

MISCELLANEOUS.

RELIGION IN FAIRY TALES.

The ancient fairy tales (and they alone are genuine folklore stories or *Märchen*) date back to pre-historic ages and reflect a civilisation that has now passed away. The tales of Snowwhite, of the stupid Hans, of little-Red Ridinghood, of Cinderella, of Dame Holle, etc., have been somewhat changed, especially through the influence of Christianity, yet their most characteristic and original features have not been obliterated but faithfully preserved. The world of fairy tales is a land of forests and of country life. The wayfarer meets giants, robbers, and other dangers. It is the age of matriarchy in which the wise old woman is a great, perhaps the greatest, power in the community, and kinship through the mother alone is recognised. Never a son inherits the kingdom; it is always the daughter; and the hero of the tale becomes king by marrying a princess. The oldest version of Cinderella is preserved in the Norse fairy tale of the Ash-Lad, a male Cinderella who like the stupid Hans goes out to seek his fortune and finds it through his marriage with a princess. The heroes of these stories are frequently children of unknown fathership borne by women who have eaten of some herb in the woods, and were therefore not considered as being on equal terms with their brothers though surpassing them in beauty, courage, and wisdom.¹

Fairy tales, being mirrors of a pre-historic age, reflect also the religion of our remote ancestors and we can plainly recognise in them a belief in immortality which is obscured however by the utter absence of a line of division between the land of the dead and of the living. The dead return to life as if they belonged there, and no further particulars being given we might be led to think that they continue in life as before; but as a rule there is nothing to prevent us from assuming that they only give an account of their fate after their departure. The story of Dame Holle is quite instructive; the good girl of the story loses her spindle in the well and being afraid of punishment jumps into it to put an end to her misery. Now she is in the country of Dame Holle, who is none other than the mother goddess that controls the weather and provides mankind with food. She makes the apples grow and presides over the bread-baking. The good girl serves her faithfully and is rewarded by becoming all covered with gold and whenever she speaks, a gold-piece falls out of her mouth. Now the bad girl goes down to Dame Holle but she suffers the bread to be burned and the apples to rot, and proving herself

¹ See Prof. Karl Pearson's instructive article on the subject in his splendid book *The Chances of Death and Other Studies in Evolution*, Vol. II, p. 51-91, published by Edward Arnold, London 37 Bedford St., and New York, 70 Fifth Avenue.

lazy and indolent in everything is punished by being covered with pitch, and whenever she speaks, a toad jumps out of her mouth.

The world of the departed is frequently depicted as the land beyond the river and a little nursery rhyme suggests the idea that we know nothing of the existence of the other shore.

"Gray goose and gander, waft your wings together.
And carry the good king's daughter over the onestrand river."¹

As the rhyme reads now it has become unintelligible. But it appears that that power in nature which mates gander and goose is indispensable for crossing the one strand river.

The religious element is most obvious in the story of Eros and Psyche, an English version of which is preserved in the tale of Beauty and the Beast. The connexion in which Death stands to Love in these stories of ages long past is full of deep thought and suggests the idea that Death, which appears as a monster, a beast, a terror, is after all a friendly power, a kind friend, a blessing. The interrelation that obtains between birth and death was felt by primitive man perhaps more keenly than by later generations. The aged, the crippled, the weary of life go to rest, but so long as love prevails mankind does not die out, *und immer circulirt ein junges, frisches Blut.*²

This observation of the close interrelation between death and love is the central idea of Eros and Psyche, which, judging from the monuments, was very popular in ancient Greece but has been preserved only in the version of Apuleius, as told in his romance *The Golden Ass*. If the redactor of the story as here retold in *The Open Court*, has brought out with more emphasis the *Leitmotiv*, by a few additional touches, he believes he has remained faithful to the spirit of the narrative and hopes to have thereby succeeded in setting in relief the serious nature of the story and the religious comfort that underlies this most exquisite production of human fiction.

P. C.

BOOKS ON HISTORY.

Mr. Goldwin Smith has written a splendid review of the political history of England in his *United Kingdom* (New York and London: The Macmillan Co. 1899, two vols., \$4.00). Mr. Smith's works are all noted for the simplicity and clearness of their style, and those who wish to obtain a lucid, connected, and succinct view of English history can do no better than to turn to these pages. They will find Mr. Smith's exposition both critical and impartial.

The second volume of Mr. Thos. E. Watson's *Story of France* has appeared. If one desires entertainment in the reading of history, one will certainly find it in this volume. Anecdote and quotation are skilfully mingled with narrative, and throughout the whole there runs an incessant fire of sarcastic moral comment. The attitude of Mr. Watson towards the history of France is, in fact, eminently that of a moral castigator; his task is to him one of conscience; he is extremely plain and outspoken in his censorial utterances, as he is also in his inferential descriptions of the reigning vices of the old *régime*: and he always points his moral at the expense of the possible facts, whatever may be the situation. The student of the sources of French history will not always be at one with Mr. Watson as to the rel-

¹ See *Book of Nursery Rhymes*, Methuen & Co., 36 Essex Street, Strand, W. C. London, 1897, page 89.

²*Faust*, Prologue.