

**FOLK RHYMES OF DEVON;
NOTICES OF THE METRICAL
SAYINGS FOUND IN THE
LORE OF THE PEOPLE**

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Folk Rhymes of Devon; Notices of the Metrical Sayings Found in the Lore of the People by
William Crossing

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NOTICES OF THE METRICAL SAYINGS
FOUND IN THE LORE OF
THE PEOPLE

BY

WILLIAM CROSSING

*Author of "The Ancient Stone Crosses of Dartmoor
and its Borderland," etc., etc.*

JAMES G. COMMIN
230 HIGH STREET, EXETER

1911

PREFACE

PERHAPS not the least curious fact connected with folk rhymes is that their authors are never known. We recognise that the ideas and beliefs enshrined in them were of spontaneous growth, but there must have been a time when these were first clothed in the garb in which they have become known to us. But in no instance are we told by whom this was furnished. In the case of rhymes of general application, which, with a simple change in the names of places, occur in different parts of the country, this is not surprising, for here it would be impossible even to determine the locality in which a saying originated; but when such is purely local we might expect that, in some cases at least, the name of its framer would be remembered. But it is not so; we find the rhyme existing, but of its parentage nothing can be gathered.

Folk rhymes that are strictly local are found less frequently than might be imagined. Many appear to be so, but upon investigation it will be discovered that they have their counterparts in other places; that variants of them exist in many counties. This, although it may sometimes be disappointing to the student of local lore, is nevertheless a fact not wanting in interest, for it proves that the same ideas on certain subjects possessed the minds of men, though they might be scattered over a wide area. Even if we imagine the rhyme to have been transplanted, as it were, from one district to another, which in very many instances undoubtedly was the case, it does not alter this. Those to whom the rhyme came must have possessed the idea it conveyed before it did come to them, or they would not have so generally adopted it.

It is on this account impossible to bring together the folk rhymes of any particular county without including in the collection many that also pertain to others. But it would at

the same time be rash to say of any that it did not originate in that county, merely because another laid claim to it. The first may be its birthplace, or it may not; but it is sufficient that it exists there, and is regarded by the people as theirs.

Although it cannot be said that folk rhymes shew the character of a people to the same extent as the ballads of a country do, yet they help to reveal much concerning them that would not otherwise be known. And the ideas embodied in each have a common origin. They are essentially of the people, springing up in their midst, and born of their thoughts and feelings. And the forms in which these ideas are expressed is likewise so; for while some single hand must have shaped each one, they would not have been adopted, and have come down to us, had they not been a true reflection of the people's thoughts in words that appealed to their sense of the homely and the natural.

It is obvious that many ideas are expressed in folk sayings that are not always in accordance with those of to-day, and this fact suggests much to us. We learn what swayed men's minds at a particular period, and perceive how their thoughts were moulded by some particular form of teaching. It is a sidelight let in upon the history of the time, and enables us to read it more clearly.

The folk lore of few English counties exceeds in interest that of Devonshire, and in this quality many of its rhythmical sayings are also not wanting. Several relate to the wild region of Dartmoor, and in such a way as to prove that here was the place of their origin and that they have not come as variants from a distance. The same may be observed of some rhymes pertaining to other parts of the county, which may consequently be regarded as the true home of many of the folk sayings heard in its rural districts to-day.

Folk lore covers a very wide field, and rhythmical sayings form but a small division of it. No attempt has, however, here been made to touch upon any part other than the latter. And the design has been not only to bring together the representative folk rhymes of the county, and to give such explanations of each as was considered necessary, but to use them also as pegs on which to hang brief descriptions of the various places and objects mentioned in them, with accounts of individuals to whom certain of the sayings refer. This course was adopted in the hope that it would make the work of more general interest.

In addition to such as may be strictly classed as folk rhymes, a few other versified sayings are included, but here it was necessary to draw a line. No epitaphs have been introduced, nor belfry rhymes, with one or two exceptions, these being merely intended to serve as examples. Public house rhyming signs have also been excluded, except in one instance. Such were outside the scope of the book, the design being not to give a mere collection of rhymes, but only to include such as could be regarded as being really and truly those of the people.

To render the subject complete it was necessary that some space should be devoted to charms, and also to what we have termed lovers' rhymes. These cannot be looked upon as belonging exclusively to Devonshire by any means, but at the same time this county has an equal claim to them with any other, and they could not well be omitted. They may perhaps be more correctly spoken of as national rather than local, but it is also true that they have found no home where more fostering care has been bestowed upon them than in Devon.

Black Down, Dartmoor,
August, 1911.

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