Book Reviews

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REVIEWS.

WEST AFRICAN FOLK-TALES, collected and arranged by W. H. BARKER, B.Sc., and CECILIA SINCLAIR. London: George G. Harrap & Co. 1917.

THIS collection of stories does not profess to be a scientific work. But it is founded on original material, which "it is hoped," as Mr. Barker in his interesting introduction says, to render ere long "available for the student of folk-lore." Arranged therefore for "a wider public," it affords the student a foretaste of what the genuine collection will offer.

The tales on which the work is "based" were collected on the Gold Coast, where Mr. Barker was Principal of the Government Institution at Accra. But we are not told to what tribes the narrators belonged, nor in what circumstances the tales themselves were told. This information is presumably reserved until the original material is presented. Mr. Barker contends, and no doubt with justice, that "folklore can and does render valuable assistance toward a solution" of the problem presented by the traditions relating to the origin of peoples. It must, however, be used with caution when we have to deal with matter so transmissible as folk-tales. "A conquered people," it is true, "do not give up their 'lore' with the land, but carry their customs and traditions with them to their new homes." But they learn many things on the way; and they absorb from peoples with whom they come into contact, whether as conquerors or conquered, or by way of trading intercourse, customs and traditions, especially tales told for amusement.

Mr. Barker gives a picturesque and interesting account of tale-tellers and their audience, rendered all the more vivid by a

preliminary photograph of native children gathered before the village to listen. He has some good remarks on "the effect of the contact of the slave-trading Europeans on the folklore of the Coast Negroes." In his observations on the similarity between the stories of different races in different stages of progress he refers to the story of the man who obtained a knowledge of the language of the lower animals on condition that he did not disclose the secret. He refers to one variant in Petrovitch's *Hero-Tales and Legends of the Serbians*, but does not mention the famous example in the introduction to the *Arabian Nights*.

The stories are chiefly tales of the lower animals. They are either Anansi stories, with which we are more familiar in their West Indian development among the imported slaves, or myths explaining the peculiarities of various creatures or of custom. Many of them belong to the Brer Rabbit type, that is to say, they are narratives of the deeds of a famous trickster. They are well told, and illustrated with original drawings (white on a black ground) by Miss Sinclair. We shall be glad to see the original material in scientific form. West African collections of folk-tales are none too many.

E. SIDNEY HARTLAND.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE MUSSULMAUNS OF INDIA, DESCRIPTIVE OF THEIR MANNERS, CUSTOMS, HABITS, AND RELIGIOUS OPINIONS, MADE DURING A TWELVE YEARS' RESIDENCE IN THEIR IMMEDIATE SOCIETY. By Mrs. MEER HASSAN ALI. Second Edition, Edited with Notes and an Introduction by W. CROOKE, late of the Indian Civil Service. Oxford University Press, 1917. Pp. xxviii + 442. Price 6s. net. or on India paper, 7s. 6d.

THE long title correctly describes the contents of Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali's unique book, which deserves the honour of reissue and of illumination by Mr. Crooke's notes, which are concise, adequate, and accurate. The lady was an Englishwoman who

made the bold experiment of marrying a high-class Muhammadan, a Sayyid or reputed descendant of the Prophet, who was employed for a time as an assistant teacher at Addiscombe. She went to India with her husband and lived there with him for about twelve years, mostly spent in Lucknow, then the seat of the court of King Ghāzi-ud din Haidar, the monarch whose vagaries are described in Knighton's queer book, *The Private Life of an Eastern King*, which will be reprinted as a companion volume to the one now noticed. Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali returned to England alone in 1829, and was then attached to the household of the Princess Augusta, who died in 1840. She was a good and sympathetic observer, who took pains to be accurate, and very rarely made a mistake. Her husband and his venerated father having been members of the Shia sect, the author's account of Muhammadan practice is necessarily written from the Shia point of view. The book may be referred to with confidence as giving a readable, trustworthy account of the beliefs, habits, and mode of life of an honourable and well-educated Mussulman family of moderate means, in a city where a Muslim court resided.

Many curious customs and superstitions are faithfully recorded. Some items of moon lore may be noted.

"If any person is ill, and bleeding is the only good remedy to be pursued, the age of the moon is first discussed, and if it happens to be near the full, they are inflexibly resolute that the patient shall not lose blood until her influence is lessened. . . .

"The full moon is deemed propitious for celebrating the marriage festivals. . . .

"When a journey is contemplated the moon's age is the first consideration. . . .

"What will be said of the singular custom, 'Drinking the moon at a draught?' A silver basin being filled with water is held in such a situation that the full moon may be reflected in it; the person to be benefited by this draught is required to look steadfastly at the moon in the basin, then shut his eyes and quaff the liquid at one draught. This remedy is advised by medical professors in nervous cases, and also for palpitations of the heart. I have seen this practised, but am not aware of any real benefit derived by the patient from the prescription."

The book is full of interesting observations of many kinds, and may be heartily recommended as being both entertaining and instructive.

VINCENT A. SMITH.

Books for Review should be addressed to
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c/o MESSRS. SIDGWICK & JACKSON, LTD.
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During the war the supply of books for review in *Folk-Lore* has considerably decreased, and, owing to the absence of many members on service or engaged in special work at home, little material for publication in "Collectanea" is being received at present. The Editor will, therefore, feel obliged if members will kindly forward to him at his address, Langton House, Charlton Kings, Cheltenham, any articles or notes suitable for publication.

13th September, 1917.