

INDIAN history is wholly oral. The tales and traditions, handed down from father to son, are the Indians' only connecting link between the past and the present, and it is the songs, ceremonies and poetry of the Indians that form their principal history. The difficulty of rendering these songs will be apparent to everyone, when it is well remembered the red man has no grammar or well-defined sounds in his language. Motions of the hands and gutturals constitute much of his language, and these are not easy to define on paper. Yet there is something to be learned in Indian poetry, but the task is a difficult one, for never was a subject more intricate. The clouds, sun, moon, stars, storms, lightning, the voice of the thunder—these are the fruitful themes that fill the savage soul with song, and from which he draws symbols in his chants and stories. War, love and the chase burst from his lips in weird music, but it is impossible to reduce to meter the flashes of his genius. His monosyllables, his eye, the nod of his head, the movements of his hands—all are potential in song, and mean more than words. Viewed in this light the winds have voices, the trees a language, and even the earth is animated with unseen spirits; and, as Schoolcraft says, many of the Indian songs are accompanied with untangible music that can neither be caught nor written. Motion forms the poetry, and the words are but the filling up of a mystical and beautiful conception. How can we translate such a language? It is impossible, and we can only gather the chaff, leaving the golden grain to be imagined, to be heard like the sighing of the winds, the whispering of the leaves, but never to be reduced to the dull theory of created matter and material form. In time of war the Indian pays great attention to the flight of birds, hence frequent allusions are made to them in their battle songs. They believe that birds can foretell man's destiny, and regard their presence as indicative of good or evil, undertaking to interpret the messages they bring, always in song, illustrative of this strange