



**The Legend of Perseus - A Study of Tradition in  
Story, Custom and Belief: Vol. III - Adromeda.  
Medusa. (Grimm Library) (Volume 5)**

*Edwin Sidney Hartland*

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About the Legend of Perseus.

The two incidents in the legend of Perseus which stood over for examination in the present volume were the rescue of Andromeda and the Medusa witch. Examining the rescue incident first, as it appears in Murchen and then in sagas, Mr. Hartland points out that, "popular as the story of the rescue of the devoted maiden is, and appealing as it does to the imagination, it is not a little remarkable that it appears to be indigenous only in the Old World." On the other hand, legends of the slaughter of a destructive monster, where there is no specific human being to deliver, not only extend beyond these limits, but frequently form part of the cosmogony of peoples alien in race and occupying distant portions of the globe. The question is, Does this difference in range of two distinct classes of rescue traditions help us to any satisfactory hypothesis as to the origin of the more important of the two — the Andromeda type? Noting first that the veneration of the lower animals is one of the rudest and oldest forms of religious conceptions, and was kept alive by the "amazing toughness of tradition" in cults of a much higher grade like those of Egypt and ancient Greece, Mr. Hartland goes on to point out that to living gods like these food was a daily necessity, and savage nations, on days of festival or under stress of some great impending calamity, "would not hesitate to give human flesh to such of those gods as were carnivorous. These two factors in the history of savage religion provide the necessary explanation of the monster dragon or serpent and the devoted maiden in the Andromeda tradition. There is left, then, only the rescue incident for elucidation, and Mr. Hartland meets this by the acute suggestion that if, by the concurrence of an advance in civilization and a political revolution, the worship of an animal deity demanding the sacrifice of a human being were suppressed, he would become in tradition a deadly monster, and the milder divinity who succeeded to his place in popular regard would be credited with his conquest and destruction.

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