

FOLK TALES FROM WEST AFRICA

TOLD BY HAROLD COURLANDER

W. Kane

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FOLK TALES FROM WEST AFRICA

The true Folk tales of West Africa are full of wit, humor, and appreciation of universal human foibles. The tales with which we are most familiar are the animal stories which are the prototypes of our own Brer Rabbit cycle. Too little known are the West African tales in which human beings are the central characters.

Three of the stories in this collection feature humans as protagonists. One tale seems to be of the creation myth variety. And the fifth is a frog story. They are all taken from The Cow-Tail Switch, by Harold Courlander and George Herzog, published by Henry Holt and Co.

Harold Courlander narrates these stories here in a simple and straightforward manner. They are recommended not only for children but for inquiring adults as well.

The Cow-Tail Switch is a narrative of a hunter who is killed by a leopard, and brought back to life by the joint efforts of all of his sons. After his return to his village he stages a great celebration and declares his intention of giving a valuable gift -- His Cow-Tail Switch, symbol of his authority -- to the son who did the most to bring him back from the land of the dead. There is a great argument in the village as to which son should get the gift. The hunter finally resolves the dispute in a way which is convincing and philosophical.

Younde Goes To Town is a quietly humorous story of a country man who goes to the big city for the first time. The city people do not understand his language, and when he asks questions of them their responses result in a tragicomic misunderstanding.

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Talk is a gently ironic story of a chief -- the wise counsellor and judge in the affairs of the people -- who is shown to be no more wise than his fellow villagers. The incident begins when a farmer digging in his garden is startled to hear a yam, his dog, his tree and other objects begin to talk. The event is contagious, and leads finally to the door of the chief, who gets only a belated understanding of the situation.

Throw Mountains is a tale of epic conception and exaggeration reminiscent of some of our own Paul Bunyan stories. It is probably a remnant of an old creation myth. It tells about how the young bull "Throw Mountains" grew strong enough to defeat the old bull "Only One". In the process the lakes, mountains and rivers of the gold coast were created.

Don't Shake Hands With Everyone is a parable which ridicules pomposity, and tells incidentally how the frog got his flat hands.

Harold Courlander is a writer and Folklorist who is well known for his "Haiti Singing", one of the definitive books on Haitian Folk Music and Dances. He is also the author of a number of books of Folk Tales, including: "The Cow-Tail Switch" (in collaboration with George Herzog), a collection of West African Tales; "Kantchi's Lime Pit", a collection of Indonesian Folk Tales; "Uncle Bouqui of Haiti", Haitian Tales; and "The Fire On The Mountain" (with Wolf Leslau), a collection of Ethiopian Folk Stories. He has written numerous articles for the Musical Quarterly and other publications on the Folk Music of Haiti, Cuba and

Ethiopia, and has recorded Music and Folklore in many parts of the world as well as in the United States. Mr. Courlander is editor of The Ethnic Series of recordings issued by the Ethnic Folkways Library, to which he has contributed numerous recordings which he made in the field. He is also a Novelist and a Guggenheim fellow.

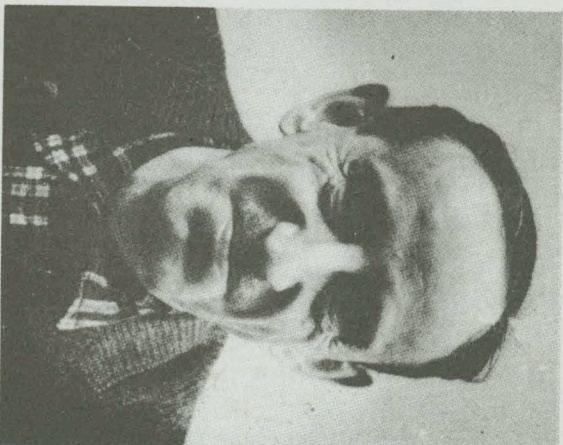


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