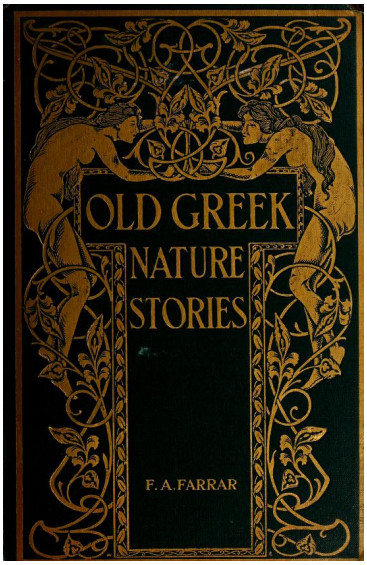
Robin Diver, "Entry on: Old Greek Nature Stories by Frank Albert Farrar ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/973. Entry version as of October 07, 2026.

Frank Albert Farrar

Old Greek Nature Stories

United Kingdom (1910)

TAGS: Aeolus Apollo Arachne Asclepius Athena Boreas Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Echo Eos Hades Heracles Medusa Odysseus / Ulysses Oedipus Pan Persephone Perseus Syrinx



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General information	
Title of the work	Old Greek Nature Stories
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1910
First Edition Details	Frank Albert Farrar, *Old Greek Nature Tales*. London: George G. Harrap & Company, 1910, 256 pp.
ISBN	0530725169
Available Onllne	archive.org (accessed: March 12, 2020).
Genre	Fiction, Myths
Target Audience	Children
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Creators

Frank Albert Farrar (Author)

Frank Albert Farrar is a mysterious author about whom almost nothing can be found online; possibly he may have been writing under a pseudonym. In his work, Farrar makes little reference to himself or his own experiences of the myths, at a time when other authors would often include the background to their own experience of the myths in their introductions.

Hathi Trust Digital Library attributes to Farrar the 1916 title Factories and great industries, with some account of trade unions, old age pensions, state insurance, the relief of distress, hospitals, which would suggest left wing leanings on Farrar's part. Haithi Trust calls the author of both this and Old Greek Nature Stories Francis rather than Frank; however Frank can also be a diminutive nickname for Francis so this may not be spurious. The name Frank Albert Farrar appears in A Bibliography of British Industrial Relations (Bain and Woolven, Cambridge University Press, 1979), supporting the possibility Farrar was also a writer on early twentieth century industry. It is also possible, however, these are two separate men with the same name writing in the same decade.

Sources:

Haithi Trust Digital Library (accessed: February 4, 2020);

Google Books, A Bibliography of Industrial Relations (accessed 4th of February 2020).

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Additional information

Summary

This is a collection of Greek myths that relate to nature. Often, this ends up being myths about characters who are turned *into* nature, meaning Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a major source. The chapters are divided thematically, and within these each myth encompasses a few paragraphs. At the beginning of each chapter, there is a title page with a series of subheadings, which I have copied over onto the bullet points below. However, these subheadings do not appear in the main body of the text, so the different myths run together. Characters will often reappear from one chapter to another.

- Chapter I: How the Old Greeks Looked at Nature (Greek Influence in Literature and Art – No Science: a World Where All Things were Possible – Origin of Nature Myths – Greeks and Romans).
- Chapter II: The Chief Gods and Goddesses of Olympus (Jupiter – Juno – Minerva – Mars – Vulcan – Apollo – Diana – Venus – Cupid – Mercury: Exploits of Mercury on his Birthday – Vesta - Olympus).
- Chapter III: Stories of the Sun-God (The Hyperboreans – Slaughter of the Python – Contest with Marsyas – Story of Niobe – Chariot of the Sun – Aurora and the Hours – Daily Course of the Sun – Story of Phaeton – Why Ethiopians are black – The Poplars – Cycnus and the Swan – Aesculapius and the Centaur Chiron – Sons of Aesculapius – Hygeia).
- Chapter IV: The Chief Deities of Earth (Greek Attitudes towards Nature – Ceres – Prosperine and the Wanderings of Ceres – Explanation of Winter – The Nymph Cyane – Story of Triptolemus – Pan – The Stillness of the Heat of the Day – Bacchus – Midas: Origin of Alluvial Gold).
- Chapter V: The Lesser Deities of Earth (Comparison with Fairies, Elves, Trolls, Gnomes, Mermaid – Satyrs, Fauns, Nymphs: Oreads, Naiads, Dryads, Hamadryads – Story of Dryope and the Lotus – Story of Echo and Narcissus – Story of Erysichthon – Story of Rhoecus – Vertumnus and Pomona – The Horae).
- Chapter VI: Deities of the Sky and Air – I (Description of Aurora: Dawn and Sunset – Story of Tithonous: the Cricket or Grasshopper – Story of Cephalus and Procris – Story of the Dog, Tempest – Morning and Evening Stars: the Hesperides and the Golden Apples – Aeolus and the Winds – Aeneas and the Winds –

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Ulysses and the Winds).

- Chapter VII: Deities of the Sky and Air – II (The Wind-Gods: Eurus, Auster, Boreas and Zephyrus – The Wooing of Boreas – Calais and Zethes, Winged Sons of Boreas – The Harpies: Whirlwinds – Conflict of the Harpies with the Sons of Boreas – Aeneas and the Harpies – Diana and her Chariot – Selene and Hecate: Witches – Story of Actaeon – Story of Endymion – The Rainbow-bridge – Iris – Iris and Achilles – Thaumas and Electra: Electric Light).
- Chapter VIII: Gods and Goddesses of the Ocean (Oceanus and the Rivers – The Sea-Nymphs – Palace of Oceanus – Neptune and his Chariot – Ages of Gold, Silver, Bronze and Iron – The Flood: Deucalion and Pyrrha – the Earth Repeopled – Nereus and the Nereids – Proteus and Aristoeus – The Bees – Marriage of Thetis and Peleus – Otus and Ephialtes – The Cyclops – Polyphemus – Acis and Galatea – Scylla and Charybdis – Adventure of Ulysses – Ino and the Sea-Birds).
- Chapter IX: Stories of Rivers (Tidal Boreas: Story of the Seine – Story of Arethusa: Disappearing Streams – Deltas: the Islands of Achelous – Conflict of Achelous and Hercules – Snakes Strangled by Infant Hercules – The Horn of Plenty – Sudden Floods: Conflict of Scamander and Achilles).
- Chapter X: Stories of Animals – I (Origin of these Stories – The Wolf: Lycaon – Were-wolf and Loup-garou – The Lynx: Lyncus – The Apes – Midas and the Ass's Ears – Story of Pan and Syrinx: Pan's Pipes – The Great and Little Bears: Calisto and Arcas).
- Chapter XI: Stories of Animals – II (The Dolphin: Adventures of Bacchus and Arion – Bats: Daughters of Minyas – Frogs: Prasants of Lycia – The Newt: Abas – The Spider: Arachne – Origin of the Olive and Horse – Ants: The Myrmidons – Psyche and Cupid).
- Chapter XII: Stories of Birds -I (The Swallow and the Nightingale: Procne and Philomela – The Hawk: Deadalion – The Peacock: Argus – Story of Io – The Partridge: Perdix – Daedalus and the Labyrinth: the Minotaur – The Death of Icarus: Invention of the Saw and Compasses – The Crow and the Raven).
- Chapter XIII: Stories of Birds – II (The Magpies: daughters of Pierus – The Jackdaw: Arne – The Sea-eagle: Nisus – Musical Stones – The Owl: Ascalaphus – Story of the Wren – Proserpine in Hades – The Didapper, or Diver: Aesacus).
- Chapter XIV: Stories of Birds – III (The King-fisher: Halcyone

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and Ceyx – Doves: Daughters of Anius – The Heron: City of Ardea – Ships of Aeneas become Nymphs – Cranes: Gerane – War of Pygmies and Cranes - Hercules and Pygmies – The Stork – the Woodpecker: Picus).

- Chapter XV: Stories of Trees (The Laurel: Daphne – The Cypress: Cyparissus – The Wild Olive – The Pine-tree: Attis – The Mulberry: Pyramus and Thisbe).
- Chapter XVI: Stories of Flowers and Plants (The Hyacinth: Hyacinthus – Death of Ajax – The Sunflower: Clytie – Frankincense Plant: Leucothoe – Myrrh: Myrrha – Death of Adonis: the Anemone – Poisonous Plants: Aconite).
- Chapter XVII: Stories of Volcanic Regions (Typhon – Typhoeus and Etna – Alarm of Pluto – Hot Springs – Attack of Rome by the Sabines – Sulphurous Springs – Extinct Volcanoes – Travellers' Tales of Hot Springs – Petrifying Springs).
- Chapter XVIII: The Gorgon's Head, and Stories of Stones (Perseus and Medusa – Atlas turned into a Mountain – Origin of Snakes in Africa – Rescue of Andromeda – Origin of Coral – Curiously shaped Rocks: Lychas and Others turned into Rocks – Origin of Hailstones – The Touchstone: Battus).
- Chapter XIX: Stories of the Heroes – I (The Twelve Labours of Hercules – Bellerophon and the Chimaera – The Calydonian Hunt – Cadmus and the Dragon – The Harvest of the Dragon's Teeth – The Necklace of Harmonia – Cadmus and his Wife turned into Serpents).
- Chapter XX: Stories of the Heroes – II (Oedipus and the Sphinx – The Sirens: Hidden Dangers of the Shore – Ulysses and the Sirens – The Argonauts and the Sirens – Ulysses and Polyphemus).
- Index.

Analysis

Rather than an introduction, Farrar opens with a chapter one claiming to address 'how the old Greeks looked at nature'. In this, he quotes Charles Kingsley's introduction to his own children's myth anthology *The Heroes* (1856) extensively, agreeing with him on the importance of Greek influence on modern civilisation. He advises everyone to read *The Heroes*, calling it "a book which every boy and girl should read" (p. 11). Farrar himself calls the Greeks "a simple, but brave and intelligent people' who 'reached the height of their glory five hundred years before the people of our own island had got beyond the stage of

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painted and skin-clad savages." (p. 11). With this portrait of the Greeks as simple but charming and wise primitives, Farrar's anthology positions itself as Romantic. The myths, Farrar says, contain "many true and noble ideas. They [the Greeks] loved courage and truthfulness, dutiful conduct to parents, courtesy to strangers, and kindness to those in need." (pp. 12–13). Clearly, this is based on a very particular reading of myth. As in other anthologies of this time period (e.g. Grace Kupfer 1897, *Stories of Long Ago in a New Dress*), Farrar provides justification for getting children to read myth in enabling them to understand classical references in art and poetry.

Farrar is clearly of the line of thought associated with James Frazer that Greek myth represents an attempt to explain natural phenomena for which they had no science, and he consistently asserts this as absolute fact. The Greeks lived "like untaught children" (p. 14) and created myths with their abundant imaginations in the absence of the scientific knowledge we have today. For example, Farrar claims that "There is a well-known story connected with Bacchus which, like so many of these old tales, tries to account for a curious fact in nature which seemed to the Greeks to call for an explanation." (p. 53). This curious natural phenomena turns out to be the presence of gold in rivers. Farrar takes the claim in ancient sources that Midas' gold touch was what caused this at face value, and assumes authors like Ovid literally believed this. He also claims: "In some cases the mere likeness of the name of some personage of former times to that of some animal or object seems to have given rise to a story in which they are shown to be the same." (p. 40). Stories of Apollo's murders of humans, he says, probably represent sudden deaths caused by the sun, like heatstroke. In one of these instances, Farrar also hints at the theory of evolution for those in the know: "The Greeks, finding that many animals had evil qualities very like those found in some human beings, explained the fact, as we have seen, by supposing that they were at first men and women, but had been changed into the form of beasts as a punishment for their wickedness." (p. 121). He goes on to add "Of all the lower animals the Apes are most like human beings in form, and, as we might expect, there is an account of their human origin." (p. 124). Here, texts like Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are taken to be good faith attempts at addressing the similarities between the human and animal as a result of Ovid's lack of knowledge of evolution. Farrar seems to take the *Metamorphoses* as a religious text in which everything said was genuinely believed by Ovid and his ancient readers to be true. The possibility that parts of Ovid may be intended

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as fantasy, humour, exaggeration or metaphor and not literally believed, or that Ovid himself may in places be mocking 'simple peoples' who believe some of his more unconvincing explanations for the nature of things are not considered.

Like many anthologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (e.g. Emma Firth 1894, *Stories of Old Greece*; Grace Kupfer 1897, *Stories of Long Ago in a New Dress;* Margaret Evans Price 1924, *A Child's Book of Myths and Enchantment Tales*), Farrar takes a high view of the importance of Apollo compared with the other Olympians. "Of all the natural objects that would attract the attention of such a race as we have described, the sun is by far the most striking and majestic. It is therefore not surprising that Apollo played a more important part in the life and myths of the Greeks than any other deity, perhaps not even excepting Zeus." (p. 24). This assertion seems difficult to justify, but it is not out of sync with the way that children's books of this time period tend to treat Apollo. The importance of Apollo in these early anthologies was probably because a) Apollo fit into Indo-European related ideas of heliocentric pagan pantheons b) Apollo, as the most important son of the chief god, seems like he should be important by western conventions of dynastic rule and c) Apollo fit well into nineteenth century conventions for children's literature which stressed that beauty was good; his golden form of beauty also worked well with the racist elements of the classics as he is blonde gold and white light. Meanwhile, Apollo's patronage of the arts made him a personally appealing god to those in creative careers, and his association with high culture caused him to fit within books intended to teach children culture.

Farrar tells several myths about attempted rape (e.g. Syrinx, Arethusa, Daphne), but edits the myths in which the woman is raped and pregnant to remove the rape element. For example, in Farrar's version of the story of Calisto, the beginning where she is raped by Jupiter is omitted, and instead she simply offends Juno in an unspecified way. A somewhat glamourized vision of satyr rape culture is provided, with Farrar claiming the satyrs "embodied the wild, free, ungoverned life of the woodland, so their days were filled with pleasures … sporting with the nymphs, who, however, usually fled from them." (p. 58). This is probably due to the popularity of Pan in Edwardian England, and the tendency to see him as a charming figure representing the delights of the natural world. Other sexually inappropriate material is also removed; for example, Farrar neatly excises the incest from Oedipus' story. He tells of Laius abandoning

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Oedipus, Oedipus' adoption, Oedipus' slaying of Laius and defeating of the sphinx, then ends by saying that Oedipus experienced many sorrows in later life.

Farrar says of Echo "She was, however, as occasionally happens in the case of more modern nymphs [read modern women], far too fond of chattering" (p. 60). This is what Echo is punished for. Rather than Echo deceiving Juno, Juno is simply "displeased at her forwardness" (p. 60) and takes her voice away as punishment for her unfeminine talkativeness.

This shows Farrar's commitment to middle class British values, and his insertion (probably unintentional) of these themes into classical mythology. He also adds a fear of the unknown, distant and wild that seems more reflective of the early twentieth century British middle class than the ancient Greeks. For example, as Farrar writes in relation to the forests: "The mystery of the shady groves in the silvery moonlight gave rise to the idea that, after the chase, the goddess [Diana] loved to gather the nymphs of the woods and springs who attended her and in such groves to join in the song and dance. Believing that they might meet such supernatural beings in the forest, people were very loath to venture there at night" (pp. 85–86). Fear of wandering too far is evocative of the insistence of the emerging middle class on the establishment of home as a safe base and disparagement of long night-time city walks and street social culture, as well as a certain fear of nature.

There are no illustrations for this anthology; instead, famous artwork appears intermittently throughout, in black and white print (e.g. Herbert Draper's 'The Lament for Icarus'). This was common for anthologies of this period (see Grace Kupfer 1897, *Stories of Long Ago in a New Dress;* Emilie Kip Baker 1913, *Stories of Old Greece and Rome*), and was part of the agenda of encouraging children to recognise classical references in art. To further his reader's general cultural education, Farrar includes additional references to the kinds of 'high culture' to which British 1910s parents might wish for their children to be introduced; for example on page 39 he brings in Edmund Spenser's mention of poplars in *The Faerie Queene.*

My print on demand ULAN Press copy of this book, published through Amazon, is clearly a scan of someone else's older edition, since handwritten pencil notes appear down the sides in scan form. From a classical reception point of view, this of course offers additional

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	interesting insights into what another person made of this book, albeit from a regrettably unspecified time in the past. For example, we can see that someone was particularly interested in the sentences on wine, since highlighting lines have been drawn down the side of the sentences "The cheering and enlivening effect of wine, too, was reflected in the character of the god, who is always represented as young, blooming, joyous, and full of good-will to mankind. Since wine promotes sociality, Bacchus was the promoter of civilization, of peace, and of law." (p. 52).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aeolus Apollo Arachne Asclepius Athena Boreas Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Echo Eos Hades Heracles Medusa Odysseus / Ulysses Oedipus Pan Persephone Perseus Syrinx
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Environment Innocence Nature Past Transformation

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