

# JOSEPH JACOBS



**J**oseph Jacobs was born in 1854 in Sydney, Australia. Entering Sydney Grammar School in 1867, he won the (Sir Edward) Knox prize twice and was school captain in 1871. Next year, on a scholarship, he studied arts at the University of Sydney and won many prizes. In October 1873 he moved to England to study at Cambridge University where he graduated with honors. He then worked as an editor, writer and translator. Supposedly, he knew 40 languages.

Jacobs became an important Jewish historian and later moved to the United States to become editor of the Jewish Encyclopedia and a Professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary. His anthropological studies led him to folklore and he edited several books of fables and in his generation became one of the most popular writers of fairy tales for English-speaking children.

Much of Jacobs' work as a folklorist was scholarly, and many credit him with preserving English and Celtic folk tales in the way the Grimm Brothers did in Germany. But he also popularized folk tales. He rewrote them for children in a style he once described of being "as good as an old nurse will speak".

Jacobs died of heart disease at his home at Yonkers, New York, on 30 January 1916 and was buried in Temple Emanuel cemetery, Mt Hope. Australian Jewry can claim this great and gentle scholar, whose versatile ability knew no bounds, as an outstanding son; yet because his contribution to his people was intellectual and his life spent far from his homeland, he is nearly forgotten in Australia.