



Norse popular tales

G. W. Dasent

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The most careless reader can hardly fail to see that many of the Tales in this volume have the same groundwork as those with which he has been familiar from his earliest youth. They are Nursery Tales, in fact, of the days when there were tales in nurseries—old wives' fables, which have faded away before the light of gas and the power of steam. It is long, indeed, since English nurses told these tales to English children by force of memory and word of mouth. In a written shape, we have long had some of them, at least, in English versions of the *Contes de ma Mère l' Oye* of Perrault, and the *Contes de Fées* of Madame D'Aulnoy; those tight-laced, high- heeled tales of the 'teacup times' of Louis XIV and his successors, in which the popular tale appears to as much disadvantage as an artless country girl in the stifling atmosphere of a London theatre. From these foreign sources, after the voice of the English reciter was hushed—and it was hushed in England more than a century ago—our great-grandmothers learnt to tell of Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast, of Little Red Riding-hood and Blue Beard, mingled together in the *Cabinet des Fées* with Sinbad the Sailor and Aladdin's wondrous lamp; for that was an uncritical age, and its spirit breathed hot and cold, east and west, from all quarters of the globe at once, confusing the traditions and tales of all times and countries into one incongruous mass of fable, as much tangled and knotted as that famous pound of flax which the lassie in one of these Tales is expected to spin into an even wool within four-and-twenty hours.

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