

right," she will persevere. Impartial, democratic, constitutional liberty is invincible. The rights of human nature are sacred; maintained by confessors, and heroes, and martyrs; reposing on the sure foundation of the commandments of God.

"Through plots and counterplots;
Through gain and loss; through glory and disgrace;
Along the plains where passionate Discord rears
Eternal Babel; still the holy stream
Of human happiness glides on!

There is One above
Sways the harmonious mystery of the world."

Gentlemen, for all the favors, unmerited and unmeasured, which I have enjoyed from the people of Massachusetts; from the councillors, magistrates, and officers by whom I have been surrounded in the government; and from the members of five successive legislatures, there is no return in my power to render but the sincere acknowledgments of a grateful heart.

JOHN RUSKIN



JOHN RUSKIN, a distinguished English art critic and prose writer, the son of a wealthy wine merchant of Scotch descent, was born at London, Feb. 8, 1819, and died at his Lancashire home, "Brantwood," near Coniston, Jan. 20, 1900. In 1842, he graduated from Oxford, winning at his college the Newdigate prize for a poem describing the dawn of Christianity in Hindustan. Passing from college, he appears to have been stirred by some strictures upon Turner's works and took up his pen in the artist's defence, though with the design of upholding the principles of truth and beauty embodied in that master's art. To this end he devoted the early volumes of his work on "Modern Painters" (1843-60), which was followed by his "Stones of Venice" and "The Seven Lamps of Architecture." From 1870 to 1879 he was Slade Professor of Art at Oxford. Besides art, his themes embraced political economy, education, and social science, in all of which subjects he had something thoughtful and stimulating to say and exercised a wholesome and inspiring moral as well as aesthetic influence. His work as a writer and teacher of his age extended over a period of fifty years, rendered fascinating by great charm of literary style. This work embraced, in addition to the books above mentioned and a mass of letters, lectures, and miscellaneous magazine articles, "Sesame and Lilies," dealing with questions of social life and politics; "The Crown of Wild Olive," treating of work, traffic, war, and the future of England; "The Queen of the Air," lectures on Greek Myths; "Unto this Last," concerning the responsibilities and duties of those called to fill offices of national trust and service; "Fors Clavigera," a series of letters to working men; "Munera Pulveris," treating of commerce, government, wealth, money, riches, etc., and "Ethics of the Dust," lectures to little housewives on the elements of crystallization. In all this mass of varied matter, while there is not a little that is fanciful, there is much to inform and instruct, as well as to inspire and elevate. He shines most, however, as an interpreter of nature and an unveiler of the Divine meanings in creation, for with his intense sense of beauty and great spirituality of mind, he recognizes and reminds the reader of the majesty of God in the world.

ON THE GREEK MYTHS

FROM LECTURE DELIVERED AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON,
MARCH 9, 1869

I WILL not ask your pardon for endeavoring to interest you in the subject of Greek mythology; but I must ask your permission to approach it in a temper differing from that in which it is frequently treated. We cannot justly interpret the religion of any people unless we are pre-

pared to admit that we ourselves, as well as they, are liable to error in matters of faith, and that the convictions of others, however singular, may in some points have been well founded, while our own, however reasonable, may in some particulars be mistaken. You must forgive me, therefore, for not always distinctively calling the creeds of the past "superstition," and the creeds of the present day "religion;" as well as for assuming that a faith now confessed may sometimes be superficial, and that a faith long forgotten may once have been sincere. It is the task of the Divine to condemn the errors of antiquity, and of the philologists to account for them; I will only pray you to read with patience and human sympathy the thoughts of men who lived without blame in a darkness they could not dispel; and to remember that whatever charge of folly may justly attach to the saying, "There is no God," the folly is prouder, deeper, and less pardonable in saying, "There is no God but for me."

A myth, in its simplest definition, is a story with a meaning attached to it other than it seems to have at first; and the fact that it has such a meaning is generally marked by some of its circumstances being extraordinary, or, in the common use of the word, unnatural. Thus if I tell you that Hercules killed a water-serpent in the lake of Lerna, and if I mean, and you understand, nothing more than that fact, the story, whether true or false, is not a myth. But if by telling you this I mean that Hercules purified the stagnation of many streams from deadly miasmata, my story, however simple, is a true myth; only, as if I left it in that simplicity you would probably look for nothing beyond, it will be wise in me to surprise your attention by adding some singular circumstance; for instance, that the water-snake had several heads which revived as fast as they were killed, and which

poisoned even the foot that trod upon them as they slept. And in proportion to the fulness of intended meaning I shall probably multiply and refine upon these improbabilities; as, suppose if, instead of desiring only to tell you that Hercules purified a marsh, I wished you to understand that he contended with the venom and vapor of envy and evil ambition, whether in other men's souls or in his own, and choked that malaria only by supreme toil,—I might tell you that this serpent was formed by the goddess whose pride was in the trial of Hercules; and that its place of abode was by a palm-tree; and that for every head of it that was cut off two rose up with renewed life; and that the hero found at last he could not kill the creature at all by cutting its heads off or crushing them, but only by burning them down; and that the midmost of them could not be killed even that way, but had to be buried alive. Only in proportion as I mean more, I shall certainly appear more absurd in my statement; and at last when I get unendurably significant, all practical persons will agree that I was talking mere nonsense from the beginning and never meant anything at all.

It is just possible however also that the story-teller may all along have meant nothing but what he said; and that, incredible as the events may appear, he himself literally believed—and expected you also to believe—all this about Hercules, without any latent moral or history whatever. And it is very necessary in reading traditions of this kind to determine first of all whether you are listening to a simple person who is relating what at all events he believes to be true (and may therefore possibly have been so to some extent), or to a reserved philosopher, who is veiling a theory of the universe under the grotesque of a fairy tale. It is, in general, more likely that the first supposition should be the

right one: simple and credulous persons are, perhaps fortunately, more common than philosophers; and it is of the highest importance that you should take their innocent testimony as it was meant, and not efface under the graceful explanation which your cultivated ingenuity may suggest, either the evidence their story may contain (such as it is worth) of an extraordinary event having really taken place, or the unquestionable light which it will cast upon the character of the person by whom it was frankly believed. And to deal with Greek religion honestly you must at once understand that this literal belief was, in the mind of the general people, as deeply rooted as ours in the legends of our own sacred book; and that a basis of unmiraculous event was as little suspected, and an explanatory symbolism as rarely traced by them as by us.

You must therefore observe that I deeply degrade the position which such a myth as that just referred to occupied in the Greek mind by comparing it (for fear of offending you) to our story of St. George and the Dragon. Still the analogy is perfect in minor respects; and though it fails to give you any notion of the vitally religious earnestness of the Greek faith it will exactly illustrate the manner in which faith laid hold of its objects.

This story of Hercules and the Hydra, then, was to the general Greek mind, in its best days, a tale about a real hero and a real monster. Not one in a thousand knew anything of the way in which the story had arisen, any more than the English peasant generally is aware of the plebeian original of St. George, or supposes that there were once alive in the world, with sharp teeth and claws, real and very ugly flying dragons. On the other hand, few persons traced any moral or symbolical meaning in the story, and the average Greek

was as far from imagining any interpretation like that I have just given you as an average Englishman is from seeing in St. George the Red Cross Knight of Spenser, or in the Dragon the spirit of infidelity. But for all that there was a certain undercurrent of consciousness in all minds that the figures meant more than they at first showed; and according to each man's own faculties of sentiment he judged and read them; just as a Knight of the Garter reads more in the jewel on his collar than the George and Dragon of a public-house expresses to the host or to his customers. Thus to the mean person the myth always meant little; to the noble person, much; and the greater their familiarity with it the more contemptible it became to one and the more sacred to the other, until vulgar commentators explained it entirely away, while Virgil made it the crowning glory of his choral hymn to Hercules.

"Around thee, powerless to infect thy soul,
Rose, in his crested crowd, the Lerna worm."

"Non te rationis egentem
Lernæus turbâ capitum circumstetit anguis."

And although, in any special toil of the hero's life, the moral interpretation was rarely with definiteness attached to its event, yet in the whole course of the life, not only a symbolical meaning, but the warrant for the existence of a real spiritual power, was apprehended of all men. Hercules was no dead hero, to be remembered only as a victor over monsters of the past—harmless now as slain. He was the perpetual type and mirror of heroism and its present and living aid against every ravenous form of human trial and pain.

But if we seek to know more than this and to ascertain the manner in which the story first crystallized into its shape, we shall find ourselves led back generally to one or other of two sources,—either to actual historical events, represented

by the fancy under figures personifying them; or else to natural phenomena similarly endowed with life by the imaginative power usually more or less under the influence of terror. The historical myths we must leave the masters of history to follow; they and the events they record being yet involved in great, though attractive and penetrable mystery. But the stars, and hills, and storms are with us now, as they were with others of old; and it only needs that we look at them with the earnestness of those childish eyes to understand the first words spoken of them by the children of men, and then, in all the most beautiful and enduring myths we shall find not only a literal story of a real person, not only a parallel imagery of moral principle, but an underlying worship of natural phenomena out of which both have sprung and in which both forever remain rooted. Thus, from the real sun rising and setting,—from the real atmosphere, calm in its dominion of unfading blue and fierce in the descent of tempest,—the Greek forms first the idea of two entirely personal and corporeal gods, whose limbs are clothed in divine flesh, and whose brows are crowned with divine beauty; yet so real that the quiver rattles at their shoulder and the chariot bends beneath their weight. And on the other hand, collaterally with these corporeal images, and never for one instant separated from them, he conceives also two omnipresent spiritual influences, of which one illuminates as the sun with a constant fire, whatever in humanity is skilful and wise; and the other, like the living air, breathes the calm of heavenly fortitude and strength of righteous anger into every human breast that is pure and brave.

Now, therefore, in nearly every myth of importance and certainly in every one of those of which I shall speak to-night, you have to discern these three structural parts,—

the root and the two branches: the root, in physical existence, sun, or sky, or cloud, or sea; then the personal incarnation of that becoming a trusted and companionable deity with whom you may walk hand in hand, as a child with its brother or its sister; and lastly, the moral significance of the image which is in all the great myths eternally and beneficently true.

The great myths; that is to say, myths made by great people. For the first plain fact about myth-making is one which has been most strangely lost sight of,—that you cannot make a myth unless you have something to make it of. You cannot tell a secret which you don't know. If the myth is about the sky it must have been made by somebody who had looked at the sky. If the myth is about justice and fortitude it must have been made by some one who knew what it was to be just or patient. According to the quantity of understanding in the person will be the quantity of significance in his fable; and the myth of a simple and ignorant race must necessarily mean little, because a simple and ignorant race have little to mean. So the great question in reading a story is always, not what wild hunter dreamed, or what childish race first dreaded it; but what wise man first perfectly told, and what strong people first perfectly lived by it. And the real meaning of any myth is that which it has at the noblest age of the nation among whom it is current. The farther back you pierce the less significance you will find, until you come to the first narrow thought, which indeed contains the germ of the accomplished tradition; but only as the seed contains the flower. As the intelligence and passion of the race develop, they cling to and nourish their beloved and sacred legend; leaf by leaf it expands under the touch of more pure affections and more delicate imagination until

at last the perfect fable burgeons out into symmetry of milky stem and honeyed bell.

But through whatever changes it may pass, remember that our right reading of it is wholly dependent on the materials we have in our own minds for an intelligent answering sympathy. If it first arose among a people who dwelt under stainless skies and measured their journeys by ascending and declining stars, we certainly cannot read their story if we have never seen anything above us in the day but smoke, nor anything around us in the night but candles. If the tale goes on to change clouds or planets into living creatures,—to invest them with fair forms and inflame them with mighty passions,—we can only understand the story of the human-hearted things in so far as we ourselves take pleasure in the perfectness of visible form, or can sympathize by an effort of imagination with the strange people who had other loves than that of wealth and other interests than those of commerce. And, lastly, if the myth complete itself to the fulfilled thoughts of the nation by attributing to the gods whom they have carved out of their fantasy continual presence with their own souls, and their every effort for good is finally guided by the sense of the companionship, the praise and the pure will of immortals, we shall be able to follow them into this last circle of their faith only in the degree in which the better parts of our own beings have been also stirred by the aspects of nature or strengthened by her laws. It may be easy to prove that the ascent of Apollo in his chariot signifies nothing but the rising of the sun. But what does the sunrise itself signify to us? If only languid return to frivolous amusement or fruitless labor, it will indeed not be easy for us to conceive the power, over a Greek of the name of Apollo. But if for us also, as for the Greek, the sunrise

means daily restoration to the sense of passionate gladness and of perfect life; if it means the thrilling of new strength through every nerve,—the shedding over us of a better peace than the peace of night in the power of the dawn,—and the purging of evil vision and fear by the baptism of its dew; if the sun itself is an influence to us also of spiritual good, and becomes thus in reality, not in imagination to us also, a spiritual power,—we may then soon over-pass the narrow limit of conception which kept that power impersonal and rise with the Greek to the thought of an angel who rejoiced as a strong man to run his course, whose voice calling to life and to labor rang round the earth, and whose going forth was to the ends of heaven.