

The Philosophy of Folk Lore

Folk-Lore is crude ethnology, crude cosmogony, crude everything in science, but beyond all it is crude history, for history to a greater or lesser extent comprehends all the others.

Folk-Lore is of three kinds:—purely mythical, purely traditional, or a combination of these, and proverbial.

Before attempting to distinguish what is the one and what is the other, let us try, for the time being, to divest ourselves of everything pertaining to what we call *civilization*,—this is not an easy task, but let us make the attempt to forget that we can read—that we ever met any one who could read, that we know scarcely anything of ourselves, and never saw any one who knows more. If we succeed in so doing we shall be for the moment, in imagination, savages.

But even as such we are in possession of a faculty the marvellousness of which exceeds or is at least equal to, the mystery of life itself, the faculty of thought. All animals think, but in most cases their thoughts are confined to food supply,—or in other words they arise from the demands of the stomach they are simple. In some of the higher orders thought embraces the interests of the species, and may be admitted as being of a compound character, thus approaching in some degree to human thought, which is so complex in its nature that we designate it "Reason." In other words the lower animals perceive—man conceives.

Man is a complex thinker, hence, in chief measure, what we now call Folk-Lore. The *mythical* is pure fabulous; the *traditional* usually has at least a thin substraction of fact; and the *proverbial* may be referred to as condensed experience pithily expressed. Now, complexity of thought gives rise to inquiry, which in time becomes inquisitiveness. Untutored man at a very early stage in his existence recognizes that manifestations of natural phenomena, are of two kinds, the regular and the irregular, or the normal and the spasmodic. Day after day the sun appears and disappears—with wide intervals the moon comes and goes—the tides operate with irregular regularity; but thunder and lightning, rain and snow, wind and calm have no stated periods. Herein are involved problems he is determined to solve, and which to his own satisfaction he *does* solve after he has fully accounted for his own appearance in some way equally satisfactory to himself, whether by having emerged from a hole under a hill, by having dropped from the sky, by transformation from pebbles, or in any other of innumerable and equally bizarre ways. Creation myths alone, whether of man only, or of the world at large might occupy our attention for hours, but all that is necessary for the present purpose is to point