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THE NATURAL HISTORY OF FOLK-LORE.

THE object of this paper is not to discuss natural history in folk-lore. That is, no doubt, a branch of the subject, and its discussion would fill many volumes. Indeed, you will agree with me that there are not many phenomena of nature apparent to the unaided senses which have not over and over again entered into the thoughts and directed the actions of the folk. My purpose is to inquire how the folk-lorist is to bring his work into line with that of other naturalists.

In order to comprehend the true position of folk-lore in the sciences which go to make up anthropology, you have only to remember that we are concerned with the past of our race as well as with the present. There are three volumes to this record, — that which is written in things, that which is preserved in documents, and that which comes down to us in sayings and customs. The science which investigates the first is archæology; the second is history; and the third, for the study of which no name has been devised, is folk-lore.

Folk-lore in this discussion means the lore of the folk. The folk include all unlettered men and women and tribes, and even lettered people when they think and act like the folk, rather than in accordance with the rules of science and culture. We all have traditions and manners which we cannot shake off, although we know them to be absurd. The greatest men have had their foibles in this respect, which linked them with the crowd. The folk are: (1) all savages, (2) the old-fashioned people, (3) the children, and (4) all of us when we are old-fashioned.

The lore of the folk includes what they claim to know, and what they do. The boundaries of this definition are not accurately fixed. Omitting the doubtful margin, however, there is enough left that is clearly our territory in common.

Folk-lore has reference to what is customary, what men and women and children think and say and do in common.

There are two kinds of action in every life. If we were left alone, each one would act spontaneously and independently, doing what seemed good in his own eyes. But hemmed in as we are by family, friends, society, government, business, school, church, associations, crafts, and fashion, we find it more convenient to act as others act, and to think as they think, than to originate a new set of actions and thoughts on every occasion. The first kind of actions we perform at our wits' end, the second kind we fall into. We are impelled into the first by inward pressure, natural proclivity; but we are attracted, led, driven into the second.

Now, as it is possible for an individual to repeat an original action until it becomes fixed and automatic, so also may we perform in unison with others, certain actions, until they become easy and agreeable.

Those actions which living beings are induced to perform in common become fixed, characteristic, varietal, specific. They go on surviving and holding over, even after the causes which combined to produce them have ceased to operate.

Those actions which they perform spontaneously give rise to new classes of activity, or they die in the struggle. In the same way custom and invention are the corner-stones of human action. The former becomes folk-lore, the latter progress.

Folk-lore stands for the hereditable part of our activity; invention is the creative, originating part of our action. Folk-lore is crystalloid; invention and science are colloidal. Folk-lore is kept alive by public opinion, and is opposed to progress; invention and science are centrifugal, venturesome, individual.

This ability to act in common has itself had a historic growth, beginning with such savage acts as beating time to a rude dance, and rising to a grand chorus, a great battle, or a modern industrial establishment employing thousands of men marking time to one master spirit.[1]

We shall now show how the methods of the naturalist may be applied to our science with regard to morphology.

[1] I am aware that the term "folk-lore" has been employed in two senses: first, to denote the sum of knowledge possessed by any folk, or the traditional material; secondly, to signify knowledge about any folk, or to include inferences and conclusions derived from a study of this material. Clearness would seem to require that the word should be confined, for the present at least, to the first meaning, which it was originally invented to express. Again, there has been, and still is, a question as to whether by the term "folk" should be understood only the illiterate portion of highly cultivated communities, or simply any body of persons forming a community, when regarded as acting and feeling in common. American folk-lorists will probably agree in the opinion that in America, the wider signification alone will be found useful.

If we had a number of crystals laid before us, how would the scientific mineralogist proceed in studying them? His first effort would be to understand and discriminate their forms; the folk-lorist may follow his example, and search for the external, formal distinctions of his material. It is apparent to everybody that unlettered people have, first, their opinions or theories upon many subjects; this he would call folk-thought. It is no less apparent, secondly, that these same people have their practices or ways of doing things, and this he would call folk-custom or wont. Folk-thought and folk-wont added together would make folk-lore. Folk-thought gives rise to the library, folk-wont to the picture gallery and the museum.

Now we cannot separate thought from wont, as some have tried to do. The best plan is to keep the library, the gallery, and the museum under one régime.

Another formal distinction in folk-lore is purely literary. Folk-thought and folk-sayings, on all sorts of subjects, are sometimes in prose, at other times in verse or rhyme. The prose saying may be proverb, maxim, fable, parable, allegory, *märchen*, myth, story; the versified lore may be the same things, besides songs, ballads, counting-out rhymes, epic poems, and other forms.

Some folk-lorists have founded their classifications on these formal characteristics, and indeed this is a very useful method for the collector, the man of business, or the intelligent woman, who is willing to consecrate any amount of leisure to some definite object within the limits of their comprehension. But the scientific student of folk-lore may have to seek other concepts in his final arrangement.

The moment the mineralogist has finished his study of form, he concerns himself about specific gravity and chemical composition. The components of his specimen must be determined and discriminated. All of the distinguished scholars who have given their attention to our subject have attempted classifications of folk-lore after the same fashion, based on analysis.

The chemical solvent, the blow-pipe analysis, are imitated in a suitable method of tabulation. The important elements of the specimen, that is, the dramatis personæ and incidents, are laid out for comparison, and the future student will have to do with these. If he is not satisfied with the diagnosis already made, he may, without cost, refer to the original specimen and dissect it for himself. The folk-specimen has this advantage, that no bungling or malicious analyst can destroy it by dissolving it into its elements. The archæologist who rummages a mound, the palæontologist who removes a fossil from its associations, the anatomist of a rare animal who destroys the connections of parts, all have closed the door of research. The folk-cabinet is like the piles of enumerators' atlases

in the Census Office. The material is ever at hand to be considered.

The refined analysis of the belief, the saying, the action, is to be our reliance in discovering the characteristics upon which a national, scientific classification is to be based.

Supplementary to such work, we have in America the opportunity of better collecting. You can imagine what sort of natural history that would be which one would make up from the desultory mention of travellers, or even from specimens gathered for commercial purposes. You may be pleased to know that the Bureau of Ethnology in Washington, at infinite pains, is gathering the stories of our Indians. The work is done by men who insist on hearing a narrative over and over again until there is no mistake about accuracy; no physicist or mineralogist is more careful than Dr. Dorsey and his colleagues at this point. No attempt has yet been made to combine this material, to anatomize it. As yet there need not be. In all sciences, the period of accurate instrumental, multiplied observation must succeed that by the mere senses, preparatory to higher generalizations. In our science we shall occupy an enviable position if it be possible to have the reputation of accuracy. Whatever the issue, would it not be grateful to us to read that no other body of original material can compare with ours for accuracy and genuineness? I am inclined to insist upon this point, and to devise the preparation of a pamphlet of definite instruction to collectors, which the Smithsonian Institution, I doubt not, would print and circulate free of cost to the Society. I am glad that attention has already been drawn to this matter in the January number of the "Journal."

In this matter of collecting, there is one subject that I would emphasize again and again, and yet I would use the utmost caution and politeness in calling attention to it. I refer now to *personal equation.*

In every observatory there is accurate record made of each observer's personal equation, — the difference of time between the crossing of a spider line by a star and the recorded time of the observer.

No astronomer would be offended if one were to say to him in a courteous manner, "You do not tell the truth." He would calmly say, "My personal equation is three tenths of a second, minus."

As we approach the more complex sciences, the personal equation varies in all those records which are based on sense perception. In anthropology the variation from truth is not only in number, time, distance, weight, color, and motion, but in the subtile inferences which always accompany sense perceptions. I have witnessed some

very curious effects upon the minds of those who overlooked this important matter. There are archæologists who will not read a word of the old Spanish chroniclers because of their personal aversion to them. You will see every-day examples of this false reading because we have not calmly eliminated the personal equation of the chronicler and accepted the residuum as true. I make no reference here to falsifiers of any kind, and their name is legion, or to those shallow people who obtrude themselves into all sciences. My allusion is to honest people who, for the reason I have assigned, fall short of the truth.

Indeed, I see no reason why the modern collector may not go a step further, carefully study out his own personal equation, and save the reader the trouble by eliminating it himself. That would be a forward step in anthropology, perhaps, for which we are not now prepared.

Beyond the accumulation of most valuable material, what ought to be our next aspiration? Perhaps I may discourage you in this answer. It should not be and cannot be, according to the canons of science, the discovery of mysteries, the guessing of the riddle of existence, or any other great matter. It is simply and prosaically this, that we pursue with fidelity scientific processes, on material carefully collected, by means of refined apparatus; we may hope to know how folk-thoughts and folk-customs came to be what they are, and how they are linked to culture-lore. In coöperation with the archæologist and the decipherer, the folk-lorist hopes to restore much of the lost history of our race.

Consider the botanist or the zoölogist. By means of much time and money expended, he comprehends the ongoings, the becomings, the changes of nature. The forces behind these things act as far away from his microscopic limit as that is distant from the visible things around him. The folk-lorist, who studies ballads and proverbs and counting-out rhymes, must find out how these things were made, how they grew, the law of their organic development. He will have then arrived at the half-way house of wisdom. But the analysis of each thought, saying, invention, custom, story, and so forth, must be made as carefully as I would have him do his collecting in the first instance. I would invoke the method of the patent attorney, who will take to pieces before your eyes the most complicated machine and show you the order of invention, the chronological order in which each part was added. It is not enough to say that this or that people say or do this or that; we must know exactly what they say or do, and how they say and do it, down to the fastening-off thread.

A word may be added regarding lore-areas. The naturalist who would treat comprehensively a species — for example, our honey-bee

— would not be content with giving the creature a binomial name based on anatomy. All that bees are and do would be included in his study. The unfolding of a single life would be as interesting to him as the telling of a tale or the singing of a ballad, would correspond with E. Sidney Hartland's pursuit of the "Outcast Child" in many lands and down the centuries. The points of view in the study of bee-life would be offset by our tracing the lore of the folk into the activities of human life. I do not know of any side from which the one subject may be viewed, that may not be advantageously occupied for the other.

Much attention has been paid in the last few years to biological regions. No naturalist neglects them. You will hear him say again and again that he does not want a mineral, a plant, an egg, a mammal skin or skeleton, if you cannot tell him quite definitely where you got it. Indeed, Dr. Virchow told the German Anthropological Society, in 1889, that a human skull counted for little unless the collector had marked well its source.

Already this fact is recognized, and, as a preparation for the true determination of lore-areas, many volumes are devoted to the folk-lore of regions. I must repeat the warning of our honored president, however, and remind you that topography or chorography for us has a variety of meanings. The term "folk-lore of Norway and Sweden" would mean, for one mind, all the lore of that peninsula, with especial reference to the pressure which long days and nights, mountains, fjords, cold and storm, abundance of fish, and dark forests had exerted over the thoughts, the speech, the ways of men there. That would be topographic lore. For another mind this term would have reference to the unfolding of the nationality and language of the peninsula, which would be demographic lore. And to a third, there would appear a blue-eyed lore and a black-eyed lore, based on the distinctions of race or blood, which would be ethnographic. We cannot, in the final count, neglect any of these points of view. Chorography for us means place, race, or people, according to the motive of our search. Besides, a lore-area has frequently a circumscription of its own, smaller or larger than any of those enumerated.

The problem of origins thrusts itself before the eyes of the folk-lorist as well as before the naturalist, the archæologist, or the historian. In startling fashion, the same language, arts, social structures, beliefs, tales, and mottoes appear in regions far apart. Were they separately created? Did a certain people, like the modern Gypsies, travel about and carry these with them? Did the sayings and doings travel themselves across vast distances by a species of commerce? None of these questions can be answered as long as our material is

filled with sediment and foreign bodies. In our own land we shall have to exercise extreme caution. There is scarcely a fraction of territory where the Indian was not a century or more in contact with whites before the recorder made his appearance. In some areas this space of time reaches to three hundred and fifty years. And even the negro race had ample time to introduce its lore to the aborigines before the reporter arrived on the spot. Especially is this true of the aborigines now in the Indian Territory, who were deported from the Southern States only fifty years ago, after remaining in close contact with negroes two hundred years. In the Spanish Americas the contact remains to this moment.

The classifications of folk-lore which I have seen, even those in which the connection with anthropology is recognized, give prominence to the subjective side rather than to the objective side of the inquiry. It is anthropology standing off and regarding the folk, forming opinions about them, and writing books about them. From our point of view, the term "folk-lore" is both subjective and objective. But it is primarily objective. It is the anthropology which the folk hold. It is their beliefs about the heavens above, the earth beneath, and the waters under the earth. Cosmogony, chemistry, physics, botany, zoölogy, and mankind, bodily, intellectual, and spiritual, — whence came the objects and the phenomena involved in these, what is their nature, power, and limitations?

Consider for a moment the range of the science called anthropology. In addition to investigating what man is, it now comprehends all that he does, his activities manifested in speech, in arts of comfort, in arts of pleasure, in social organization, duties and customs, in philosophy, literature, and science, in religion. Without doubt, there is also a folk-speech, folk-trades and practices, folk fine art, folk-amusement, folk-festival, folk-ceremonies, folk-customs, folk-government, folk-society, folk-history, folk-poetry, folk-maxims, folk-philosophy, folk-science, and myths or folk-theology. Everything that we have, they have, — they are the back numbers of us.

It is true that the cosmogony of the folk overshadows all the beliefs and practices of the folk; the light from the spirit world streams over every thought, and seems to have led some into the error that the folk are only myth-makers. But no one seems to have noticed that also, with the most learned, every object and movement of the present life is reflected back upon the heavenly life. Nothing takes place there that was not enacted here. Every god and minor spirit is a copy of something real. Mythology is only a part of folk-lore, and can be fairly understood only when we have a correct understanding of the culture plain of the myth-teller and his audience. I hope I may be pardoned for repeating that every specialist in an-

thropology must first go down and sit at the feet of the folk, to be instructed in all the ways of life, and in the proper method of accounting for phenomena.

Most classifications of folk-lore that I have examined have been based on a mixture of classific concepts partly formal, partly functional, and partly metaphysical.[1] For my own part, I have found it better to work the other way, to make collections in the smallest possible classes of folk-lore, just as our museum collectors gather specimens, waiting for these to group themselves as occasion may demand. The linguist will naturally fix his mind on folk-speech, — etymologies, spelling, pronunciation, definition, sentence-making, wherever he may find them. The house-builder, cabinet-maker, tailor, craftsman, doctor, sailor, and others will search out each his share of practical lore. The musician, draughtsman, painter, sculptor, or landsape-gardener will compass sea and land to complete his technic family tree.

Around the governmental organization, the military organization, the family, the community, the guild, the union, cluster traditions and customs, ceremonies, festivals, games, as thick as leaves in the forest. These are capable of separate collection, and naturally fall together. The science of the folk, as before mentioned, falls naturally into cosmogony, sky-lore, weather-lore, mineral-lore, plant-lore, and man-lore, or history and philosophy.

What we call literature had its parent and predecessor in folk-speech. I do not mean now the matter, but the manner of saying. It would not do to speak of the *belles-lettres* of the unlettered. But they hand down by tradition in prose and verse the choicest utterances of their distinguished men, and these are their treasured compositions, and will find their patrons in men of literary taste. The historian especially at this time will search out the methods of recording events among the uncivilized, in order that he may catch a glimpse of the old chroniclers at their work. I have a fancy that, in the near future, the little scraps and shreds of lore will be gathered for historic purposes very much as the archæologist brings together the materials, tools, pictures, and descriptions of processes, and the products of the humblest industries.

[1] The conspectus contained in the *Handbook of Folk-Lore* by Mr. George Laurence Gomme, as I am informed by the editor of this Journal, will be found under Bibliographical Notes below. Mr. E. Sidney Hartland has advocated a division into two departments, Folk-thought and Folk-practice or Folk-wont, including in the latter, worship. Mr. J. S. Stuart-Glennie divides the study of man's history into Folk-lore and Culture-life, dividing the former into (1) elements and subjects, embracing folk-beliefs, folk-passions, and folk-traditions, and (2) expressions and records, comprehending folk-customs, folk-sayings, and folk-poesy.

Finally, in the presence of the spirit-world, we contemplate folk-religion, which is what they believe about the spirit world and what they practice in view of that belief. What they believe is *folk-creed;* what they practice is *folk-cult.* Folk-creed and folk-cult constitute folk-religion, just as folk-thought and folk-wont constitute the folk-lore of anything whatever.

By this process of gathering material, with no view to classification, we enable the systematic student to write books on child-lore, moon-lore, flower-lore, rabbit-lore, weather-lore, sea-lore, folk-medicine, or any other line he may select. The lore of a people, a region, a race, includes the whole range of anthropological sciences regarded from the point of view of that people, region, or race. In the same way, world-lore expands the vista to all times and climes, Those who pursue the subject with this ruling conception in mind, take up some *infimus conceptus*, like "counting-out rhymes," and find every example thereof under the sun. I have frequently imagined, for the different lore-areas, cards ruled in squares, with the classific concepts of anthropological science in the vertical column and the objects of folk-thought and folk-custom across the top. In each square the collector, by a number or reference, could indicate the character of the folk-response to the binomial conception. All that Mr. Bolton and other folk-loric globe-trotters would have to do would be to glance over the whole set to see whether he had overlooked any examples. Better still, these indefatigable gentlemen might be induced to fill up many of the vacant squares for us. The world would then form an encyclopædia folk-lorica.

Some day we may hope to realize Mr. J. S. Stuart-Glennie's definition of folk-lore, that it is our learning about the folk, just as bird-lore is what the folk believe and do about birds. But that will be the last chapter in the book, and can be written only after the natural historian of the human mind declares the information all in, and all the little squares on my cards properly filled up.

Until that time, let us be patient, accurate, unprejudiced, scientific. I remember very well the struggle to bring archæology within the rules of refined work. The researches of Putnam and Holmes in the last years how the beneficent result. Folk-lore, also, has its camp-followers, with whom we should part company at an early day. Above all, let us not forget that all science, and every human industry, custom, and belief, originated with the folk. Before astronomy, was astrology; before physics, were caloric and discrete forces; before chemistry, was alchemy; before biology, was natural history; before anthropology, was mythology: and it may be that some day our own precious oracles will turn out to be old wives' fables.

Otis T. Mason.