

and until I began my researches it was generally supposed that one might as well undertake to find all the lost books of the Edda, or the perfect original text of Beowulf in the memories of the peasantry in Yorkshire, as a mythology and cyclus of sagas, legends, and ancient poems among these poor basket-makers, who still haunt fashionable American watering-places after the manner of gypsies. Yet I succeeded, with great difficulty, in finding all this in vast abundance among them. One or two learned men had indeed conjectured that something of the kind existed, but these Indians were so extremely reticent, and averse to communicate their lore, that when I had made some progress in my work, I received a letter from my friend J. H. Trumbull, the most learned Red Indian scholar in America, congratulating me on having been "the first to crack this hard nut." As an instance of the difficulty which I experienced, I may state that during the first summer which I devoted to it, I did not succeed in getting a single story, though I was very intimate with a really well educated Abenaki Indian, who spoke and wrote both French and English like a gentleman. I tried and tempted him in every way to give me some scraps of folk-lore, but he persistently denied that he knew anything of the kind, though I afterwards learned that he was a perfect living library of legends.

It was wonderful enough to find such a literature, about equivalent to the Scriptures as regards quantity, preserved among a few poor people, who are seldom spoken of by the whites, except as illustrations of ignorance and utter degeneracy. But a further surprise awaited me when I found that the