

THE MOON IN LEGEND AND SONG

A Classic Study of the Earth's great Satellite

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THE great antiquity of astronomy renders this science worthy of attention. Not only because of its educational value as a nature study, but historically. Unlike some branches of science which, for the most part, are but of yesterday, the science of the heavenly bodies may be traced backwards until its beginnings are lost in mythology and fable.

Man has always looked upwards, and from time immemorial regarded with awe and profound wonder the handiwork of the Creator as displayed in the starry heavens. Among savage tribes this naturally led to deification and worship; and it is in this deification of the celestial bodies that many of the legends relating to them had their origin. These old stories, strange and fanciful as they are, reveal to us the thoughts and feelings with which primitive man gazed into the sky.

We have, however, many star legends that come not from antiquity, but from the folk-lore of more recent periods. We meet them every day in modern literature, for Shakespeare, Tennyson, Longfellow and others make constant allusions to them in their verse. The Indian legend regarding the markings on the moon is told very quaintly by the latter poet, when Hiawatha

"Saw the moon rise from the water,
Rippling, rounding from the water,
Saw the flecks and shadows on it,
Whispered, 'What is that Nokomis?'
And the good Nokomis answered,
'Once a warrior very angry,
Seized his grandmother and threw her
Up into the sky at midnight;
Right against the moon he threw her;
This her body that you see there."

There are many other stories about these markings. The Incas of Peru explain them by telling of a very beautiful maiden, who long, long ago, fell in love with the moon, and cast herself into his arms; while the aborigines of the islands of the Pacific represent the moon as an ardent lover who snatched a fair bride from earth.

Perhaps the best known of these stories is the one told of an old man who, busy picking up sticks and brushwood one bright Sunday was met by a fairy who asked why he was working on the Sabbath. His reply, "Sunday on earth or Monday in heaven, is all the same to me," so angered the fairy that to punish him she decreed that he must carry his sticks forever, and banished him to the moon, saying, "As you have no regard for Sunday on earth, take your perpetual Monday (Moonday) in heaven, and from now on travel with the moon."

From Scandinavian folklore, we learn that on the moon are two children bearing between them a pail of water suspended on a pole or yoke, from their shoulders. This is most probably the original of our nursery rhyme about Jack and Jill, for the vanishing of one spot after another as the moon wanes, represents the fall first of Jack, and then of Jill.

According to a Hindoo legend, Buddha, in a very early stage of his existence, was in the form of a hare, and when travelling one day in company with a fox and an ape, they were met by Indra (the Jupiter of the Hindoo). The god, disguised as a beggar, asked them for food, and all three went in search of it. The hare, being unable to find any, and wishing to appear well in the eyes of his guest, had a fire built and then threw himself on it that the beggar might have supper. The god was so pleased by the hare's great heroism,

that as a reward he placed him on the moon.

The Hindoos have another legend about the moon which runs something like this: The Sun, the Moon and the Wind belonged to one family, and one day their relatives, Thunder and Lightning, invited them to a banquet. Their mother, a very beautiful star, was not invited, so waited patiently at home. By and by the children returned and were warmly welcomed by the star, who had kept her bright little eye open all night long. "Well, dear children," she said, "have you brought anything home for me from the banquet?" Then the Sun, who was the oldest, and very selfish, and while



A remarkable full-moon photograph taken by Rev. Dr. Marsh; much resembling a water-melon in shape.

having a good time himself, had forgotten all about his poor hungry mother at home, said: "I have brought nothing home for you! I went for a good time and not to bring a dinner for my mother."

Then the Wind said: "I didn't bring anything for you, either, mother. I forgot all about you when I was away."

But the gentle Moon said, "Mother, see all the nice things I saved for you, I hope you will like them"; and as she said this she placed a choice dinner before her mother.

Then the Star turned to the Sun and said: "Because you amused yourself without any thought of your poor lonely mother at home, you shall be cursed. Your rays shall be so hot and scorching that men shall hate you." (This is why the sun is so hot to-day).

Turning to the Wind, the Star said: "You, too, forgot your mother, and must be punished. You shall blow when it is hot, and nature will become so parched that men shall detest you." (This is why the wind is so very disagreeable during the hot weather).

The Star smiled, and her voice was sweet and low as she said to the gentle Moon: "My daughter, because of your thoughtfulness, no dazzling glare shall accompany your pure rays. You shall be so cool, calm and yet so bright that men shall love and bless you. (This is why the moon's light is so soft and soothing).

Nothing, so the Greeks thought, was more pure than the White Moon goddess, and the story of her love for Endymion was one they told and retold to their children.

Long, long ago, before people had settled down to the humdrum existence which we lead to-day; when giants roamed about the earth, and the gods were yet with men, the moon sailed above the known world as she still does, only in those days men knew and called her by her names: As a celestial deity she was known as Luna; as a terrestrial deity, Diana; and in the lower regions, Hecate or Prosperine. Diana was the daughter of Jupiter and Latona, and though she loved them and her twin brother, Apollo, very dearly, she seldom saw them, for her path lay among the stars.

One beautiful summer evening, when Apollo's sun chariot was sinking slowly behind the western sky, and all the earth lay bathed in rosy splendour,

"There came a vision of a lovely maid,
Who seemed to step from a silvery car,
Out of the low-hung moon."

Diana stood on a hilltop looking down over plain and valley, and far out to sea. The earth was very

beautiful as it lay at the feet of the moon goddess, and yet she cared little for its beauty, for her heart was very sad. Many a tender love meeting had she witnessed, as she does now; many a happy tale of love had her pale face looked down upon, but a sister's love was the only one she had known. A strange unquenchable longing had come to her heart. She was so alone!

Just as she felt her heart about to break a wonderfully beautiful sight met her eyes. Far down the hillside, under the trees edging a placid lake, lay a youth, the night air playing softly with his waving locks. A crook was by his side, and the lambs of his flock were gamboling near him.

To Diana's eyes this shepherd boy was more beautiful than hill or valley, river, lake or sunset glow, and waiting only until Apollo had sunk behind the hills, the proud moon princess bent her stately head and whispered to the youth, "Oh, Endymion! Come away with me. How happy I would be to dwell in this peaceful valley by thy side, but I am Luna, Queen of Night. I must wander night by night across the sky, even as the sun god does by day. Come sweet youth, and wander with me. Thou dost not even dream how vast and beautiful is the world outside this peaceful vale. Come with me, Endymion! Come with me, my love!"

But Endymion, closing his eyes before the radiant face bent so lovingly over him, murmured in

reply: "No, it cannot be, thou most beautiful Queen of Night! Alas, it cannot be! Thou canst not stay in my peaceful valley; neither can I wander with thee, my queen, in the heavens. I fain would go, but great Zeus commands us both; we must obey."

A death-like palour overspread Diana's face, and a stony sadness settled there as she heard the death knell of her hopes. Already the sunset glory was fading. Darkness was creeping on and the sky called to the goddess of the moon to shed her pure white light over the sleeping earth. "I must leave thee now, Endymion," she whispered faintly. "Alas! thou canst not come with me: I cannot dwell with thee! Good night, my love, good night." Stooping low she kissed the fair brow of the youthful shepherd and immediately his eyes closed in sweet slumber. Stepping into her silvery car the Queen of Night once more pursued her path across the heavens.

All night long, and even now, Endymion is sleeping. And why? Listen, and I will tell you. The moon goddess, fearing that age and toil would soon destroy the charms of her beloved, had bestowed upon him the gift of eternal youth. Nightly she passes over her dear one's resting-place, and alighting from her silvery car, impresses an airy kiss upon his lips. He, responding not to the Queen of Night's caress, her face is cursed with perpetual sadness, and one can read her sorrowful story in her pale countenance.