

Whites, should have the mentality of apes because we are closer to them and less specialized than the Negro, for example. It may come as a surprise to some to learn that the tightly curled or kinky hair, the smooth hairless skin, and the thick lips of the Negro are highly specialized physical characteristics which are not shared by any apes. In other words, the Negro is less primitive and less like an ape in these respects than are the Whites.

In order to prove that our culture is superior to all others, we are wont to compare other civilizations with our own; and the more they differ from ours, the lower they are thought to be. This is illogical, immature, and provincial. There is really no good way for comparing cultures. We, like "primitive" peoples and "savages," think of our own concerns, our own way of life, as the best possible in the world. This smug attitude is similar to that of a man who, without any knowledge or fair appraisal of other communities, thinks that the railroad station or the park of his home town is the finest and best in the world. This sort of belief is a prejudice and should be recognized as such.

All civilizations are the end results of contributions and borrowings from all other peoples and civilizations. It is a common end achieved with the help of many.

In other words, any civilization which is isolated becomes stagnant; but a civilization which has numerous contacts and intermixtures with other cultures and peoples flourishes and becomes great.

#### WHY CULTURES VARY

Why do cultures differ? Why are some interested mainly in conquest, or in wealth, or in philosophy? Race, as we have seen, is not responsible; and instinct certainly is not. The answer is that man's mental plasticity is responsible for differing cultures. Man's adaptive ability is a greater asset to him than speed is to the deer, than flight is to the bird, or than streamlining is to the whale.

But all these things fade into insignificance when compared to the wide range of man's potentialities. Man is not inexorably governed by instincts as are other members of the animal world. Man is plastic, reacts quickly and completely to new situations and environments, and thus has an advantage over every other animal.

But perhaps you will still ask why cultures differ. Man's innate plasticity or adaptability is the answer to part of this question. The other portion may be answered by calling attention to the fact that man is a social animal and craves, and must have the approval of his fellow men. He struggles to attain this approval in forms and ways which his society or group recognizes and sanctions.

For example, if my own little social group, including family and circle of friends and acquaintances, stresses the importance of

earning large salaries and playing bridge well, then I bend all my efforts to be successful in these goals in order to be like others in my group and thus to win their approval. In this way, I am secure and happy and feel that I have "arrived."

And so it is with societies and nations and cultures. Aims, goals, interests, purposes, motives vary greatly from one culture to another; but whatever it is—be it conquest, herding, farming, wealth—each member of that society seeks to achieve that goal and to reap the consequent rewards and honors of his society.

It is well to remember that time and historical accidents unequally distribute the contacts which permit the exchange of ideas and the chances for a civilization to grow. Remember that as late as A.D. 900 our uncivilized ancestors in Britain were already two or three thousand years behind the Egyptians. But does that mean that our ancestors were duller and inferior to the Egyptians? Of course not. Time and contacts had not permitted them to share in the advances perfected in the Near East and Egyptian areas.

#### FOLKLORE OF THE DIAMOND

BY HENRY W. NICHOLS

CHIEF CURATOR, DEPARTMENT OF GEOLOGY

Many were the occult and mystic powers attributed to gems in ancient and medieval times, and many were the fantastic legends concerning them. These were not merely superstitions of the more ignorant populace, for they were recorded in good faith by the most eminent authors of their day such as Theophrastus, Pliny, and Boëtius. It is probably from vestiges of some of these ancient beliefs that we have acquired the pretty sentiments that add so much to our own pleasure in the possession of precious stones.

As the diamond is the most highly esteemed of precious stones it is natural that more superstitions and legends cluster about it than other gems. The most persistent and widely prevalent of these beliefs is that of its indestructibility. Pliny says that the diamond is so hard that if it is placed on an anvil and struck a violent blow with a hammer, the hammer and anvil will break but the diamond will not be injured. If, however, the diamond is first soaked in the fresh, warm blood of a ram, the diamond will be crushed to powder but the anvil will also break. The Chinese version has it that the diamond will break if struck with a ram's horn. This belief has persisted in some degree to modern times. Instances are known where valuable diamonds have been destroyed by being subjected to this test. The trouble is that, although the diamond is the hardest substance known, it is far from being the toughest, and actually it is readily broken by a moderate blow.

According to tradition, wearing a diamond assured many kinds of good fortune. Among other beliefs are the following: The diamond should be worn on the left side for there it has greater virtue than when worn on the right. It gives hardihood and manliness, and keeps limbs whole. It gives victory in plea and in war if the cause be just. It preserves from strife and riot, from evil swevens (dreams), and from sorrows and enchantments. If an enchanter seeks to bewitch a person who bears a diamond the virtue of the stone will cause all the evil to fall upon the enchanter. No beast dare attack a man that wears a diamond. Diamonds drive away lenures, incubi and succubi (evil spirits, male and female demons). Diamonds preserve virtue and detect infidelity. In the presence of poison they sweat and become moist. They cure lunacy and drive out evil spirits. In India it is believed that large stones bring the wearers back to their families. A diamond placed upon a lodestone neutralizes its magnetic properties so that it will not attract a compass needle. In Roman times the diamond was regarded as the kernel of gold, the purest and noblest part which has condensed to a transparent mass. A curious account of the origin of the diamond was given by Sir John Mandeville, traveler and story-teller of the 14th Century. He said that diamonds grow together, male and female. They are nourished by the dew of heaven. They bring forth small children and grow all the year. It is needless to say that in these more enlightened times no credence is given these legends and superstitions of a more credulous age.

In a Field Museum publication, *The Diamond, A Study in Chinese and Hellenistic Folk-Lore*, by the late Dr. Berthold Laufer, there are cited more of these curious legends and ancient beliefs of the powers of the diamond.

#### FIELD MUSEUM NEWS ON WAR SCHEDULE

This issue of FIELD MUSEUM NEWS, published as of April 15, constitutes both the April and May numbers (Vol. 14, Nos. 4-5). The next issue will combine the June, July, and August numbers, and will be published about June 1. The September and October numbers will appear as a single issue, scheduled for publication September 15. November and December will be published on normal schedule the first day of those months.

This reduction is due to the depletion of the Museum staff by the calling of many members into war service, with consequent necessarily curtailed activities in many directions, and to the necessity of conserving paper.



Martin, Paul S. 1943. "Man, the Unknown." *Field Museum news* 14(4), 6–6.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/25717>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/365166>

**Holding Institution**

Field Museum of Natural History Library

**Sponsored by**

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

**Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the Chicago Field Museum.

For information contact [dcc@library.uiuc.edu](mailto:dcc@library.uiuc.edu).

Rights Holder: Field Museum of Natural History

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.