

TALES OF ANCIENT GREECE

INTRODUCTION

THE results obtained from the examination of Language in its several forms leave no room for doubt that the great stream of mythology has been traced to its fountain-head. We can no longer shut our eyes to the fact that there was a stage in the history of human speech, during which all the abstract words in constant use among ourselves were utterly unknown, when men had formed no notions of virtue or prudence, of thought and intellect, of slavery or freedom, but spoke only of the man who was strong, who could point the way to others and choose one thing out of many, of the man who was bound to any other or able to do as he pleased.

That even this stage was not the earliest in the history of language is now a growing opinion among philologists; but for the comparison of legends current in different countries it is not necessary to carry the search further back. Language without words denoting abstract qualities implies a condition of thought in which men were only awakening to a sense of the objects which surrounded them, and points to a time when the world was to them full of strange sights and sounds, some beautiful, some bewildering, some terrific, when, in short, they knew little of themselves beyond the vague consciousness of their existence, and nothing of the phenomena of the world without. In such a state they could but attribute to all that they saw or touched or heard a life which was like their own in its consciousness, its joys, and its sufferings. That power of sympathising with nature which we are apt to regard as the peculiar gift of the poet, was then shared alike by all. This