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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SNOW RIDDLES

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An old English riddle runs as follows:

"White bird featherless
Flew from Paradise,
Perched upon the castle wall;
Up came Lord John landless,
Took it up handless,
And rode away horseless to the king's white hall."

The white bird is the snow and Lord John is the sun that melts it. More or less similar riddles about snow are found in a large number of European languages and dialects, including Latin versions dating back at least as far as the fourth century of our era. Strange to say, some of the Latin versions once formed parts of incantations used for conjuring away disease. A translation of one of them reads: "There flew a bird without feathers, which lighted on a tree without leaves; some shepherds found it; they took it up without hands, they cooked it without fire, they ate it without teeth." Here the shepherds are the sun's rays.

One of several German versions runs thus:

"Da kam ein Vogel federlos,
Sass auf dem Baum blattlos,
Da kam die Jungfer mundelos,
Und ass den Vogel federlos
Von dem Baume blattlos."

("There came a featherless bird, which lighted on the leafless tree; then came the mouthless maiden and ate the featherless bird from the leafless tree.")

Almost equally popular and widely disseminated are the riddles about "that which covers the earth (or the mountains, etc.), but cannot cover the water."

There are many variations on this theme.

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