

MAX MULLER ON FOLK-LORE.

Few subjects are intrinsically of greater interest or have made greater progress within the last decade, than the study of Folk-Lore. A quarterly review, devoted to this subject, has been lately started in Sicily. To the first number Professor Max Müller has addressed a letter, from which the following is an extract:—

“To collect popular stories is either a most difficult or a most easy task. Everybody who finds nothing better to do thinks he is able at least to write down the stories which his nurse has told him. But this, you know, is a great mistake. First of all, not every story that an old woman may tell deserves to be written down and printed. There is a peculiar earthy flavour about the genuine home-grown, or, if I may say so, autochthonic *Märchen*—something like the flavour of the dark-red wild strawberry—which we must learn to appreciate before we can tell whether a story is old or new, genuine or made-up; whether it comes, in fact, from the forest or from the hot-house. This is a matter of taste; but, as tasters of wine or tea will tell you, even taste can be acquired.

“Secondly, the same story should, whenever that is possible, be collected from different sources and in different localities, and the elements that are common to all versions should be carefully distinguished from those that are peculiar to one or more only.

“Thirdly, each collector should acquaint himself with the results already obtained in the classification of stories, in order to see and to say at once to what cluster each new story belongs. Hahn's classification of ancient myths, imperfect as it is, may give you an example of what ought to be done in order to arrive at a classification of modern myths. Here your archives might render very great service.

“Fourthly, wherever it is possible the story ought to be given in the *ipsissima verba* of the story-teller. This will be a safeguard against that dishonesty in the collection of stories from which we have suffered so much. It is quite true that a collector who trims and embellishes a story ought to be whipped; while a man who invents a story and publishes it as genuine ought to be shot. But, until such a Draconic law is carried into effect, your insisting on having in all cases the *ipsissima verba* will be a great protection.