

Relation of Mythology
to Religion.

Olva Palmer

1896.

Subject,

"The relation of mythology
to Religion"

Outline

1. Introductory,
 a Explanation of terms.
 & Origin of mythology
2. Superstition
- 3 Greek mythology
- 4 Roman mythology
- 5 Norse mythology
 a Why we should study it
 & More closely related to Religion
6. Conclusion.

In comparing or contrasting any two objects, we must first know the exact conditions of both and then proceed from the general to the more minute. So in comparing or contrasting the subjects of Mythology and Religion, we must first understand what each term implies and what it excludes, or as the word definition means not only that which a thing is but also that which it is not.

The word mythology is of Greek origin and it means a system of myths or a collection of popular legends fables or stories relating to the gods, heroes, demons or other beings whose names have been preserved in popular belief.

We are apt to think that such traditions are found among the ancient Greeks, Hindoos and Egyptians only.

Among us the Greek mythology is most talked of. But every nation has had its system of mythology.

The word mythology seems to be rather comprehensive in its meaning and we shall find the same characteristic also of religion.

Religion is any system of faith and worship and in this sense it comprehends the belief and worship of Pagans and Mohammedans as well as that of Christians.

All religions consist in the belief in a superior power or powers governing the world. Thus we may speak of a false and a true religion but not of a false and true Christianity.

Now from the broad definitions of mythology and religion we can see that a comparison is as possible as a contrast. But to think of mythology as a system of heathen fables, and of religion as our Christian Religion, an attempt to compare them would seem ludicrous if not irreverent.

The myth is the oldest form of truth and mythology is the knowledge which the ancients had of the divine and thus we can say that the true object of mythology is to find God and come to him.

But do you say, Can they be searching for what they know not of and

too among the physical elements?
Yes, man's mind was never meant to
be idle.

We first study nature in the outward
world in its general structure, adapta-
tions and dependencies, for God sure-
ly manifests himself in nature.

In connection with this we
next study the physical, intel-
lectual and moral nature of man.

If this is not the order of revolu-
tion why is the expression, "Man
know thyself" so often and various-
ly used.

Our Norse and Greek forefathers
had no clearly defined knowledge
of any god outside of themselves
and nature, but they had a some-
what vague idea about a supreme
god, whom they dared not name.

We might not think that the self-
same superstition by which we
are yet somewhat blinded orig-
inated in these mythological
times.

We are now called narrow mind-

ed and unchristian if we are superstitious. and would not the charge be true. We would think anyone insane now if they believed implicitly in myths. yet to separate this visual superstition from this fanciful illusion to remote events would indeed be narrow and unprogressive.

When Paul went to Athens, he said "Ye men of Athens. I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. for as I passed by and beheld your devotions I found an altar with this inscription. 'To the unknown god, whom therefore ye ignorantly worship. him declare I unto you'"

It was of this same unknown god that one of the ancient Greek poets had said. "In him we live and move and have our being"

Thus the Greeks found God in the study of their heathen deities. In mythology we speak of the gods. while the Christian world

speaks only of God. They can see the same Bible picture they saw in childhood. The purity of a calm face, with eyes uplifted, hands clasped, in this they read the first commandment. "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me"

The myths of the ancients as the earliest literary crystallization of social order and religious fear record the incipient history of religious ideals and moral conduct.

What are the sun, moon and dawn to us? We answer "light & power & beauty." but to the ancients they were more. They had them deified. They worshipped only that which they could imitate in the inanimate. Their gods of war, of love, of revelry, of wisdom and of youth preside over the institutions and occupations of mankind.

In every stage of mythology a power is manifest making for righteousness. a love yearning for sympathy

divine. A moral sense striving through humanized nature and spiritualized man, through pantheism and monotheism to the spirit in whom we live and move and have our being. Who lives and moves through us all.

All mythological legends are derived from the narratives of scripture, though the real facts have been disguised and altered; and may we not say, much lowered.

Deucalion is only another name for Noah. Hercules for Samson.

Arion for Jonah. The dragon which kept the golden apples, was the serpent that beguiled Eve.

Nimrod's tower was the attempt of the giants against heaven.

It is said that many myths antedate the scriptural narrations of which they are said to be copies. But this is only theory and it rests upon two improved assumptions. One that all nations have had a chance to be influenced by the same set

of religious doctrine. The other that God made his revelation in the beginning for all once for all and has done nothing since to help man toward righteousness.

Greek mythology is said to be the result of their minds when they first began to think. Greek mythology had its roots in Sanskrit soil but its sunshine and rain and air came from a clime which was neither frozen as in Iceland, nor heated with furnace heat as in India.

It was fresh wholesome and temperate.

They studied objects for their beauty and fitness instead of ruthlessly tearing them to pieces to discover some inner and hidden meaning. The Greeks as a class took their mythology as it came, much as we do history and not as a revealed definition of practical authority. They were themes for the poet and not for the moralist. The truth is Religion

and ethics were never really made to coalesce in Greece.

The Greek youth believed devoutly in the gods and so his religion molded him. His absolute faith in his religion was that which gave to the Greeks music, poetry and art.

When the elements were personified the powers of light became the creators of good - both spiritual and temporal. While the powers of darkness were evil, so to-day we have good in light and evil in darkness.

The vilest actions and lowest passions were attributed to the gods. While Greek art would have lost much if it had not been for the peculiar beliefs in Greek mythology, morality would certainly have gained thereby.

It is impossible to draw a distinct line of separation between the good and evil powers of their mythology. But it gives us the key to Greek culture.

In all mythology it is a pleasing trait it loved to trace in every operation

of nature the agency of deity.

The imaginations of the Greeks peopled the regions of earth and sea with divinities to whose agency it attributed the phenomena that our philosophy ascribes to the operation of natural law.

So Pan the god of wood and fields whose name signifies in Greek all, came to be considered a symbol of the universe and a personification of nature. So Milton in his description of the creation says, "Universal Pan knit with the graces and the hours in dance. Led on the eternal spring." Later Pan was regarded as a representative of all the Greek gods and of Paganism itself.

According to an early Christian tradition, when the heavenly host announced to the Shepherds the birth of Christ a deep groan heard through all the isles of Greece, told that great Pan was dead.

That the dynasty of Olympus was dethroned and the several deities sent wandering in the cold and

darkness. This shows the earliest idea of Christ and that in this relation he was accepted as the one true Savior as he took the place of the many gods the Greeks had set up before them.

Is it probable that without these gods the Greeks would have been as ready to understand the true Christ. Not considering in this point the length of time it took to exchange the sacred and well grounded faith in the myth for the new Religion.

Although the Greek mythology had the most luxuriant.

They were the first to find some meaning in a myth.

The Greeks first effected a reconciliation between science and Religion.

They said that myths are Religious stories.

We hear much about Greek and Roman mythology and yet there are other mythologies as interesting to certain countries and as beneficial in a literary or Religious point of view.

The time will come when we will hear as much of the Norse mythology as we do of the Greek or Roman. Our Gothic inheritance will be cherished.

Bayard Taylor said "That the Scandinavian languages in view of their rich literature, in view of the light which this literature throws upon early English history and in view of the importance of Iceland in a successful study of English and Anglo Saxon, ought to be taught in every college in Vinland."

The Norse mythology tells of high regard for the prevailing worship also for political duties, yet they were the first to regret the profane ceremonies and come to believe in the existence of a more powerful God.

Harold Fairfax said "I swear never to make any offerings to an idol but to that God alone whose omnipotence has formed the world

and stamped man with his own image. It would be an act of folly for me to expect help from him whose power and empire arises from the accidental hollow of a tree or the peculiar form of a stone."

It is certain that mythology as it now stands can not be fully understood, without an accurate knowledge of the religions of the several nations. And yet as closely as Religion and mythology are intertwined it is necessary to hold them apart for discussion.

Books consulted.

- 1 Norse Mythology.
- 2 Classic Myths.
- 3 Dwights Mythology.
- 4 Encyclopedia Britannica.
- 5 Story of the Golden Age.
- 6 Story of Sigfreid.
- 7 Eclectic Magazine.