

X.—SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND FESTIVALS.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION.—The Thompson Indians had neither hereditary chiefs nor a recognized nobility. The rank of each person was determined by his wealth and his personal qualities. Their "chiefs" were therefore men of the tribe noted for wealth, wisdom, oratorical powers, or prowess in war.

A war-party, for better management, had a war-chief, who was the one considered by his companions best qualified to act as a leader. As the Indian is naturally fond of power and honor, he seldom refused the offer. The chief rarely decided a question without asking the opinion of his fellow-warriors. In hunting-parties, the most efficient man took the lead and directed the others, at their request, but subject to their approval. In religious ceremonies, a capable man who was looked upon as taking the most prominent part was called the "chief" of the ceremonies and dances. Orators possessed great influence and power, often swaying the mass of the people as they chose. Most of these are said to have favored peace and harmony. When at the same time wise and wealthy, they exerted a very great influence over the people, who willingly obeyed them. Some of them were looked upon as the chief men of certain large districts, the people negotiating through them with strangers; yet they seldom or never acted in matters of public interest without obtaining the consent of all their people.

Wealthy persons also held prominent positions in the tribe. The more liberally they gave of their riches, the more highly were they thought of: hence public feasts and presents were frequently given. They made a point of treating strangers well, that they might become known among the people of other tribes.

Under these conditions the title of "chief" could not be hereditary; but the fact that a man was the son of a chief gained him a certain amount of popularity. If, however, he failed to possess or attain the necessary qualifications, he was not called "chief," nor would he be considered in any way different from the mass of the people. Nevertheless chieftaincy has descended in some instances, particularly among the Lower Thompsons, from father to son for several generations. There were no female chiefs. No particular costumes or ornaments were worn by the chief.

It has been mentioned before that the influential men always consulted with the men of the tribe, but there were no formal councils. Whenever a man had an undertaking in view that concerned the band, he invited the men of the village to discuss it. At these councils such subjects as the organizing of war-expeditions, marriages, or other matters of public interest, were discussed, each man having a voice in the matter. Generally the advice of the oldest or the most experienced was taken. If the advice or the help of some leading man noted for his wisdom, who lived at some distance, were desired, a messenger was sent to him. The man who had called the meeting, and his immediate friends, were