

THE BLACK-FOOT COSMOGONY.



A T H E R
Legal, an
Oblate Mis-
sionary at
McLeod,
Alberta,
sends us the
following
account of
the Black-
foot tradi-
tion of

creation, or Cosmogony, which seems to us all the more interesting, as it has been dictated by an old Indian. We therefore feel pleasure in offering it to the readers of THE OWL.—EDITOR.

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To the best of my belief our Indians, especially those of the Black-foot tribe, have no tradition of their own concerning the Deluge. Some of them, however, have spoken to me of such a tradition, but of one which seems so like the Biblical version, that I have no hesitation in believing it to be only an importation. They themselves, being questioned on this fact, acknowledge that they do not know whether it comes from their ancestors or from the early explorers, and some of them even positively adhere to the latter opinion.

They have, however, a tradition which has erroneously been taken for that of the Deluge. This is the one I purpose laying before you, in its original phraseology, a literal translation of the Black-foot text. Its perusal will show beyond a doubt that it treats not of the Deluge, but of Creation.

The Old One (the Demiurge of the Black-foot, called in their language *Napiwu*) wandered o'er the surface of the boundless sea. His little brother, the beaver, was with him; so were his two little brothers, the otter and osprey; (the Black-foot have a kind of veneration for this bird, which they call *Matsiseipiwu*) his little brother, the musk-rat, was with him too. At that time the beaver's tail was straight, and the musk-rat's was large and flat. The Old One said to his young brothers: "Dive and try to find and bring me the earth." Then all these four

dived, and after some time they all reappeared on the surface of the water, except the musk-rat, who remained a while longer at the bottom. But they brought nothing with them. They dived again; but the otter, the beaver and the osprey soon returned, with the same unsuccessful result. They all thought, on account of his not appearing, the musk-rat was drowned. At last his head was seen peeping above the surface, and as he came near them he fell into a swoon. The Old One stretched out his hand and took him up. He then examined his paw, which he kept closed, and found in it a small portion of mud. "Behold the earth, my little brothers," said the Old One. Then he added: "Dive again and look for a stone." They all dived once more, and returned one after the other. The musk-rat, however, remained under water some time longer than the others; he brought up a little stone which he gave to the Old One. (Some attribute all this success of the musk-rat to the osprey.)

Thus far the tradition could easily be referred to the Deluge; but let us proceed.

Then the Old One finished making the earth; for this he took four days. Of course the portion of earth which the musk-rat found, or brought up, was very little; but the Old One breathed on it, and it became immensely large. (Some say he scattered it about as the sower scatters the seed.) The next day he made the Rocky Mountains, and the day after he made the woods and rivers, the fishes and all the animals that walk upon the earth. The following day he made all the birds.

After this he undertook to make human beings, and first made woman. To accomplish this he cut off one of his own legs, and in two days he completed the work. The result, at first, was not satisfactory, for it happened that her eyes were in a vertical instead of being in a horizontal position. Her mouth, too, was vertically divided. She had no nose, and her ears were too long by far. She had eight teeth altogether, four on each side. He next made her fingers and toes, but she had only three fingers on each hand