

lack made the tribe, in a way, inferior to their neighbors on the coast, and for this reason the tendency and the desire of evolving myths of this character becomes intelligible. But the tribe was organized on a different basis from that of the coast people. While the latter were divided into clans, the idea that was present to the minds of the Salish people was that of the village community; and it is clear, therefore, that the traditions which developed would be of such a character that each village would have one mythical ancestor.

The same change has taken place among the Bella Coola, whose mythology is much more thoroughly modified by the coast tribes than that of the Salish tribes of Fraser River.

These considerations have an important bearing upon the interpretation of the myths of primitive people, such as are recorded in the following pages. I have tried to show that the material of which they are built up is of heterogeneous origin, and that much of it is adopted ready-made. The peculiar manner in which foreign and indigenous material is interwoven and worked into a somewhat homogeneous fabric depends to a great extent upon the social conditions and habits of the people. Oft-repeated actions which are the expression of social laws, and which constitute the habits and customs of the people, may be expected to be more stable than traditions that are not repeated in a prescribed form or ritual, and have thus become intimately associated with habitual actions. This is probably the reason why we find that ritual moulds the explanatory myth, and why, in a more general way, the myth is made to conform with the social status of the people. Discrepancies between the two, in a general way at least, belong to the class of phenomena that are called "survivals." The discrepancy may consist in the preservation of earlier customs in traditions, or in fragments of early traditions under modified social conditions. The survivals themselves are proof of the gradual process of assimilation between social conditions and traditions which has wrought fundamental changes in the lore of mankind.

Both factors, dissemination and modification on account of social causes, must tend to obscure the original significance of the myth. The contents of mythology prove clearly that attempts at the explanation of nature are the primary source of myths. But we must bear in mind that, owing to the modifications they have undergone, we cannot hope to gain an insight into their earliest form by comparisons and interpretations, unless they are based on a thorough inquiry into the historical changes that have given to myths their present forms. It would seem that mythological worlds have been built up, only to be shattered again, and that new worlds were built from the fragments.