

HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

ately few of them are reliable as sources, because they have been so much adapted to their aim, which is to instruct or edify. The information to which Baumann refers consists for the most part of details which have no bearing on the moral which the author wants to draw.

(f) *Tales of artistic merit*

These form a whole sub-category, and not merely a type within a sub-category, because their artistic merit is such as to distinguish them quite clearly from all other categories of tales.

The main purpose of these tales is to please the listener. Everything else is subordinated to this. The historical element is often reduced to a mere background against which the tale unfolds, and it must in no way detract from the story itself. Indeed there is a tendency to supply historical details that are lacking, or touch them up if they are vague. Causes and motivations are invented, and historical personages are given a personality, or imaginary ones introduced. No particular status is given to minor characters, but well-known ones are made into ideal types. No hesitation is felt about combining several traditions if necessary, or about dividing up a single tradition into several parts. In short, violence is done to the facts, either by exaggerating them or by making them more exciting. These characteristics of the artistic tale have been fully described and discussed by various writers.³² Most tales of this kind are transmitted without any form of control. The type includes three sub-types: the epic, the legend, and the fable, according to whether the dramatic, the edifying, or the imaginative element is uppermost. The only reason for regarding them as sub-types rather than types is that the distinction between them is often vague.

Artistic tales are freely transmitted and often undergo numerous changes because of their aim, which is to please. Distortions may also arise because of didactic or moral purposes. Rationalizations and idealizations take place, and the need is felt to satisfy the demands of listeners for a climax, for excitement, and for a good ending to the story. All the writers who have dealt with this type of source have emphasized how untrustworthy it is.³³ But if a tale has been carefully transmitted,

it can serve as a source for the history of the psychological attitudes of a people. Such tales are rare, however. Most tales merely express the ideals and ways of life of the present.