

mulgated by him. He has absolute control of all military expeditions; and, whithersoever the chief or leader of the soldiers is sent by him, the warriors follow. At the present time, the two most prominent chiefs of the Blackfeet nation are Sapoo-maxsikes, or "The Great Crow's Claw," chief of the Blackfeet proper, and Oma-ke-pee-mulkee-yeu, or "The Great Swan," chief of the Bloods. These men are widely diverse in character, the former being a man whose word, once given, may be relied upon for fulfillment; while the latter is represented as a man of colossal proportions and savage disposition, crafty, treacherous, and cruel.

As a race, the Blackfeet are livelier than other Indian tribes. The latter are generally quarrelsome when in liquor, while the former show their jollity by dancing, singing, and hugging one another with all sorts of antics. Though so fond of rum, the Blackfeet are not habitual drunkards. They get completely drunk once or twice a year, but at other times take nothing stronger than coffee, which the United States Government deals out to them as part of an annual subsidy. They consider—and not without some reason—that these periodical excesses are good for them, curing the biliousness caused by their mode of life.

Their funeral and burial ceremonies indicate their belief in the immortality of the soul. These forms are of a similar type among all the tribes composing the nation. They place their dead, dressed in gaudiest apparel, within a tent, in a sitting posture, or occasionally fold them in skins and lay them on high scaffolds out of the reach of wild beasts, under which the relatives weep and wail. Their arms and horses are buried with them, to be used on the long journey to the spirit-land, showing the possession of the idea of the dual nature of matter and spirit.

A somewhat singular custom obtains upon the death of a child. Immediately upon its decease, the whole village rush into the lodge and take possession of whatever portable property they can seize upon, until the grief-stricken parents are stripped of all their worldly possessions, not even excepting their clothing. The only method of evading the custom is to secrete the most valuable property beforehand, generally a matter difficult of accomplishment.

Although the Blackfeet nation is divided into detached tribes, yet the essential characteristics of the race may be found in all. Proud, courageous, independent, and dignified in bearing, they form the strongest possible contrast with the majority of the Northern tribes; and they have many natural virtues which might carry them far toward civilization, but for the wars into which they have been plunged by the rapacity of the whites. These wars have not only greatly diminished their numbers, but keep alive a feeling of implacable hatred of the whole white race which no extraneous influence has as yet served to mitigate. "At this moment," wrote an American officer scarcely fifteen years since, "it is certain a man can go about through the Blackfeet country without molestation, except in the contingency of being mistaken at night for an Indian."

But fifteen years of injustice and wrong have changed the friend into an aggressive enemy. Injustice and wrong toward the Indian have almost always formed the rule with the Government and individuals, and the opposite the exception. Smarting under a sense of these wrongs, the Blackfeet have been made implacable enemies of their oppressors. Those who have paraded a "knowledge of Indian character" have, in scores of instances, purposely fanned the flames of indignation and desires for revenge, and incited the Indians to make war that their own craft might prosper in government employ. Knowledge of Indian character has too long been synonymous with knowledge of how to cheat the Indian, a species of cleverness which, even in the science of chicanery, does not require the exercise of the highest abilities. The red-man has already had too many dealings with persons of this class, and has now a very shrewd idea that those who possess this knowledge of his character have also managed to possess themselves of his property.

At war on every hand, anything like regular trade with the Blackfeet nation is carried on with much difficulty. Years ago a desultory exchange of peltries and merchandise was conducted through the Peagin tribe at Fort Benton and other posts on the Missouri; but constant imposition on the part of the white traders, and retaliation by the red-men, have now nearly estopped all commercial relations between the two parties. In recent years, a small post established by two Americans on the Belly River, sixty miles within British territory, on the Fort Benton and Edmonton House trail, for the purpose of trading improved arms, ammunition, and spirits, to the Blackfeet, has attracted the greater share of their trade; the Blackfeet realizing the necessity of meeting their enemies with the improved implements of modern warfare. This establishment, controlled by a band of outlaws, obtaining its goods by smuggling across the boundary-line, and the open and flagrant violation of all law, human and divine, and only safe from plunder by the savages by reason of superior armament and the known reckless character of its servants, was fortunately broken up by the Dominion constabulary a short time since. It is a matter of regret, however, that the Blackfeet should have been thoroughly supplied with repeating-rifles previous to its demolition. The closing of this post leaves the Blackfeet nation but one other trading-post in the immediate vicinity of their own territory, and diverts the trade from an American to a British channel.

The Rocky-Mountain House of the Hudson's Bay Company stands upon the high northern bank of the North Saskatchewan River, in the thick pine-forest which stretches away to the base of the foothills. The stream here runs in a deep, wooded valley, on the western extremity of which rise the towering peaks of the Rocky Mountains. The house itself is a heavy log structure, and presents many features to be found in no other post of the region. Built with especial reference to the Plain Indian trade, every device known to the trader has been put