

reasons. In fact it seems doubtful whether his strength lay so much in the inherent correctness of his ideas, as in the uniform clearness and force with which he propounded and defended them. He was a born advocate, and if he had been able to follow his chosen profession of law he would undoubtedly have become famous.

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*The Legend of Perseus; A Study of Tradition in Story, Custom and Belief.* By EDWARD SIDNEY HARTLAND, F.S.A. Vol. I. The Supernatural Birth. London, David Nutt.

Mr. Hartland believes that the classical myth of Perseus belongs to a group of folk tales ranking among the foremost in interest for the student of the evolution of human thought and human institutions. The first three chapters are devoted to an account of the story as given by the poets and historians of antiquity, and in modern folk-lore; the remaining chapters trace the supernatural birth in Märchen, Sagas and practical superstitions. The legend consists of three leading trains of incident, viz.:

1. The Birth, including the prophecy, etc.
2. The Quest of the Gorgon's Head, including the jealousy of Polydectes, etc.
3. The Rescue of Andromeda, including the fight with the monster, etc.

It is considered that the modern tales have come down from classical antiquity in the countries in which they are now found, but they are subject to variations. After the Danæ type we have a type in which the wife of a poor fisherman eats the head of a fish—the king of the fishes—and becomes the mother of three boys. In this group the plot consists of four incidents, distinguishable as:

1. The supernatural Birth,
2. The Life-token,
3. The Dragon-slaying, and
4. The Medusa-witch.

After this group there still remain a large number of variants, wherein one or more of the incidents are wanting or may be represented by a mere relic. Some of these the author recognizes as probably derived by degradation from one or other of the earlier versions; of some he is constrained to say that they are in a state of

decay; and in some the reader can hardly see any resemblance at all to the legend of Perseus. Yet the connection may be said to be made out, through the tracing of the gradations of change.

The stories of supernatural birth are very numerous, and may be said to have a currency as wide as the world. The usual agency is, that a woman eats some part of a mysterious fish; but in India it is fruit that she eats, an apple or an orange, or two grains of wheat, or soma seeds; or she swallows a potent drug. Conception in other cases has been by the wind or by the rays of the sun. The author has been very industrious in collecting stories and very discriminating in their classification; he gives more than twenty pages of authorities whom he has consulted; and as a student of folklore, working on approved lines, he has performed his task well.

The question, however, occurs, whether this laborious hunting up of stories is a very profitable business? Many of the modern folk-tales may be interesting stories for the nursery; and it is as well, once for all, to know their relations or resemblance to the legend of Perseus; but what was the meaning of the Perseus legend itself? We are not persuaded of the 'anthropological' explanation, according to which 'the original belief is intimately bound up with the savage theory of the universe.' The Greeks had ceased to be savages when they came to believe in Zeus, and framed the story of Perseus. The Greek mythology had an astronomical basis, and not an anthropological; Perseus and Andromeda are still constellations in the heavens; and Zeus is there too, though unrecognized. Besides, it hardly seems consistent to trace the folk tales of savages to the Greek myths and then seek the origin of the myths in the irrational fancies of savages. The study of folk tales, in their multiplication, variation and decay, is analogous to the study of Scripture MSS. with their hundreds of various readings. The revisers of the Bible found that the three oldest manuscripts were of more value than all the hundreds of later copies; and the student of the legend of Perseus will find the parallel Babylonian legend of Gilgames more to his purpose than a bushel of modern folk-lore.

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