

down in Mexico and Nicaragua, among the wild Navajo and Apache horsemen of the Mexican plains—in addition to that of the adopted one. The Blackfeet tongue is rich, musical, and stately; that of the Sircies harsh, guttural, and difficult; and while the Sircies always speak the former in addition to their own tongue, the Blackfeet rarely acquire the language of the Sircies. Although the remaining tribes of the great Blackfeet nation live in close alliance and speak the same language, yet it is comparatively easy to distinguish them by differences of dialect and pronunciation, such as prevail in the various districts of our own country.

Of the territory occupied by the Blackfeet nation, the Sircies, numbering scarcely two hundred souls, inhabit the northern border; joining them on the south come the Blackfeet proper, numbering, according to the late annual counts of the Hudson's Bay officers at their posts, about four thousand. From their southern limit to the South Saskatchewan range the Bloods, numbering two thousand; and thence to the Missouri wander the Peagins, numbering three thousand. In March, 1870, the small-pox, carrying off large numbers of the latter tribe, swept northward through the remaining tribes, and reduced the nation by a fourth. Previous to the ravages of this terrible epidemic, the Blackfeet confederacy was believed to comprise from twelve to fourteen thousand people, all included.

But the Blackfeet, taken as a body, are still the most numerous and powerful of the nations that live wholly or partly in British North America. In person they have developed an unusual degree of beauty and symmetry. Though of less stature than many other Indians, they are still tall and well made. Their faces are very intelligent, the nose aquiline, the eyes clear and brilliant, the cheek-bones less prominent and the lips thinner than usual among other tribes. The dress of the men differs little from the ordinary costume of the Indian of the plains, except in being generally cleaner and in better preservation. The Bloods dress more neatly and are finer and bolder-looking men than the Blackfeet, who, in turn, surpass the Peagins in these respects. The Bloods are said to have among them many comparatively fair men, with gray eyes, and hair both finer and lighter colored than usual in the case of pure Indians. This tribe is supposed to bear its savage name, not from any particular cruelty of disposition, but because, unlike the other tribes, its warriors do not steal horses, but only seek for the blood of their enemies, whom they generally overcome, for they are among the bravest of all the natives. The faces of both Blackfeet men and women are generally highly painted with vermilion, which seems to be the national color. The dress of the latter is very singular and striking, consisting of long gowns of buffaloeskins, dressed beautifully soft, and dyed with yellow ochre. This is confined at the waist by a broad belt of the same material, thickly studded over with round brass plates, the size of a silver half-dollar piece, brightly polished. The Blackfeet, however, in common with other Indians, are rapidly adopting blank-

ets and capotes, and giving up the beautifully-painted robes of their forefathers. The ornamented robes that are now made are inferior in workmanship to those of the days gone by.

The mental characteristics of the Blackfeet resemble closely those of Indians everywhere. Similar circumstances give shape and force to thoughts and emotions in all. Intellectual vigor is manifested in shrewdness of observation, and strong powers of perception, imagination, and eloquence. They are quick of apprehension, cunning, noble-minded, and firm of character, yet cautious in manner, and with a certain expression of pride and reserve. They are strong and active, and naturally averse to an indolent habit. Their activity, however, is rather manifested in war and the chase than in useful labor. Pastoral, agricultural, and mechanical labor they despise, as forming a sort of degrading slavery. In this they are as proud as the citizens of the old republics whose business was war. Their labors are laid upon the women, who also are, upon occasion, the beasts of burden upon their marches; for the egotism of the red-man, like that of his white brother, makes him regard woman as his inferior, and a predestined servant to minister to his comfort and pleasure. The Blackfeet have, moreover, both a local attachment and a strong patriotic or national feeling, in which respect they differ favorably from all other tribes. In their public councils and debates they exhibit a genuine, oratorical power, and a keenness and closeness of reasoning quite remarkable. Eloquence in public speaking is a gift which they earnestly cultivate, and the chiefs prepare themselves by previous reflection and arrangement of topics and methods of expression. Their scope of thought is as boundless as the land over which they roam, and their speech the echo of the beauty that lies spread around them. Their expressions are as free and lofty as those of any civilized man, and they speak the voices of the things of earth and air amid which their wild life is cast. Their language being too limited to afford a wealth of diction, they make up in ideas, in the shape of metaphor furnished by all Nature around them, and read from the great book which day, night, and the desert, unfold to them.

As before stated, although the Blackfeet nation is really a confederacy of five tribes, yet there is no semblance of a national government anywhere. All political power is vested in the head-chief of each tribe, and is nearly absolute while he exercises it. He is the executor of the people's will, as determined in the councils of the elders. Some of them are men of considerable natural abilities; all must be brave and celebrated in battle. Sometimes they are hereditary leaders, but more frequently owe their elevation to prowess in war, or merits as orators and statesmen. Public opinion elevates them, and that, together with an uncompromising assertion of their rights, alone sustains them. To disobey the mandate of a chief is, at times, to court instant death at his hands. But, when a chief is once established in power, the tribe generally confide in his wisdom, and there is seldom any transgression of the laws pro-

mulgr
milita
or leac
follo
nent c
sikes,
Black
"The
men
ing a
upon
as a
tion,

A
India
when
danc
sorts
feet
plete
time.
Unit
of a
with
are
their

belic
are c
the
dies
occa
scaff
the
are
ney
idea

des
the
sess
upc
all
clo
is
ger

det
the
ind
str
Nc
wh
for
the
on
ali
wh
se
A.
ce
cc
ge