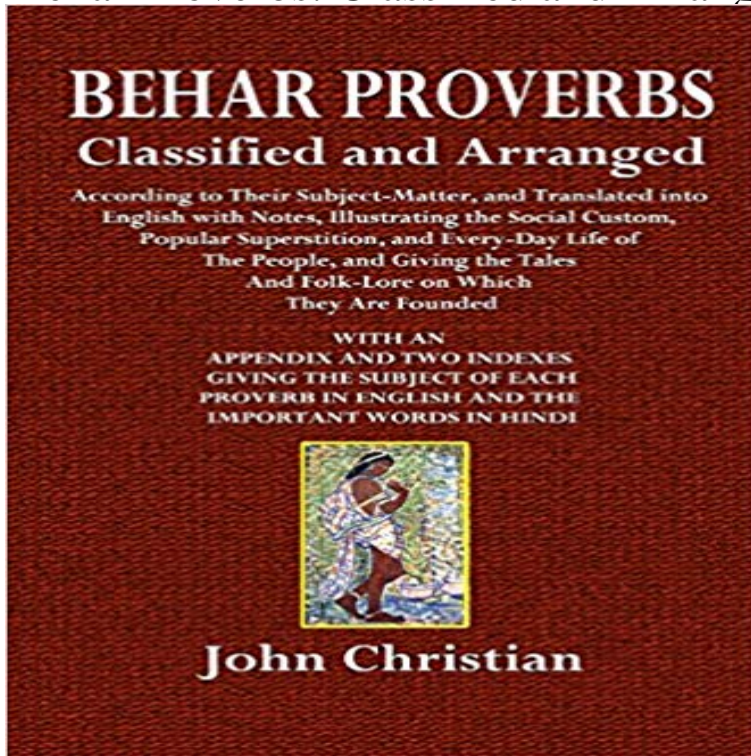


Behar Proverbs: Classified and Arranged



An excerpt from the beginning of the INTRODUCTION: 1. Proverbs in General.

It is no less a true than a terse Arabic saying, That a Proverb is to speech what salt is to food. It aptly describes the office of proverbs, and puts in a practical though homely form the part played by them in a language. It is quite possible to derive nourishment and sustenance from food without salt; but if we want to enjoy our meals, we must have salt in them. Just so with Proverbs. Language would be tolerable without spicy, epigrammatic sayings, and life could no doubt be carried on by means of plain language wholly bereft of ornament. But if we wish to relish language, if we wish to give it point and piquancy, and if we want to drive home a truth, to whip up the flagging attention of our listener, to point a moral or adorn a tale, we must flavour our speech with proverbs. There is no language in the world, however poor, that has not its proverbs, its pithy and pointed sayings, and its witty epigrams, the wisdom of many and the wit of one some one who has treasured up and kept ready for use in a concentrated and palatable form the essence of practical wisdom, by availing ourselves of which we become possessed of a clear sight and take a ready view of intricate matters, to unravel which for ourselves would require a disproportionate expenditure of time and mental labour. Proverbs, says Archbishop Whately, are somewhat analogous to those medical formulas which, being in frequent use, are kept ready made up, in the chemists shop, and which often save the framing of a distinct prescription. 2. Proverbs of a people are the index of their lives. Every nation has its peculiar form of expressing its ideas, its special shades of thought. The idea may be the same, but different people will employ different figures of speech and modes of expression to convey it. These may seem quaint, perhaps crude, and even

grotesque to others; but they are the appropriate vehicles of thought of the people, and suited to their circumstances in life. Proverbs, however quaintly expressed, contain the essence of some moral truth or practical lesson; they are drawn from real life, and are generally the fruit of philosophy grafted on the stem of experience. Carlyle says, That a mans religion is the chief fact with regard to him: a mans or a nation of mens. If the proverbs of a people are not the chief facts with regard to them, they are at any rate a safe index of their lives, their mode of living, their current thoughts, their intellectual and social status, their surroundings, and in fact everything else that goes to make up social life.

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