the swan-maidens, dawn-nymphs, and dryads, and though their wrath was to be dreaded, they were

not malignant by nature. Christianity, having no place for such beings, degraded them into something like imps; the most charitable theory being that they were angels who had remained neutral during Satan's rebellion, in punishment for which Michael expelled them from heaven, but has left their ultimate fate unannounced until the day of judgment. The Jinn appear to have been similarly degraded on the rise of Mohammedanism. But the Trolls were always imps of darkness. They are descended from the Jotuns, or Frost-Giants of Northern paganism, and they correspond to the Panis, or night-demons of the Veda. In many Norse tales they are said to burst when they see the risen sun. [122](#) They eat human flesh, are ignorant of the simplest arts, and live in the deepest recesses of the forest or in caverns on the hillside, where the sunlight never penetrates. Some of these characteristics may very likely have been

suggested by reminiscences of the primeval Lapps, from whom the Aryan invaders wrested the dominion of Europe. [123](#) In some legends the Trolls are represented as an ancient race of beings now superseded by the human race. "'What sort of an earth-worm is this?' said one Giant to another, when they met a man as they walked. 'These are the earth-worms that will one day eat us up, brother,' answered the other; and soon both Giants left that part of Germany." "'See what pretty playthings, mother!' cries the Giant's daughter, as she unties her apron, and shows her a plough, and horses, and a peasant. 'Back with them this instant,' cries the mother in wrath, 'and put them down as carefully as you can, for these playthings can do our race great harm, and when these come we must budge.'" Very naturally the primitive Teuton, possessing already the conception of night-demons, would apply it to these

men of the woods whom even to this day his uneducated descendants believe to be sorcerers, able to turn men into wolves. But whatever contributions historical fact may have added to his character, the Troll is originally a creation of mythology, like Polyphemos, whom he resembles in his uncouth person, his cannibal appetite, and his lack of wit. His ready gullibility is shown in the story of "Boots who ate a Match with the Troll." Boots, the brother of Cinderella, and the counterpart alike of Jack the Giant-killer, and of Odysseus, is the youngest of three brothers who go into a forest to cut wood. The Troll appears and threatens to kill any one who dares to meddle with his timber. The elder brothers flee, but Boots puts on a bold face. He pulled a cheese out of his srip and squeezed it till the whey began to spurt out. "Hold your tongue, you dirty Troll," said he, "or I'll squeeze you as I squeeze this stone." So the Troll grew

timid and begged to be spared, [124](#) and Boots let him off on condition that he would hew all day with him. They worked till nightfall, and the Troll's giant strength accomplished wonders. Then Boots went home with the Troll, having arranged that he should get the water while his host made the fire. When they reached the hut there were two enormous iron pails, so heavy that none but a Troll could lift them, but Boots was not to be frightened. "Bah!" said he. "Do you suppose I am going to get water in those paltry hand-basins? Hold on till I go and get the spring itself!" "O dear!" said the Troll, "I'd rather not; do you make the fire, and I'll get the water." Then when the soup was made, Boots challenged his new friend to an eating-match; and tying his scribe in front of him, proceeded to pour soup into it by the ladleful. By and by the giant threw down his spoon in despair, and owned himself conquered. "No, no! don't give it

up yet," said Boots, "just cut a hole in your stomach like this, and you can eat forever." And suiting the action to the words, he ripped open his srip. So the silly Troll cut himself open and died, and Boots carried off all his gold and silver. Once there was a Troll whose name was Wind-and-Weather, and Saint Olaf hired him to build a church. If the church were completed within a certain specified time, the Troll was to get possession of Saint Olaf. The saint then planned such a stupendous edifice that he thought the giant would be forever building it; but the work went on briskly, and at the appointed day nothing remained but to finish the point of the spire. In his consternation Olaf rushed about until he passed by the Troll's den, when he heard the giantess telling her children that their father, Wind-and-Weather, was finishing his church, and would be home to-morrow with Saint Olaf. So the saint ran back to

the church and bawled out, "Hold on, Wind-and-Weather, your spire is crooked!" Then the giant tumbled down from the roof and broke into a thousand pieces. As in the cases of the Mara and the werewolf, the enchantment was at an end as soon as the enchanter was called by name. These Trolls, like the Arabian Efreet, had an ugly habit of carrying off beautiful princesses. This is strictly in keeping with their character as night-demons, or Panis. In the stories of Punchkin and the Heartless Giant, the night-demon carries off the dawn-maiden after having turned into stone her solar brethren. But Boots, or Indra, in search of his kinsfolk, by and by arrives at the Troll's castle, and then the dawn-nymph, true to her fickle character, cajoles the Giant and enables Boots to destroy him. In the famous myth which serves as the basis for the Volsunga Saga and the Nibelungenlied, the dragon Fafnir steals the Valkyrie Brynhild and

keeps her shut up in a castle on the Glistening Heath, until some champion shall be found powerful enough to rescue her. The castle is as hard to enter as that of the Sleeping Beauty; but Sigurd, the Northern Achilles, riding on his deathless horse, and wielding his resistless sword Gram, forces his way in, slays Fafnir, and recovers the Valkyrie.

In the preceding paper the Valkyries were shown to belong to the class of cloud-maidens; and between the tale of Sigurd and that of Hercules and Cacus there is no difference, save that the bright sunlit clouds which are represented in the one as cows are in the other represented as maidens. In the myth of the Argonauts they reappear as the Golden Fleece, carried to the far east by Phrixos and Helle, who are themselves Niblungs, or "Children of the Mist" (Nephele), and there guarded by a dragon. In all these myths a treasure is stolen by a fiend of darkness,

and recovered by a hero of light, who slays the demon. And—remembering what Scribe said about the fewness of dramatic types—I believe we are warranted in asserting that all the stories of lovely women held in bondage by monsters, and rescued by heroes who perform wonderful tasks, such as Don Quixote burned to achieve, are derived ultimately from solar myths, like the myth of Sigurd and Brynhild. I do not mean to say that the story-tellers who beguiled their time in stringing together the incidents which make up these legends were conscious of their solar character. They did not go to work, with malice prepense, to weave allegories and apologues. The Greeks who first told the story of Perseus and Andromeda, the Arabians who devised the tale of Codadad and his brethren, the Flemings who listened over their beer-mugs to the adventures of Culotte-Verte, were not thinking of sun-gods or dawn-

maidens, or night-demons; and no theory of mythology can be sound which implies such an extravagance. Most of these stories have lived on the lips of the common people; and illiterate persons are not in the habit of allegorizing in the style of mediaeval monks or rabbinical commentators. But what has been amply demonstrated is, that the sun and the clouds, the light and the darkness, were once supposed to be actuated by wills analogous to the human will; that they were personified and worshipped or propitiated by sacrifice; and that their doings were described in language which applied so well to the deeds of human or quasi-human beings that in course of time its primitive purport faded from recollection. No competent scholar now doubts that the myths of the Veda and the Edda originated in this way, for philology itself shows that the names employed in them are the names of the great

phenomena of nature. And when once a few striking stories had thus arisen,—when once it had been told how Indra smote the Panis, and how Sigurd rescued Brynhild, and how Odysseus blinded the Kyklops,—then certain mythic or dramatic types had been called into existence; and to these types, preserved in the popular imagination, future stories would inevitably conform. We need, therefore, have no hesitation in admitting a common origin for the vanquished Panis and the outwitted Troll or Devil; we may securely compare the legends of St. George and Jack the Giant-killer with the myth of Indra slaying Vritra; we may see in the invincible Sigurd the prototype of many a doughty knight-errant of romance; and we may learn anew the lesson, taught with fresh emphasis by modern scholarship, that in the deepest sense there is nothing new under the sun.

I am the more explicit on this point, because it seems to me that the unguarded language of many students of mythology is liable to give rise to misapprehensions, and to discredit both the method which they employ and the results which they have obtained. If we were to give full weight to the statements which are sometimes made, we should perforce believe that primitive men had nothing to do but to ponder about the sun and the clouds, and to worry themselves over the disappearance of daylight. But there is nothing in the scientific interpretation of myths which obliges us to go any such length. I do not suppose that any ancient Aryan, possessed of good digestive powers and endowed with sound common-sense, ever lay awake half the night wondering whether the sun would come back again. [125](#) The child and the savage believe of necessity that the future will resemble the past, and it is only

philosophy which raises doubts on the subject. [126](#) The predominance of solar legends in most systems of mythology is not due to the lack of "that Titanic assurance with which we say, the sun MUST rise"; [127](#) nor again to the fact that the phenomena of day and night are the most striking phenomena in nature. Eclipses and earthquakes and floods are phenomena of the most terrible and astounding kind, and they have all generated myths; yet their contributions to folk-lore are scanty compared with those furnished by the strife between the day-god and his enemies. The sun-myths have been so prolific because the dramatic types to which they have given rise are of surpassing human interest. The dragon who swallows the sun is no doubt a fearful personage; but the hero who toils for others, who slays hydra-headed monsters, and dries the tears of fair-haired damsels, and achieves success in spite of incredible

obstacles, is a being with whom we can all sympathize, and of whom we never weary of hearing.

With many of these legends which present the myth of light and darkness in its most attractive form, the reader is already acquainted, and it is needless to retail stories which have been told over and over again in books which every one is presumed to have read. I will content myself with a weird Irish legend, narrated by Mr. Patrick Kennedy, [128](#) in which we here and there catch glimpses of the primitive mythical symbols, as fragments of gold are seen gleaming through the crystal of quartz.

Long before the Danes ever came to Ireland, there died at Muskerry a Sculloge, or country farmer, who by dint of hard work and close economy had amassed enormous wealth. His only son did not resemble him. When the young Sculloge looked about the house, the day after his

father's death, and saw the big chests full of gold and silver, and the cupboards shining with piles of sovereigns, and the old stockings stuffed with large and small coin, he said to himself, "Bedad, how shall I ever be able to spend the likes o' that!" And so he drank, and gambled, and wasted his time in hunting and horse-racing, until after a while he found the chests empty and the cupboards poverty-stricken, and the stockings lean and penniless. Then he mortgaged his farmhouse and gambled away all the money he got for it, and then he bethought him that a few hundred pounds might be raised on his mill. But when he went to look at it, he found "the dam broken, and scarcely a thimbleful of water in the mill-race, and the wheel rotten, and the thatch of the house all gone, and the upper millstone lying flat on the lower one, and a coat of dust and mould over everything." So he made up his mind to borrow a horse and

take one more hunt to-morrow and then reform his habits.

As he was returning late in the evening from this farewell hunt, passing through a lonely glen he came upon an old man playing backgammon, betting on his left hand against his right, and crying and cursing because the right WOULD win. "Come and bet with me," said he to Sculloge. "Faith, I have but a sixpence in the world," was the reply; "but, if you like, I'll wager that on the right." "Done," said the old man, who was a Druid; "if you win I'll give you a hundred guineas." So the game was played, and the old man, whose right hand was always the winner, paid over the guineas and told Sculloge to go to the Devil with them.

Instead of following this bit of advice, however, the young farmer went home and began to pay his debts, and next week he went to the glen and won another game, and made the Druid rebuild his mill.

So Sculloge became prosperous again, and by and by he tried his luck a third time, and won a game played for a beautiful wife. The Druid sent her to his house the next morning before he was out of bed, and his servants came knocking at the door and crying, "Wake up! wake up! Master Sculloge, there's a young lady here to see you." "Bedad, it's the vanithee [129](#) herself," said Sculloge; and getting up in a hurry, he spent three quarters of an hour in dressing himself. At last he went down stairs, and there on the sofa was the prettiest lady ever seen in Ireland! Naturally, Sculloge's heart beat fast and his voice trembled, as he begged the lady's pardon for this Druidic style of wooing, and besought her not to feel obliged to stay with him unless she really liked him. But the young lady, who was a king's daughter from a far country, was wondrously charmed with the handsome farmer, and so well did they get along that

the priest was sent for without further delay, and they were married before sundown. Sabina was the vanithee's name; and she warned her husband to have no more dealings with Lassa Buaicht, the old man of the glen. So for a while all went happily, and the Druidic bride was as good as she was beautiful. But by and by Sculloge began to think he was not earning money fast enough. He could not bear to see his wife's white hands soiled with work, and thought it would be a fine thing if he could only afford to keep a few more servants, and drive about with Sabina in an elegant carriage, and see her clothed in silk and adorned with jewels. "I will play one more game and set the stakes high," said Sculloge to himself one evening, as he sat pondering over these things; and so, without consulting Sabina, he stole away to the glen, and played a game for ten thousand guineas. But the evil Druid was now ready to pounce on his

prey, and he did not play as of old. Sculloge broke into a cold sweat with agony and terror as he saw the left hand win! Then the face of Lassa Buaicht grew dark and stern, and he laid on Sculloge the curse which is laid upon the solar hero in misfortune, that he should never sleep twice under the same roof, or ascend the couch of the dawn-nymph, his wife, until he should have procured and brought to him the sword of light. When Sculloge reached home, more dead than alive, he saw that his wife knew all. Bitterly they wept together, but she told him that with courage all might be set right. She gave him a Druidic horse, which bore him swiftly over land and sea, like the enchanted steed of the Arabian Nights, until he reached the castle of his wife's father who, as Sculloge now learned, was a good Druid, the brother of the evil Lassa Buaicht. This good Druid told him that the sword of light was kept by a third brother,

the powerful magician, Fiach O'Duda, who dwelt in an enchanted castle, which many brave heroes had tried to enter, but the dark sorcerer had slain them all. Three high walls surrounded the castle, and many had scaled the first of these, but none had ever returned alive. But Sculloge was not to be daunted, and, taking from his father-in-law a black steed, he set out for the fortress of Fiach O'Duda. Over the first high wall nimbly leaped the magic horse, and Sculloge called aloud on the Druid to come out and surrender his sword. Then came out a tall, dark man, with coal-black eyes and hair and melancholy visage, and made a furious sweep at Sculloge with the flaming blade. But the Druidic beast sprang back over the wall in the twinkling of an eye and rescued his rider, leaving, however, his tail behind in the court-yard. Then Sculloge returned in triumph to his father-

in-law's palace, and the night was spent in feasting and revelry.

Next day Sculloge rode out on a white horse, and when he got to Fiach's castle, he saw the first wall lying in rubbish. He leaped the second, and the same scene occurred as the day before, save that the horse escaped unharmed.

The third day Sculloge went out on foot, with a harp like that of Orpheus in his hand, and as he swept its strings the grass bent to listen and the trees bowed their heads. The castle walls all lay in ruins, and Sculloge made his way unhindered to the upper room, where Fiach lay in Druidic slumber, lulled by the harp. He seized the sword of light, which was hung by the chimney sheathed in a dark scabbard, and making the best of his way back to the good king's palace, mounted his wife's steed, and scoured over land and sea until he found himself in the gloomy glen where Lassa Buaicht was

still crying and cursing and betting on his left hand against his right.

"Here, treacherous fiend, take your sword of light!" shouted Sculloge in tones of thunder; and as he drew it from its sheath the whole valley was lighted up as with the morning sun, and next moment the head of the wretched Druid was lying at his feet, and his sweet wife, who had come to meet him, was laughing and crying in his arms. November, 1870.

## V. MYTHS OF THE BARBARIC WORLD.

THE theory of mythology set forth in the four preceding papers, and illustrated by the examination of numerous myths relating to the lightning, the storm-wind, the clouds, and the sunlight, was originally framed with reference solely to the mythic and legendary lore of the Aryan world. The phonetic identity of the names of

many Western gods and heroes with the names of those Vedic divinities which are obviously the personifications of natural phenomena, suggested the theory which philosophical considerations had already foreshadowed in the works of Hume and Comte, and which the exhaustive analysis of Greek, Hindu, Keltic, and Teutonic legends has amply confirmed. Let us now, before proceeding to the consideration of barbaric folk-lore, briefly recapitulate the results obtained by modern scholarship working strictly within the limits of the Aryan domain.

In the first place, it has been proved once for all that the languages spoken by the Hindus, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Kelts, Slaves, and Teutons are all descended from a single ancestral language, the Old Aryan, in the same sense that French, Italian, and Spanish are descended from the Latin. And from this undisputed fact it is an inevitable inference that these

various races contain, along with other elements, a race-element in common, due to their Aryan pedigree. That the Indo-European races are wholly Aryan is very improbable, for in every case the countries overrun by them were occupied by inferior races, whose blood must have mingled in varying degrees with that of their conquerors; but that every Indo-European people is in great part descended from a common Aryan stock is not open to question.

In the second place, along with a common fund of moral and religious ideas and of legal and ceremonial observances, we find these kindred peoples possessed of a common fund of myths, superstitions, proverbs, popular poetry, and household legends. The Hindu mother amuses her child with fairy-tales which often correspond, even in minor incidents, with stories in Scottish or Scandinavian nurseries; and she tells them in words

which are phonetically akin to words in Swedish and Gaelic. No doubt many of these stories might have been devised in a dozen different places independently of each other; and no doubt many of them have been transmitted laterally from one people to another; but a careful examination shows that such cannot have been the case with the great majority of legends and beliefs. The agreement between two such stories, for instance, as those of Faithful John and Rama and Luxman is so close as to make it incredible that they should have been independently fabricated, while the points of difference are so important as to make it extremely improbable that the one was ever copied from the other. Besides which, the essential identity of such myths as those of Sigurd and Theseus, or of Helena and Sarama, carries us back historically to a time when the scattered Indo-European tribes had not yet begun to hold

commercial and intellectual intercourse with each other, and consequently could not have interchanged their epic materials or their household stories. We are therefore driven to the conclusion—which, startling as it may seem, is after all the most natural and plausible one that can be stated—that the Aryan nations, which have inherited from a common ancestral stock their languages and their customs, have inherited also from the same common original their fireside legends. They have preserved Cinderella and Punchkin just as they have preserved the words for father and mother, ten and twenty; and the former case, though more imposing to the imagination, is scientifically no less intelligible than the latter.

Thirdly, it has been shown that these venerable tales may be grouped in a few pretty well defined classes; and that the archetypal myth of each class—the

primitive story in conformity to which countless subsequent tales have been generated—was originally a mere description of physical phenomena, couched in the poetic diction of an age when everything was personified, because all natural phenomena were supposed to be due to the direct workings of a volition like that of which men were conscious within themselves. Thus we are led to the striking conclusion that mythology has had a common root, both with science and with religious philosophy. The myth of Indra conquering Vritra was one of the theorems of primitive Aryan science; it was a provisional explanation of the thunder-storm, satisfactory enough until extended observation and reflection supplied a better one. It also contained the germs of a theology; for the life-giving solar light furnished an important part of the primeval conception of deity. And finally, it became the fruitful parent of

countless myths, whether embodied in the stately epics of Homer and the bards of the Nibelungenlied, or in the humbler legends of St. George and William Tell and the ubiquitous Boots.

Such is the theory which was suggested half a century ago by the researches of Jacob Grimm, and which, so far as concerns the mythology of the Aryan race, is now victorious along the whole line. It remains for us to test the universality of the general principles upon which it is founded, by a brief analysis of sundry legends and superstitions of the barbaric world. Since the fetichistic habit of explaining the outward phenomena of nature after the analogy of the inward phenomena of conscious intelligence is not a habit peculiar to our Aryan ancestors, but is, as psychology shows, the inevitable result of the conditions under which uncivilized thinking proceeds, we may expect to find the barbaric mind

personifying the powers of nature and making myths about their operations the whole world over. And we need not be surprised if we find in the resulting mythologic structures a strong resemblance to the familiar creations of the Aryan intelligence. In point of fact, we shall often be called upon to note such resemblance; and it accordingly behooves us at the outset to inquire how far a similarity between mythical tales shall be taken as evidence of a common traditional origin, and how far it may be interpreted as due merely to the similar workings of the untrained intelligence in all ages and countries.

Analogies drawn from the comparison of languages will here be of service to us, if used discreetly; otherwise they are likely to bewilder far more than to enlighten us. A theorem which Max Muller has laid down for our guidance in this kind of investigation furnishes us with an

excellent example of the tricks which a superficial analogy may play even with the trained scholar, when temporarily off his guard. Actuated by a praiseworthy desire to raise the study of myths to something like the high level of scientific accuracy already attained by the study of words, Max Muller endeavours to introduce one of the most useful canons of philology into a department of inquiry where its introduction could only work the most hopeless confusion. One of the earliest lessons to be learned by the scientific student of linguistics is the uselessness of comparing together directly the words contained in derivative languages. For example, you might set the English twelve side by side with the Latin duodecim, and then stare at the two words to all eternity without any hope of reaching a conclusion, good or bad, about either of them: least of all would you suspect that they are descended from the same radical. But if

you take each word by itself and trace it back to its primitive shape, explaining every change of every letter as you go, you will at last reach the old Aryan *dvadakan*, which is the parent of both these strangely metamorphosed words. [130](#) Nor will it do, on the other hand, to trust to verbal similarity without a historical inquiry into the origin of such similarity. Even in the same language two words of quite different origin may get their corners rubbed off till they look as like one another as two pebbles. The French words *souris*, a "mouse," and *souris*, a "smile," are spelled exactly alike; but the one comes from Latin *sorex* and the other from Latin *subridere*. Now Max Muller tells us that this principle, which is indispensable in the study of words, is equally indispensable in the study of myths. [131](#) That is, you must not rashly pronounce the Norse story of the Heartless Giant identical with the Hindu

story of Punchkin, although the two correspond in every essential incident. In both legends a magician turns several members of the same family into stone; the youngest member of the family comes to the rescue, and on the way saves the lives of sundry grateful beasts; arrived at the magician's castle, he finds a captive princess ready to accept his love and to play the part of Delilah to the enchanter. In both stories the enchanter's life depends on the integrity of something which is elaborately hidden in a far-distant island, but which the fortunate youth, instructed by the artful princess and assisted by his menagerie of grateful beasts, succeeds in obtaining. In both stories the youth uses his advantage to free all his friends from their enchantment, and then proceeds to destroy the villain who wrought all this wickedness. Yet, in spite of this agreement, Max Muller, if I understand

him aright, would not have us infer the identity of the two stories until we have taken each one separately and ascertained its primitive mythical significance.

Otherwise, for aught we can tell, the resemblance may be purely accidental, like that of the French words for "mouse" and "smile."

A little reflection, however, will relieve us from this perplexity, and assure us that the alleged analogy between the comparison of words and the comparison of stories is utterly superficial. The transformations of words—which are often astounding enough—depend upon a few well-established physiological principles of utterance; and since philology has learned to rely upon these principles, it has become nearly as sure in its methods and results as one of the so-called "exact sciences." Folly enough is doubtless committed within its precincts by writers who venture there without the laborious

preparation which this science, more than almost any other, demands. But the proceedings of the trained philologist are no more arbitrary than those of the trained astronomer. And though the former may seem to be straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel when he coolly tells you that violin and fiddle are the same word, while English care and Latin cura have nothing to do with each other, he is nevertheless no more indulging in guess-work than the astronomer who confesses his ignorance as to the habitability of Venus while asserting his knowledge of the existence of hydrogen in the atmosphere of Sirius. To cite one example out of a hundred, every philologist knows that s may become r, and that the broad a-sound may dwindle into the closer o-sound; but when you adduce some plausible etymology based on the assumption that r has changed into s, or o into a, apart from the

demonstrable influence of some adjacent letter, the philologist will shake his head. Now in the study of stories there are no such simple rules all cut and dried for us to go by. There is no uniform psychological principle which determines that the three-headed snake in one story shall become a three-headed man in the next. There is no Grimm's Law in mythology which decides that a Hindu magician shall always correspond to a Norwegian Troll or a Keltic Druid. The laws of association of ideas are not so simple in application as the laws of utterance. In short, the study of myths, though it can be made sufficiently scientific in its methods and results, does not constitute a science by itself, like philology. It stands on a footing similar to that occupied by physical geography, or what the Germans call "earth-knowledge." No one denies that all the changes going on over the earth's surface conform to physical laws; but then

no one pretends that there is any single proximate principle which governs all the phenomena of rain-fall, of soil-crumbling, of magnetic variation, and of the distribution of plants and animals. All these things are explained by principles obtained from the various sciences of physics, chemistry, geology, and physiology. And in just the same way the development and distribution of stories is explained by the help of divers resources contributed by philology, psychology, and history. There is therefore no real analogy between the cases cited by Max Muller. Two unrelated words may be ground into exactly the same shape, just as a pebble from the North Sea may be undistinguishable from another pebble on the beach of the Adriatic; but two stories like those of Punchkin and the Heartless Giant are no more likely to arise independently of each other than two coral reefs on opposite sides of the globe

are likely to develop into exactly similar islands.

Shall we then say boldly, that close similarity between legends is proof of kinship, and go our way without further misgivings? Unfortunately we cannot dispose of the matter in quite so summary a fashion; for it remains to decide what kind and degree of similarity shall be considered satisfactory evidence of kinship. And it is just here that doctors may disagree. Here is the point at which our "science" betrays its weakness as compared with the sister study of philology. Before we can decide with confidence in any case, a great mass of evidence must be brought into court. So long as we remained on Aryan ground, all went smoothly enough, because all the external evidence was in our favour. We knew at the outset, that the Aryans inherit a common language and a common civilization, and therefore we found no

difficulty in accepting the conclusion that they have inherited, among other things, a common stock of legends. In the barbaric world it is quite otherwise. Philology does not pronounce in favour of a common origin for all barbaric culture, such as it is. The notion of a single primitive language, standing in the same relation to all existing dialects as the relation of old Aryan to Latin and English, or that of old Semitic to Hebrew and Arabic, was a notion suited only to the infancy of linguistic science. As the case now stands, it is certain that all the languages actually existing cannot be referred to a common ancestor, and it is altogether probable that there never was any such common ancestor. I am not now referring to the question of the unity of the human race. That question lies entirely outside the sphere of philology. The science of language has nothing to do with skulls or complexions, and no

comparison of words can tell us whether the black men are brethren of the white men, or whether yellow and red men have a common pedigree: these questions belong to comparative physiology. But the science of language can and does tell us that a certain amount of civilization is requisite for the production of a language sufficiently durable and wide-spread to give birth to numerous mutually resembling offspring. Barbaric languages are neither widespread nor durable. Among savages each little group of families has its own dialect, and coins its own expressions at pleasure; and in the course of two or three generations a dialect gets so strangely altered as virtually to lose its identity. Even numerals and personal pronouns, which the Aryan has preserved for fifty centuries, get lost every few years in Polynesia. Since the time of Captain Cook the Tahitian language has thrown away five out of its