

A few of the simpler and more striking of these features might attract notice even among the earliest and rudest tribes. But still more would the elemental forces of nature arouse the fears, excite the imagination and stimulate the curiosity of primitive man. Wind and lightning, rain-storms and river-floods, breakers and tidal waves, earthquakes and volcanoes would seem to be direct and visible manifestations of powerful but unseen supernatural beings. Nor would the more obtrusive features of landscape fail to add their influence—mountains with their clouds, tempests and landslips; crags and precipices with their strange grotesque half-human shapes, ravines with their gloomy cliffs and yawning chasms between.

It is not difficult to conceive how from these concurrent materials there would spring fables, legends and myths, long before the spirit of scientific observation and deduction was developed, and how such fables might continue to satisfy the popular imagination long after that spirit had arisen among the more reflective few. The earliest efforts at the interpretation of nature found their expression in the mythologies and cosmogonies of primitive peoples, which varied in type from country to country, according to the climate and other physical conditions under which they had their birth. Geological speculation may thus be said to be traceable in the mental conceptions of the remotest pre-scientific ages.

The popular beliefs continued for a time to influence, in a greater or less degree, the speculations of the philosophers who began to observe the operation of natural processes and who, though their deductions