

Subscription Invitation

Norwegian Folk- and Children's Tales

The scholarly value of the folktale is no longer doubted by the educated. Emanating from the innermost life of a people, these popular compositions grant profound insights into the formation of the particular characteristics and perspectives of said folk. Transmitted with remarkable reliability through a long line of succession, they allude in numerous aspects to convictions held in the past and a people's course of development. Moreover, compared with similar compositions from other folk groups, they confirm or negate the tribal kinship of the peoples. However - something that many are perhaps more inclined to deny - they also open up a rich poetic world to anyone who still has the power and mobility of imagination to dare to step into it without fear of turning somersaults, and who still retains such a purity of heart so as not to be intimidated by their childlike simplicity, which has been set as guard for their unique domain. Everything in this world still lives, speaks, and acts as if in the Golden Age: nothing is too small to know, nothing too great to dare to use, and in the midst of this abundant wealth and diversity, the plots and relations of the stories are often so simple and true that one may not know whether or not one is listening to episodes from one's own life. Reflection disdains this form of composition: everything is visible and its ability to objectify is surpassed only by its touching naivety.

There is also a particular consideration which must highlight attention to

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this branch of literature in our country: unlike our two neighbours – notably the Danes – we do not have any ballad tradition from the Middle Ages, and thus the folktale, and perhaps the legend, is our only form of folk composition that, perhaps for this very reason, occurs in such abundance. One need only notice the influence that Danish epics have had on the literature of this nation to realise that the folktale must have had a not inconsiderable significance for our developing literature.

Collection of these folk compositions is urgently needed at present, if it is ever to be possible. Among other things, our reawakened, newly outward-looking political life is by necessity hostile to legends and folktales. That these, which shortened many a long winter's evening around the hearth, and many a long day behind the herds in the forest, should fall evermore silent in our mountain valleys is a fact that, while encouraging as a sign of increasing enlightenment, is certainly regrettable, if no one preserves them before they die on the lips of the folk. This consideration, as well as our deep love for the folktales of our childhood, moved us a number of years ago to determine to collect and publish *Norwegian Folk- and Children's Tales* - an undertaking that we hereby invite our compatriots to support by subscription.

Our plan is to publish, in unbound booklets, what we have collected of these folk compositions and what we shall hereafter collect, faithfully reproduced as we have received them from the raconteur, without any embellishment or change in setting or episode, except that which we shall consider ourselves entitled to excise the occasional outgrowth that may injure a sense of propriety. It is still our intention that one of these booklets – the number of which will depend on how successful our collection is – shall be appended with an introduction to the folktale. Moreover, we intend to produce a supplementary booklet of notes, when we consider the collection complete, which is a work that our lack of learning would make difficult, if we should work alone; Hr. Lektor Munch has kindly promised to help us, however.

You may from this understand that our plan roughly coincides with that by which the brothers Grimm have published their excellent *Kinder und Hausmärchen*; we would, however, stay truer to the language and idiom of the folk narrators among the people, as far as is possible.

Although we mention our names, we know very well that we are nameless. We are not hopeless, however; we take the liberty of referring to the folktales that one of us, namely Asbjørnsen, has published in the picture book *Nor* a few years ago, though we by no means wish to consider these as samples of the collection we advertise here.

P. Chr. Asbjørnsen,
Stud. med.

Jørgen Moe,
Cand. theol.

If the endeavour announced here should find the encouragement among our countrymen that we are convinced it rightly deserves, we have committed to undertake its publication, providing every appropriate typographical support. The price will be 5 shillings per sheet (16 pages in 8vo) and each booklet is intended to have 8 to 10 sheets. Subscriptions may be collected at any bookseller or commissionaire, and subscribers, upon receiving 10 paid issues, will receive an 11th gratis.

Christiania in January 1840,
Guldberg & Dzwonkowski