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SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACKFOOT
INDIANS.

BY REV. JOHN MACLEAN, M.A., PH.D.

(Read 19th November, 1892.)

The Blackfoot Confederacy is named by the three tribes comprising it, Sâketûpiks, *the People of the Plains*, and Netsepoye, *the People that Speak the Same Language*. It is the custom amongst the mounted police and settlers in Alberta, where the three tribes are located, to speak of the Confederacy as simply the Blackfeet, and to name each gens after the chief of the gens. The natives follow their own customs, calling each gens by its own distinctive name, recognizing the fact that the chiefs may be removed by death and other causes, which would change the names; but by following their own native method, the names of the gentes are always retained. The Blood Indians are called *Kaina*, a name not definitely understood, but from all I could gather from the old men in the camps, it is derived from *Aikaie*, *an old robe*, and the application of this name to the tribe means that the people at one period in their history wore old robes, which were well-nigh useless, and it was at that time and because of that circumstance that they were thus named. This tribe is also named *Aapaitûpi*, Blood people, and *Sûmûkegtûqkûnema*, and *Sûmûkena*, which mean that these people had large knives with which they fought.

The Piegan tribe is named in the Blackfoot tongue *Pikûni*, singular *Pikûnikwan*, which is derived from *Apikûni*, meaning a half-dressed hide of the buffalo. The Indians say that there was a period in the history of the Confederacy when the Piegans were compelled through poverty to dress themselves in buffalo robes, which were badly tanned and almost worthless as an article of clothing.

The Blackfoot tribe is called *Siksikauo*, meaning Blackfeet. The singular number has always the personal termination *kwan*, thus *Siksîkaikwân* = a Blackfoot Indian. It is a compound word made from the combination of *Siksînum*, Black, and *Oqkûts*, his foot. We have the adjectival particle *Siksî*, the noun particles *kai* and *kaw*, and the personal termination *kwan*, which completes the word. There are two meanings given to this name, that is, as to its origin. The Indians have told me

repeatedly that the name referred to a period when the prairie was burned, leaving the ground black and dry. As the Indians travelled over the prairie their moccasins became black and they were named by the tribes adjacent Blackfeet. Jerry Potts, Government guide and interpreter, who is a reliable authority on questions of this nature, says that there is another account of the origin of the name, and he is strongly inclined to give it the preference. This tribe lived for some time in the northern part of the country, where the mud was soft and of a dark colour, and at that time, and from that cause, their moccasins became dark, and consequently they received the name of Blackfeet, which now they bear. This name has also been applied to the Confederacy by some as a distinctive name.

Many years ago the Blackfeet, Crees, Sarcees and Gros Ventres were one people, and lived peaceably together in the Red River country. Together these tribes travelled westward and settled near a large lake surrounded by woods in the country of the Saskatchewan. The present Provisional District of Alberta was at that time peopled by the Flatheads, Shoshonees, Crows, and other Indian tribes. The first white men whom the Indians met were the traders, who came to barter goods for furs and hides. From these traders the members of the Blackfoot Confederacy received guns, and they drove the Flatheads and Shoshonees across the mountains and the Crow Indians into the region of the Yellowstone. The Blackfeet do not now know the exact location of the lake where they settled many years ago in the north. During the period when the Crees and Blackfeet were one people they were travelling southward when a quarrel arose about a dog. Dogs were very scarce at that time, and hence the quarrel became an important one, involving the tribes. So serious did the affray become, and the hostility manifested so very great, that the Crees and Blackfeet separated and have remained independent until the present day. A long period before the advent of any white settlers the Blackfeet travelled as far southward as Salt Lake, hunting wild horses and buffalo, and they went eastward for trading purposes to a trading post at Qu'Appelle, in the provisional district of Assiniboia.

The three tribes, Blackfeet, Blood and Piegan, which constitute the Blackfoot Confederacy, are three distinct tribes, having no common council, or bond of unity, except the ties of a common parentage, language, customs, traditions and interests. I have never learned that any common council consisting of delegates from each of the tribes has ever been held since they separated. Whenever any important matter was under consideration which affected the Confederacy, a young man,

commonly called "a runner," was sent to carry the news, or a chief would be delegated as messenger, but generally one of the servants of the head chief. If it were a grave matter, the head chief of the tribe would undertake the mission, and upon his arrival would be treated in an honourable manner, as became such an august personage. The head chief and the minor chiefs of the tribe would then assemble and the matter would be brought before them by their illustrious visitor and discussed.

The state life in each of the tribes is the same. There is not a definite number of gentes in each tribe. There is not a common taboo for the gentes. Some of the gentes have a taboo, but not all. There is not one common to all, each gens which has a taboo has a distinctive one. There is one, however, which partakes of the nature of a common taboo, which relates to the Naâye gens. This gens will partake of fish, but none other of the gentes will partake of them. Sometimes a single individual will eat a piece of flesh of some bird or animal, and upon learning what it is will spit it out, exclaiming, "That is against my medicine."

There is one common ancestor for all the Indian tribes. He is not an ancestor in the proper sense, but a secondary creator. He is called *Napioa, the Old Man*. He is not the creator of the gens, or tribe, but of the whole Indian race.

Individuals belonging to one gens can marry into any other gens. The wife goes with her husband to his gens and lives there with him. If he dies, the widow can remain in her husband's gens or return to her own.

The Blackfoot Confederacy have not any adoption ceremony. I have seen women belonging to the Cree and Kootenay tribes, and men who in their youth were Ojibways and Crees, and these were treated as members of the Blackfoot Confederacy, no distinction being made between them. None of these had ever gone through any adoption ceremony. In the matter of caring for orphans, they are looked after by the nearest relatives, and when these fail they are provided for by the tribe. They are never allowed to be in want, for the people say as they are of the same flesh and blood they must be cared for by the people.

There are several state classes, the most important being the chiefs. They are called *Ninaks, fathers, chiefs*. Of these there are three kinds, namely, two principal chiefs, the peace or civil chief, and the war chief, and the minor chiefs. The two principal chiefs have each one gens, and are also the supreme heads of the tribe. Each minor chief has a

gens, whose interests he attends to at the meetings of the council. Each member of the gens is specially protected by the minor chief. When Crowfoot, the principal chief of the Blackfoot tribe, was alive, the people belonging to the three tribes spoke respectfully of him, and had there been a supreme head for the Confederacy there is no doubt but that he would have been elected to that position, but whenever he visited the Blood Indians he did not preside at the council, but was treated as an august member of the Confederacy. Questions of a federal nature were submitted to him, as to the supreme heads of the other tribes. The Indians are a people jealous of their rights, and no one, no matter how noble his character and great his position, would accept of honours or usurp authority.

The war chief is the head warrior of his tribe. In the ancient days the mode of election was conducted in the following manner: When a warrior had shown himself to be especially brave, giving evidence of great courage, good judgment and honesty, and had won the esteem and affection of his tribe, the camp-criers, who were invariably old men, went among the lodges, visiting the people and extolling the virtues of their candidate. By this means all the people soon learned the name of the candidate and his claims for the position. This action of the criers was kept up until the sun dance ceremonies were in full operation, and then the warriors mentioned the name of the man desired for the position. They expressed their wish for the election of their candidate. The person designated for the position was then placed in the centre of the medicine lodge, and the people declared him elected as war chief of the tribe by assenting with their voices. A rival candidate was easily thrust aside through the influence of the camp-criers. The criers were skilful in all matters affecting an election, so that it was a settled question who was to be the war chief before the sun dance began.

The duties of the war chief were to make arrangements for war, and to lead the warriors to battle. Virtually, he was supreme in the camp during a period of war. War could not be resolved upon without the concurrence of the council. At this council the peace chief presided. Small parties might go out to make raids upon their enemies, for the purpose of stealing horses, but these were of such minor importance that nothing was thought of them. When, however, the war was of a tribal character the council must decide, and when the decision was favourable to war, the war chief had almost, if not altogether, the sole control of the camp. At a council meeting presided over, some years ago, by Red Crow, the peace chief of the Blood Indians, to consider the question of going to war against the Sioux Indians, who were supposed to be within the territory of the Blackfeet, and therefore guilty of trespassing, it was decided to go

to war. *Natosonesta, Medicine Calf*, one of the most influential chiefs of the tribe, was not present at the council, and it was at last agreed to adjourn, to meet and hear *Medicine Calf's* opinion. The council met, and the chief was present, when the decision of the council was stated to him. The chief listened intently, and then asked,

"Where are the Sioux?"

"In our territory," was the reply.

"What harm have they done?" he enquired.

"They have not done any," was the answer.

Curtly then he spoke to the council: "I fight against my enemies!"

This ended the council meeting and the Blood Indians did not go to war.

The war chief was in the early days elected for five years, but now they retain their position for life, or until they are unfit to perform their duties. Since the institution of reservations, and the supervision of the Government, the chiefs are retained in their positions during good behaviour, or until death or incompetency removes them. The present war chief of the Blood Indians is *Manistokos, the Father of Many Children, alias White Calf*.

The peace chief is elected similarly to the war chief. His duties are to keep order in the camp, and to regulate all matters in the camp. He is the chief civil officer, and is supreme except in times of war. When the tribe is on the march he gives orders where the lodges are to be pitched collectively. Whenever anything happens as they are travelling the soldiers call a meeting in the chief's lodge, over which the chief presides. The question is discussed, and a decision arrived at, whereupon the soldiers receive their instructions from the chief and hasten speedily to obey his command. All petty grievances and quarrels are brought before him, and he gives his advice as to the manner of settlement. Grave questions affecting the tribe, and not of an individual character, are reserved for the council; but all minor disputes arising from theft, offences against the person, and questions of a similar nature are settled by the chief as judge, magistrate, adviser and father to his people. The peace chief must be therefore stern in giving his decrees, wise and sympathetic in counsel, dignified in his dealings and impartial in his judgments—a judge on the bench and a father at the lodge-fires of his people. At the camp-fire he is stern and dignified, at the lodge-fire sympathetic and humble. *Mikasto, Red Crow*, is the peace chief of the Blood Indians.

Besides the minor chiefs, one of whom presides over each gens, and the sum of them constitute the council, there is a class of men known as soldiers, warriors, braves or policemen. All the young men in the tribes aspire to the position. When a young man is anxious to become a warrior he presents himself to the war chief, who examines him, and if he finds him a suitable person he is admitted, if not, he is rejected. Sometimes a young man performs a brave deed which raises him so much in the esteem of the people that he is honoured. Without any application from him, when a brave act has been performed, he is admitted as a warrior. Promotion lies with the war chief, who raises his warriors to their respective grades, according to their ability and the display of their bravery. No man can be elevated who does not perform a warlike deed. The soldiers act as warriors in times of war, and during the periods of peace they are the policemen of the camps. They are therefore under the rule of the war chief in troublesome days, but in the peaceful days they are under the guidance of the peace chief. They keep order in the camp under his instructions. They are related to the chiefs as messengers. The writer remembers a detachment of black soldiers coming to Medicine Calf's lodge late one evening and taking away the wife of *Dog-Running-Back*. She had been married according to the native custom to an old man, but subsequently a young man named *Dog-Running-Back*, son of *Medicine-Calf*, had won her affections, and she escaped with him. It was an elopement, but these were of such frequent occurrence that the Indians spoke of them as "stealing a wife." The old man learned of the return to the camp of the guilty pair and he called in the aid of *Mikasto*, the peace chief, who sent the black warriors to arrest the woman. It was at midnight when they came to the lodge. They allowed her to ride upon her own horse behind them. As they rode through the bush she slipped off her horse, and under the cover of the darkness escaped. The matter was ultimately settled to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

Jerry Potts told the writer that when he was war chief amongst the Piegans, *Running Wolf*, a Piegan chief, was guilty of a misdemeanor and was summarily treated, according to the laws of the tribe. The peace chief had given orders one evening, as they were on the march, that no one was to advance on the following day, nor at any time, without instructions. The war chief had under him fifty men, and as he was keeping guard he saw an object ahead of the camp, at a long distance. Jerry and his fifty men went out to ascertain what the object was, when they were surprised to see *Running Wolf* standing beside his horse, and upon the ground a dead buffalo. When asked the reason for disobeying orders he pleaded in extenuation that he only went out to get

this buffalo, as he had seen it; besides, this law did not apply to him, as he was a chief. The warriors looked at their leader, and at once he gave orders that the law must be obeyed by everyone, and anyone breaking the law must be punished. The warriors took *Running-Wolf*, stripped him naked, took away his horse, and made him walk to camp, a distance of seven miles. After some consultation in the camp his horse was given back to him, but they tore his blanket in shreds, and kept all the rest of his property.

There are several grades of warriors among the tribes. The writer found the following grades among the Blood Indians:—

Mokaikīnūki, the Brave Warriors: Heavy Shield is head of this band of soldiers.

Mastoqpatūpi, the Crow Warriors.

Imītaiīnakī, the Dog Warriors.

Etsīnakī, the Horn Warriors.

Kaispa, the Sioux Warriors.

Siksīnakī, the Black Warriors.

Potaina, better known as "Joe Healey," told me that the men must be thirty-four or thirty-five years of age before they are admitted into the ranks of the black soldiers. The highest position obtainable by a warrior is after having passed through all the military grades he receives the full rank of warrior.

The following gentes are found among the Blood Indians:—

1. *Siksīnokaiia, the Black Elk People*. This is the name of the gentes whose chiefs are Eagle Head and Blackfoot Old Woman. The legend says that a child was born very dark, when he became a man he wore an elk skin. He became a chief and his gens was named the Black Elk people.

2. *Inepoia*. This is the name of two gentes, Bull Back Fat's and White Calf's. There are two or three families in One Spot's gens who belong to the *Inepoia* gens. The legend says that a long time ago their ancestors walked a great distance and because of the journey and the heat they perspired freely, and then they were called *Inepoia, the Sweating People*.

3. *Otekīksīn, the Short People*. This is another name for Bull Back Fat's gens.

4. *Apīkaks, the People with the Sore Feet*. This is the name of the gens, of which Strangling Wolf is the chief.

5. *Mamyauye*. *Red Crow*, *Mikasto*, who is peace chief of the Blood Indians, is chief of the gens named above. This chief is also called *Onīstaiākapi*. The gens has two names, and the legends state that there was a period when the tribe was absent hunting buffalo, and the members of this gens remained at the mountains, being unable on account of sickness to accompany the tribe. They had no buffalo meat, and they fished in the mountain streams, catching large quantities of fish, which they ate. They were therefore called *Mamyauye*, *the Fish Eaters*.

At another period in their history the brother of Red Crow was peace chief and also chief of this gens. During this time a friend gave unto him a revolver with six chambers, a rare thing for an Indian to possess at that time, and from this circumstance the gens was named *Nadye*, *Six Mouths*, from the six chambers of the revolver.

6. *Pikīstaiā*, *the Goose People*. This is the name of the gens of which *Sakoīstamik* is the chief.

7. *Netaitaskaia*, *the Bad People, Enemies*. Two gentes bear this name, one governed by *Heavy Shield* and the other by *Eagle Rib*, *Petoqpekīs*.

8. *Imūksenā*, *the Vexed People*, from *Maksento*—*he is cross, vexed, angry*. *Low Horn* is the chief, and the legend says that many winters ago the chief of this gens died, and the people being unable to go out hunting the buffalo, because of the mourning time and there being no one to lead them, they were vexed.

9. *Ipūktmūnoawa*, *the People with the Skinned Legs*. This is the name of the gens of which *Manīstokos*, *Father of Many Children*, better known amongst the white people as *White Calf*, the war chief of the Bloods, is the chief. *Inepoia* is another name for this gens.

There are other legends connected with the gentes, but some of them are vulgar in their origin. Some of them seem to partake of the nature of nicknames. So far as I am able to judge, they must be accounted for in the same manner as the giving of names unto individuals. Generally each person has two names, a good one bestowed upon him for some brave action or worthy characteristic, and a bad one given because of contempt, for having been guilty of a foul deed, or it may arise from a mean-disposition. Another class of names is given in a mood of playfulness to mark some humorous trait in the individual. The reason, then, why the Indians will never tell their names when asked arises from the fact that in pronouncing their names they are telling their characters. Modesty hinders the possessor from mentioning the honourable name and

shame from telling the contemptuous one. The names of the gentes appear to be given in accordance with this custom of bestowing personal names.

Some of the aged men informed the writer that in the early history of the Confederacy some of the Indians were held in slavery, but they have held no slaves during the lifetime of any of the people now living. There are some old men, however, who act in the capacity of servants to some of the chiefs. I have never known any of these, although I have seen young men acting as messengers. Some of them seemed to hold an official position, for they were not related to the peace chief by marriage, although they belonged to the same gens. They undertook long journeys when ordered to do so, interpreted when they had the ability, and received no compensation for their work.

Since the making of the treaty the mode of forming a gens and of electing chiefs has been modified. An influential Indian may secure a large number of adherents through his boldness in proposing some popular measure, first by suggesting it, and by secret and incessant agitation keeping it before the minds of the people. His name will be brought forward at some interview with prominent Government officials after the way has been cleared by securing strong support from the people; a promise of investigation will be given, and the Indian council having nominated him, the Government will finally sanction his election, if that is in the interests of the tribe.

When the tribe is on the march there is a regular order of camping. This is a very simple arrangement, and there is not the elaborate and definite method of division which exists among the Dakotahs. When the people reach the place appointed for camping, the peace chief has his lodge pitched upon the westward side, he is surrounded by the leading members of his gens, and then eastward the chiefs have their lodges pitched at a sufficient distance from each other to allow the members of their respective gentes to surround them. The sacred tents are guarded by the soldiers. This latter arrangement has not taken place for several years, as I have never seen any of these sacred lodges, but I have been informed by the aged chiefs that such were in existence in the early years.

Several sacred pipes belonged to the Blood tribe, some of which are still in possession of the chiefs. The tribal pipe had a large stone head with figures of animals cut before and behind, the stem was about three feet long, made of wood, carved and painted, from which fringes of ermine skins were appended. A woman was detailed to look after it. In travelling, this woman carried it upon a horse, upon which nothing else

was allowed to be borne. After reaching the camp, it was taken into the lodge, being carried around on the right hand side of the lodge, never deposited in its place from the left hand side. Besides this pipe, of which there was one for each camp, there were sacred medicine pipes possessing great healing powers, of which we shall speak when we treat of the medical priesthood.

The Blood Indian Reservation is the largest Indian reserve in the Dominion. It is located between the Belly and St. Mary's rivers near Macleod, Provisional District of Alberta, the southern boundary of the reserve being about fourteen miles from the international boundary line. It is approximately sixty miles long by eighteen miles wide, and contains four hundred and seventeen thousand acres, or five hundred and forty-seven square miles. It was surveyed in August, 1883, in accordance with the amended treaty of July 2nd, 1883, by J. C. Nelson, Dominion Land Surveyor. The Indians have a timber limit in the Rocky Mountains, concerning which those interested will find full information in the "*Descriptions and Plans of Certain Indian Reserves in the Province of Manitoba and the North-West Territories, 1889.*"

In September, 1888, the Indian population on the reserve was two thousand one hundred and thirty-five. There was at that time one head chief and eighteen minor chiefs. There were twenty-one bands or gentes. So we have nineteen chiefs and twenty-one bands, but there were two bands without a chief. One of these contained nearly forty persons and the other nearly seventy, and a large majority of them were females. The number of children between six and sixteen years of age was about six hundred. The number of deaths during the year was as follows: forty-one boys, twenty-three girls, fifty-one adults. The adults' ages were chiefly from forty to forty-five years, but there were some of an extremely old age. The number of births was fifty-one boys and thirty-four girls. The amount of treaty money paid was ten thousand eight hundred and seventy-five dollars. The Indians are fed by the Government, and the daily ration averaged *per capita* 1.09 pounds of beef and .37 of a pound of flour. The number of acres broken on the reserve was two hundred and forty, and the number under fencing three hundred and thirty-five acres. The number of houses on the reserve was two hundred and sixteen. Several of the old houses had been rebuilt and improved by the Indians during the year, and fifty new ones had been erected. The Indians owned from fifteen hundred to two thousand horses and an innumerable company of dogs. During that year there were grown by the natives nine hundred and eighty-six bushels of potatoes from thirty-three acres. Owing to the dry rot the crop was not a good one. They

had ninety acres of oats, producing one thousand three hundred and fifty-six bushels; three acres of wheat with fifty-six bushels, and over twenty-five acres of garden produce, which did well. The number of employees on the reserve was the agent, farm instructor, clerk, interpreter, issuer and assistant issuer, cook, and three white men as labourers to teach the Indians farming. A medical man visited them regularly to attend to the sick. During the busy season of the year, say from March till November, four Indians were employed by the Government and received pay, all the rest of the Indians doing their own work.

In October, 1891, the writer paid a special visit to the reserve, and he found the Indians building better houses, growing larger crops, getting out hay contracts for the mounted police, and understanding more clearly their relations to the white settlers. At that time the average daily ration *per capita* was one and a quarter pounds of beef without shrinkage and .42 of a pound of flour. This would not be sufficient for supporting an adult, but when we note the fact that a child one day old receives the same, it can be easily seen that where there is a large family of children there will be sufficient. It is not the intention of the Government to feed them without doing something to support themselves, as that would beget and maintain a system of pauperization, but to keep them from being in want and at the same time encourage them to toil. The Indians receive their rations at the Lower Agency twice per week, and the same number of times at the Upper Agency. The reason for issuing at the two agencies is the distance of the bands from each other, the Indian camps being located for more than thirty miles along the Belly River.

It costs the Government about fifty dollars per head for supporting the Blood Indians. The Blood Indians consume over five thousand dollars' worth of beef per month. Five or six years ago they consumed over six thousand dollars' worth per month. The beef is furnished by contractors, who are paid eight and a half cents per pound. They must give the whole animal with the offal, but they are only paid by the weight of the four quarters, the head and offal being delivered, for which they receive not any compensation. All the hides which are not needed by the Indian Department for the use of the Indians are taken by the contractors at two dollars each. There are between seventy and eighty hides per month, of which the Indians use about thirty-five, the contractors paying two dollars each for the rest, the price being deducted from the amount paid for the beef.

From October, 1889, to October, 1890, there were born twenty-four boys and thirty-five girls, and there died twenty-two boys, thirty-one girls and fifty-five adults. The estimated population of the Blackfoot

Confederacy is about as follows:—Bloods, 1,700; Piegans, 600; Sarcees, 300; and Blackfeet, 1,100. The causes of the decrease are the same as are found amongst all native races, but this question will be fully discussed in a subsequent paper. Each Indian is paid annually the sum of five dollars for himself and the same amount for each member of his family. Each minor chief receives fifteen dollars and the head chief twenty-five dollars per annum, with the five dollars *per capita* for their families.

The following list of Indian names obtained by the writer at the Piegan reserve will reveal the method and meaning of Indian names. The names of some of the male members of the camp were Eagle Tail Feathers, No Runner, Chief White Cow, Dog Child, Crow Flag, Weasel Tail, Gives to the Sun, Elk Blood Head, Dog's Head, Sits in the Middle, Running Eagle, Man who Talks, Man who Lost his Blanket, Iron Breast, Black Weasel The Spider, Big Plume, Good Killer, Surrounded at Night. The names of some of the women were as follows:—Small Medicine Lodge, Weasel Woman, The Woman to Look at.

Strangers were always honourably treated, the best seat beside the chief being given, and the choicest pieces of the buffalo supplied. They were hospitable to the stranger when in the camp, and he was under the special protection of the chief. After he had gone, however, he was in danger at the hands of the young men, the renegades of the tribe, who felt free to deprive him of his property, when once he was beyond the jurisdiction of the chief.
