**A PLEA FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF KOREAN MYTHS AND FOLKLORE**

BY CECIL H. N. HODGES.

**The Reason for this Paper**

It would seem that no serious attempt has been made as yet to collect and put in order what may be comprehended under the heading of

Korean myths and folklore : yet the change passing over the life of this people makes it imperative to set about such work without delay.

**Material for this Paper**

The present paper aims to be no more than a plea that this Society should undertake this task, for the writer is a stranger in the fields of comparative mythology and folk-lore, and the material to hand has been of the scantiest. This material consists of

(a) Some notes on early Korean history, translated from a Kukmun (국문) Serial magazine, now suppressed:

(b) Personal observations of things Korean and enquiries made about the same, all limited by those barriers to conversation and real understanding which confront one but recently come to live among a folk of unknown tongue and unfamiliar customs:

(c) Notes in letters from a friend in England, who has studied anthropology and comparative mythology, though merely as an amateur.

**The Need for such Investi gation is Urgent**

One feels that if investigation on the above lines is much longer deferred, the day for making it, and for correlating its results with what is known of the myths and folk-lore of other races, will be passed. Young Korea of to-day, conscious of national failure, and bewildered by Japanese and Western thought and[page 42] civilization, is only too ready to despise and forget as soon as may be its own customs and tales of bygone days, holding them, quite unjustly, to be all foolish and profitless and responsible in great part for the present position of the nation.

**Two Prefatory Remarks**

It may be well to make further two prefatory remarks:—

(1) Speaking as a missionary, one cannot be blind to the way in which opportunities are let slip, both through lack of interest in the people’s history and customs, and still more through an almost contempt of what appears valueless in face of the problems to be met here and now. Such an attitude, even though assumed unconsciously, cannot but close the doors to the Korean telling anything of his national traditions and practices, all which have gone to the moulding of his character and the shaping of his thought and mode of self-expression. For without some sympathetic familiarity with what has gone to the making of a people, by means of their age-long customs, and their tales of heroes of old, true sympathy with them becomes the more difficult, and thinking their thoughts and speaking their speech a more formidable task, than it must in any case prove. Further, any study of comparative history, myth and custom will not fail to widen one’s outlook on life, by showing the underlying unity of the human race, and how yellow, white and black man has on the whole moved along the same main lines of development and is so still moving.

(2) Secondly, one shrinks from any apparently irreverent use of Holy Scripture or Christian tradition. Yet the Old Testament is the record of the Hebrews national development or feeling after Truth ; and the Hebrew records need correlation with those of other races. Also it is obvious that much of Christian teaching and practice and much found in things secular amongst modern Christian civilizations, is of far older date than the Christian era. True lines of development persist: so that much of pre-Christian thought and practice is found continuing its movement towards the ultimate Truth, now under the aegis of the Church. [page 43]

The Subject In Hand In any race its development, its movement towards Truth, will be

marked :—

(a) by Traditional stories; which, when the art of writing is in use, will in part be set down in permanent form :

(b) By Customs; many of which will persist long after any meaning is attached to them.

In which connection one would note the Value of Children’s games. Prof. Starr, of Chicago, learned by enquiries made at On Son Dong, Kang Wha Island, of a rare form of tattooing once practiced by Koreans and still surviving through Children’s play.

Such Korean tales as will be used in this paper, though in no case of early date, are sufficient to show the growth of the race along the lines which other races have followed ; with the influence of nature-worship interwoven from the first, an influence that one can see has persisted till to-day.

**What main Ideas to watch for**

Though professing no real knowledge of the Subject in Hand this paper must have a scheme of classification ; and accordingly, while subject always to correction, certain main ideas have been grouped together.

In the development of a race certain main ideas will present themselves in succession. They can be traced in old tales, customs, phases of thought―superstitious if you will: and their influence will be recognized on the folk of to-day. For present purposes these main ideas are grouped as follows :—

(1) Attempts to deal with the Mystery of Fertility and Reproduction both in man and in nature generally : which will find expression in Imitative Magic in Use of Stones, Eggs, Fire (or Gold, or Sun)

This is the earliest stratum.

Presumably all connected with the propitiation of Spirits, though [page 44] due largely to dread of the Unknown or Unexperienced, also springs from man’s facing this Mystery of Fecundity.

(2) Then a later stratum Will be marked by prominence given to

the Influence of Water

by tales of Human Wit and Prowess,

by Riddles and the Magic of Numbers

and so one would pass to the age of History proper.

Very early, Burial Rites, and regard for the spirits of the departed, would become the object of thought and care.

Viewed thus broadly Man’s developement, very simple in essence, would appear to follow his realization of the three-fold Mystery of Birth, Death, and the life lived between these two. He will first deal with Birth and Death, because these are simple, whereas the third of this trinity being complex, his philosophizing on it cannot but come much later.

**Using material in Hand**

Of the tales now to be read none is dated earlier than 60 B. C., following Dr. Gale’s chronology, Though this is unsatisfactory in that it gives us nothing really early, but forces us close up to the historical period, it is enough to show the superimposing of the second stratum, according to the rough grouping of main ideas set down above, upon the first, before all passes into the less fascinating realms of history proper.

**The founding of the Kingdom of Silla by 박 Pak 혁 Hyek 거 Ko 셰 So B. C. 57**

“In the days of the Sam Han (삼한) Chin Han (진한) was not ruled by a king, but its folk lived among the hills in six separate Village Communities (部落). One day So-pel-Kong (소벌공) headman of one Community, was wandering in the forest, when on a sudden he saw before him a horse, on its knees and whinnying. He went quickly toward it, when behold! it was nowhere to be seen, only in its place was a round gourd, like to an egg. Marvelling much he rubbed it, and from within came forth a baby boy. In awe he gathered the babe to him, and took it home and nurtured it with care. Ten years passed and the boy [page 45] had grown in wit and beauty and goodness far beyond his peers, and stood the heaven-born sage (聖人) revealed. When he was come to thirteen years the men of Chin Han foregathered and chose him King. Thus began the Kingdom of 新羅 under 朴赫世. For that he sprang from a Gourd he received the name of Pak (朴) ; from him are descended al those who bear this name.”

**Egg**

Here we see the Egg idea prominent. Where no ancestry of the hero is recorded, the earliest type of myth often makes him spring from this emblem or fertility. A very primitive idea closely allied with nature-worship.

In Kayan Borneo, if the harvest fails, Eggs are used in the sacrifices to recover fertility.

In many places in Europe Eggs or Egg-shells are strung on trees in spring, a remnant of the propitiation of the spirit of fruitfulness.

The Christian custom of the Easter Egg is presumably a result of this primitive idea, the Egg being the symbol of new life.

**Stories connected with the Founding of 고구려 Ko- ku-Ryo by 고 Ko 쥬 Chu 몽 Mong B. C. 37**

“Now Hai-pu-ru (희부루) King of north Pu-yo (부여), was well stricken in years, nor had he a son. Much time he spent in prayer and sacrifice upon the mountains. And it happened on a day that he saw before him a great stone shedding tears. Much wondering he moved it aside and beheld, and lo! a little child, in fashion like a frog, and in colour like to gold. In great joy of heart he cried “This is af heaven-sent child,” and he named him Kim oa (금와) (金蛙) and made him his heir.”

“Now it fell on a day that King 금와 met a woman on the South side of the Great White Mountain on the banks of Oo Pul water. The King asked her of herself and she made answer “I am the daughter of Ha Paik, King of Under the waters (cf. Poseidon), and my name is Ryu-wha (류화) (？ Willow). Prince Hai-mu sa (회무사) son of Heaven, beguiled me and lay[page 46] with me ; and after that we had parted, my parents in sore anger at my lewdness sent me to banishment in this place.” So spake she and 금와 moved with pity took her and placed her safely in a secluded chamber Yet ever the sunlight followed and lit upon her ; whereby she conceived and bear an Egg. And Keum Wa deemed it of ill-omen and cast the egg forth, but nor ox nor horse would trample it, and the crow and magpie gave it the shelter of their wings, till that Ryou Hwa again gathered it and stored it in a place of warmth. And in time a man child brake the shell and came forth, a child of wondrous beauty. When grown near seven years old he fashioned how and arrows with his own hands, and in a hundred shots would score a hundred hits. So was he called Chu-mong (쥬몽)for that the men of Pu-yo were wont thus to name one who was skilled with the bow.”

In these tales we see Gold (or Sun light), the Egg, the Stone, and perhaps Water all playing their part in accounting for the mystery of Birth.

The wonder-child, of unknown parentage, is begotten of the Sun, sprung from the Egg, or is found under the Stone. The allusion to the Stone weeping is, it seems, very strange, it may show the influence of the Water idea of a later period.

In passing, it might be well to mark the constant interest shown in the derivation of names.

**Stones**

(a) Stone superstitions are widespread in the world and are almost entirely connected with Fertility. The tying of stones to trees to make them productive is very common: and the throwing of stones as a fertility charm is well known. Corea of course abounds with Stone superstitions. There is the familiar stone heap on a pass, or indeed at almost any turn of a path, heaped round a bush or tree hung with propitiation offerings of rags, paper and straw ; often with a devil post standing among the stones ; and often the common empty spirit-hut stands hard by- There are the upright isolated stones standing singly in a field or in couples or more in[page 47] number, apparently set up in some planned order. There are too the stone heaps supporting a small upright stone or stones : and too one meets the single stone housed in a hut Besides all which we have too the instances of the man of prehistoric date who for some purpose erected cromlechs or dolmens. The Peruvian Indians had special shaped stones to produce maize ; others for cattle ; others for other purposes which had fertility in view.

New Caledonians bury stones of certain shapes in the fields for each sort of crop ; and for a tree, bury stones round the roots. Such stones are kept in graveyards till wanted, so that the ancestral spirits shall lend their influence. Melanesians use stones in a like manner. Australian aboriginees will build a heap of stones and perform rites round it to bring rain. Using stones in “making rain” with imitative magic is apparently world wide ; stone magic is also used to produce warmth and sunshine. In one place in Asia minor a certain cure for drought is to gather 77,000 stones, lick each one and place it in the sea ; and most surely rain would fail before the process was completed! Phallic stones are of course common everywhere ; one of the finest being the huge monolith in the vast Hindu Temple at Madura in S. India. There is never need to seek far for the phallic stone against which the woman rubs who wishes to bear a son.

Outside the North Gate of Seoul is a big boulder standing almost on the common pathway with a number of small holes rubbed in it, which recalls the Man-an-tol of Cornwall. Presumably the holes are rubbed by women with smaller stones, which they afterward carry and drop. This suggestion needs substantiating by observance which the writer has not had opportunity to give. In several places women carry small stones with them for a while and then let them fall. All such practices being imitative magic designed to bring children. There is an African notion that every married woman has an ancestral spirit husband, on whom depends her chance of bearing children ; he lives in a tree. Where ancestral spirits live in[page 48] stones the same idea might obtain, and the stone would have to be touched by the woman to gain the benefit.

**Gold**

(b) In the tales first read of the origin of 금와 and 쥬몽 we see the world wide ideas about the influence of Gold or Fire or Sun upon Fertility. The birth of 쥬몽s just the Korean form of the Greek myth of the hero Perseus born of Danae, who conceived by Zeus coming upon her as a shower of Gold. In that 류화 conceived by the sunlight and bear an Egg, from the which 쥬몽 sprung, it would seem that the idea contained in the Greek myth of Leda is here blended into one with the Danae legend.

In one Indian tribe the actual ceremony of marrying a woman to the sun is (or was) annually carried out ; though chiefly in order to gain wisdom from the sun when oracles were wanted.

The gift of Heaven would be gold : gold (or the Sun) is supremely worthy of devotion. Gold is the divine metal never to be esteemed lightly and yet which utterly destroys such votaries as unduly value it in the material sense. A truth sufficiently prominent in Greek mythology through the legend of Midas.

In the Cuzco temple of the sun even the clods in the garden were of Gold, and the Sacred Fire, lit from the Sun, burned as it did in the Vestal’s Temple at Rome, never going out from generation to generation, christian legend offers instances of the same idea of cherishing a sacred flame.

Parsees in their setting out their dead that the body may be consumed by birds of prey show, may be, the influence of that idea which causes in places violent antipathy to cremation, which is rooted of course in dread of defiling the sacred element of Fire.

That Fire (or Gold) should be held responsible for Birth and Death is accordingly only to be expected. King Arthur of unknown ancestry, comes to Lyonesse in a ship that shone like fire, and a fiery wave carries him to Merlin’s feet―’the heavensent child.’ The Hebrew hero, Elijah, leaves this world by[page 49] being carried to Heaven by a Chariot and Horses of fire. In the Hebrew records angelic appearances are often connected with fire, as in the case of the birth of the hero Samsoni where we read “And the angel did wonderously ; and Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar.”

According to the proposed arrangement of main ideas we now pass from the first stratum to the second, which we find represented by customs or stories showing importance assigned to Water, to Human Wit and Prowess, to Riddles and Number Here we find further tales connected with the hero 쥬몽: his popularity with the king earned him the hatred of the royal princes, which was increased by the failure of their attempt to ruin him by slander. A trick of 쥬몽’s whereby he Wort himself a fine horse and on a certain hunting slew mote than all the rest, brought him into jeopardy of his life, and at his mother, 류화’s advice he fled the country with his horse and three friends and founded the Kingdom of 高句鹿(고구려).

“Now ere 쥬몽 fled from Pu-yo (부여), his wife was with child ; and afterward she bear Ryu-ri (류리). A man among men was 류리 and a lover of the short-bow. It fell on a day that 류리 went a-hunting ; and in sport he fired at the bowl of a woman who fetched water, and pierced it through. Then cried the woman in anger, “A fatherless brat is a mannerless brute.” So was he shamed, and firing again with mud he stopped the bowl’s leak, and returned home. And seeking his mother he asked, “Who is my father? Then Ryei si (례씨) laughed and replied. “He who begat thee in lawful wedlock is not.” And 류리 answered with tears, “A man and fatherless! what right have I to live?” and would have slain himself, But 례씨 with speed restrained him, saying, “Twas but a moment’s jest Be not over hasty, but heed my words well. Thy father is a hero of renown [page 50] and rules in 고구려, having to flee this land for that it was not worthy of him. What time he fled, he gave me this charge ;—

“Seven Passes Valleys Seven Stone Below and Pine Above Seek the Trove

If a child be born to us, bid him bring me the hidden thing, so shall I know him to be my very son.”

Therefore go now, my son, and find this hidden thing.” So she spake, and 류리 said, “So then a King’s son am I: how can I continue in this low estate?” And much he wandered o’er hill and dale seeking that which his father had hidden. And on a day when in his own house, he heard a sound from between the pillar and its stone (Kitong (기둥) and Chyu-tchyo (쥬쵸)), and gazing intently he marked the stone how it was shaped with seven corners rising distinct and seven hollows lying between, all plain to see. Then did he understand and cried, “Seven passes, Valleys Seven,” that is the foundation stone: “Stone below and Pine above,” that is between the pillar and the stone,” and searching there he found the portion of a broken sword. With this and three comrades he journeyed to 고구려 and offered that which he had found to the king. And the king joining it to the broken blade in his own keeping, lo! it fitted without flaw. Then with great joy declared he 류리 his son and heir.”

In such tales we see the later stage of thought when the wonderful child of unknown parentage is still in the forefront, but he always finds his father in some hero. Human skill and Cunning and Bravery come into prominence. Skill with the bow is a marked feature of these tales, recalling the part it plays in the Greek cycle of Odysseus stories, that hero famed above all else for his cunning. Here too Riddles play their part on the stage ; man puzzles over Numbers and the magic number ‘7’ appears. So we slip into pretty well historical times and tales. Such movement of Korean growth as we are tracing it, is well paralleled in the Old Testament records There too we see[page 51] the days of the dim Eponymous heroes, when there were giants on the earth in those days and Nimrod won fame as a mighty hunter, slip into the days of the Judges when the heroes are historical rather than mere shadowy men of renown, and mens skill and cunning and strength, the asking of riddles (as in Samson’s history), constant ambushments and trouble over fenced cities, such a source of trouble too in early Corea, occupy the stage. We find too the Corean tale akin to the finding of Moses, and the temptation of Joseph.

**The coming of 셕 Syek 탈 Tal 회 Hai A. D. 7**

“One day certain men on the sea-coast of Kim Kwan saw a large box floating in the water. It came to land, but they feared to draw it on to the beach, and in time the waves lifted it and bore it to shore at A Chin Po.

And an old woman dragged it up, and looking in she saw a man child lying. Him she took home and cherished till he grew to man’s estate. In stature he was exceeding great, and withal of a beautiful countenance, nor could any approach him in wit and skill. Now when first she drew the box from the water a magpie circled round and followed her with cries. And for that removing 鳥 from 鶴, 昔 remains, therefore his surname was Syek (셕), and because he was taken out of the box his second name was 脫觧 (drawn out). So is 昔脫鮮 father of the clan 셕.”

**Water**

As King Arthur, the hero of unknown parentage, comes by Water, so does 셕탈회. There is less of magic in the coming by water than by Stone or Egg or Sun, for it leaves open many possible sources of origin. The coming by water seems to be reflected in much christian tradition. S. Barth olomew and the four martyred with him in India float across the ocean to their last resting places in boxes of lead. S. James the Great, who is the S. James of Compostella, floats in a shell over the sea. The tradition being maintained in the cockle shell worn by the Palmers, and by the grottoes still built by children in the East End of London in the beginning of August, at the feast of S. James of Compostella, which grottoes should contain the[page 52]

shells. Another instance of children quite unconsciously continuing old traditions in their games.

**A. D. 32**.

“Now Hotong was son of Moo Sin, the King, but born of a concubine. And he was goodly to behold, and his father loved him much. But the Queen was moved with jealousy, and slandered Hotong to the King, saying, “Hotongi came in to mock me.” But the King believed her not, yet when she daily affirmed the same with tears he began to heed her. Then said Hotong “If I allay my father’s doubts and clear myself of this crime, I must disclose a mother’s sin which would be unfilial conduct,” so cutting his throat he died.”

This is the only too familiar story, well known in the Hebrew form of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, and in the Greek form of Phaedra and Hippolytus. Here it has the added touch of illustrating a meaning of Filial Piety.

**A.D. 65 The Finding of 김 Kim 알 al 지 chi**

“In the third month of this year the King of Silla lay resting by night in the forest of Si-rim (시림) on the west side of Kim Syeng (김셩) and heard ahen clucking among the trees. When the dawn broke, the King called his ministers, and they found hanging in a tree a box of the colour of Gold, and beneath it a white hen clucked. And fetching the box they opened it, and the king looked in and beheld a little child of wondrous beauty. Then the King was glad and cried “This is the gift of heaven ; and he took the babe home and nurtured it. And the child grew beyond his peers in strength and wit, so that the King loved him exceedingly. And he named him 알지, while his first name was called Kim (金) because he came forth of a box of gold. Further the name of the forest was changed to Kyei rim (계림), that is, the forest of the clucking hen ; therefore the Kingdom was called 계림 (鷄林.).” With this strange throw back to the primitive stratum of Gold this paper must close. There are customs and stories intimately connected with this peoples existence, which of necessity have not been alluded to. Yet any investigation[page 53] made along such lines as have been suggested will have to reckon with them, it is surely by such investigation that one must seek the material for tracing the developement of the Korean race from its prehistoric days to what it is to day.