



# **A Book of New England Legends and Folk Lore: In Prose and Poetry (Classic Reprint)**

*Samuel Adams Drake*

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Excerpt from A Book of New England Legends and Folk Lore: In Prose and Poetry

The recovery of many scattered legendary waifs that not only have a really important bearing upon the early history of our country, but that also shed much light upon the spirit of its ancient laws and upon the domestic lives of its people, has seemed to me a laudable undertaking. This purpose has now taken form in the following collection of New-England Legends.

As in a majority of instances these tales go far beyond the time when the interior was settled, they naturally cluster about the seaboard; and it would scarcely be overstepping the limit separating exaggeration from truth to say that every league of the New-England coast has its story or its legend.

Disowned in an age of scepticism, there was once - and the time is not so far remote - no part of the body politic over which what we now vaguely term the legendary did not exercise the strongest influence; so that, far from being merely a record of amusing fables, these tales, which are largely founded on fact, disclose the secret spring by which society was moved and history made. One looks beneath every mechanical contrivance for the true origin of power. That is to assume that the beliefs of a people are the key to its social and political movements, and that history, taken in its broadest sense, cannot be truly written without having regard to such beliefs. Had the conviction that witches existed not been universal, public sentiment would never have countenanced the executions that took place in New England.

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