

CELTIC MYTHOLOGY  
AND RELIGION.

BY  
ALEXANDER MACBAIN,  
M.A., F.S.A. SCOT.

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she could not go without horse shoes on her hands and feet. She gave her man's clothes, and told her to learn smithying till she could make horse shoes for herself.

"This she did, and got over the hill of poison. But on the day of her arrival, she found that her husband was to be married to the daughter of a great gentleman that was in the town. As festivities were in progress, the cook of the house asked the stranger to take his place and make the wedding meal. She watched the bridegroom, and let fall the ring and feather in the broth intended for him. With the first spoon he took up the ring, with the next the feather. He asked for the person who cooked the meal, and said, 'that now was his married wife.' The spells went off him. They turned back over the hill of poison, she throwing the horse shoes behind her to him, as she went a bit forward, and he following her. They went to the three houses where she had been. These were the houses of his three sisters; and they took with them their three sons, and they came home to their own home, and they were happy." <sup>1</sup>

Such is a good specimen of the folk-tale, and the folk-tales are merely the modern representatives of the old Mythology—merely the detritus, as it were, of the old myths which dealt with the gods and the heroes of the race. In the above tale we are in quite a different world from the practical and scientific views of the 19th century; we have birds speaking and acting as rational beings, and yet exciting no wonder to the human beings they come in contact with; supernatural spells whereby men may be turned into animals; a marriage with a bird, which partially breaks these spells, and the bird becomes a man for part of the day; supernatural kidnapping, ending in the disappearance of the man-bird; and pursuit of him by the wife through fairy regions of charms and spells and untold hardships—a pursuit which ends successfully. It looks all a wild maze of childish nonsense, unworthy of a moment's serious consideration; it would certainly appear to be a hopeless subject for scientific research; for what could science, whose object is truth, have to do with a tissue of absurdities and falsehoods? But this view is a superficial one, though it is the one commonly held. On looking more deeply into the matter, we shall find that after all there is a method in the madness of Mythology, and that the incongruous mass of tales and broken-down myths that make up a nation's folk-lore is susceptible of scientific treatment. Science first attacks the problem by the method of comparison; it compares the myths and tales of one nation with those of another, with the view of discovering similarities. The outlines, for example, of the tale already given, exist not merely in one or two inure tales in our own folk-lore, but can also be traced over all the continent of Europe, as well as in many parts of Asia. The outline of the tale is this—The youngest and best of three daughters is married or given up to some unsightly being or monster, who in reality is a most beautiful youth, but who is under certain spells to remain in a low form of life until some maiden is found to marry him. He then regains his natural form, though, as a rule, only partially; and the newly-married pair have to work out his complete redemption from the spells. But, just as he is about to be free from the spells, the curiosity or

<sup>1</sup> Abridged from Campbell's West Highland Tales, vol. T, p. 63.





























































































































































































