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THE BLACKFEET INDIANS.

Robinson

WHOEVER has studied the geographical position of the posts of the Hudson's Bay Company cannot fail to have noticed the vast extent of country intervening between the forty-ninth parallel of latitude and the North Saskatchewan River, in which there exists no fort or trading-station of the company. This is the country of the Blackfeet, that wild, restless, erring race, whose hand is against every man, and every man's hand against them. With the Rocky Mountains and the forty-ninth parallel as a portion of the circumference, a line drawn from the latter through the elbow of the South Saskatchewan River and the Bad Hill, thence trending northwest along the course of the Red-Deer River, nearly to the Rocky-Mountain House, would inclose the British American territory of the Blackfeet nation. In the United States, it extends along the course of the Missouri River to a point below the Sun River, thence diverging north of east to the elbow of the South Saskatchewan. A line drawn from the latter point to the Rocky-Mountain House would measure six hundred miles in length, and yet lie wholly in the country of the Blackfeet. Along its northern border lies a fair and fertile land; but close by, scarcely half a day's journey to the south, the arid, treeless, sandy plains begin to supplant the rich, verdure-clad hills and dales, and that immense central desert spreads out those ocean-like expanses which find their southern limit down by the waters of the Canadian River, full twelve hundred miles due south of the Saskatchewan.

Within the territory of the Blackfeet nation not a trace of settlement exists, not a trading-post stands to welcome the booty-laden warrior to its rude counter. Along its entire border there prevails, during the months of summer and autumn, a state of perpetual warfare: on the north and east with the Plain Crees; on the south and west with the Kootanais and Flatheads; on the southeast and northwest with the Assiniboinis of the plain and mountains; on the south there are ceaseless predatory excursions against the Americans on the Missouri. Ever since the tribes first became known to the white traders, there has existed this state of hostility among them. The red-man has always three great causes of war—to steal a horse, to take a scalp, or to get a wife. On the north, the Crees and Assiniboinis continually force on hostilities, for the sake of stealing the Blackfeet horses, which are far better than their own; while, on the south, the Blackfeet make war upon the Crows and Flatheads for a similar reason. At war with every nation that touches the wide circle of their boundaries, these wild, dusky men sweep like a whirlwind over the arid deserts of the central plateau. They speak a language distinct from that of all other native tribes; their feasts and ceremonies, too, are different from those of other nations. Not absolutely stationary residents of a domain, and wandering much by fam-

ilies and tribes, yet they are not nomads; a confederacy, there is not the semblance of a national government anywhere. In fact, they form the most curious anomaly of that race of men who are passing away beneath our eyes into the infinite solitude. The legend of their origin runs thus:

"Long years ago, when their great forefather crossed the Mountains of the Setting Sun, and settled along the sources of the Missouri and South Saskatchewan, it came to pass that a chief had three sons: Kenha, or The Blood; Peaginou, or The Wealth; and a third who was nameless. The first two were great hunters; they brought to their father's lodge rich store of moose and elk meat, and the buffalo fell beneath their unerring arrows; but the third, or nameless one, ever returned empty-handed from the chase, until his brothers mocked him for want of skill. One day the old chief said to this unsuccessful hunter: 'My son, you cannot kill the moose, your arrows shun the buffalo, the elk is too fleet for your footsteps, and your brothers mock you because you bring no meat into the lodge; but see! I will make you a mighty hunter.' And the old chief took from his lodge-fire a piece of burnt stick, and, wetting it, rubbed the feet of his son with the blackened charcoal, and named him Sat-sia-qua, or The Blackfeet; and evermore Sat-sia-qua was a mighty hunter, and his arrows flew straight to the buffalo, and his feet moved swift in the chase."<sup>1</sup>

According to tradition, from these three sons descended the three tribes of Blood, Peaginou, and Blackfeet, but for many generations there have been two other tribes or parts of tribes recognized in the confederacy. These are the Gros-Ventres, or Atsinas, on the extreme southeast, a branch of the Arapahoe nation who dwelt along the sources of the Platte; and the Sircies, on the north, a branch or offshoot of the Chippewyans of Lake Athabasca. The latter are a small but very mischievous band, which, last of all the tribes, joined the confederacy. How the former tribe became detached from the parent-stock has never been determined; but of the latter tradition tells how a tribe of Beavers, fighting over the wanton killing of a dog, concluded a peace only on condition of separation; and the friends of the chief whose arrow had killed the dog marched out into the night to seek their fortunes in the vast wilderness lying to the south. A hundred years later, a Beaver Indian, following the fortunes of a white trader, found himself in one of the forts of the Saskatchewan. Strange Indians were camped about the palisades, and among them were a few braves who, when they conversed together, spoke a language different from the other Blackfeet; in this the Beaver Indian recognized his own tongue. And to this day the Sircies speak the language of their original tribe—a guttural tongue which may be heard far

<sup>1</sup> Major Butler, "Great Lone Land."

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-

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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

in force to secure the servants against the possibility of a-surprise during a trade, for the wily Blackfeet seize every opportunity to overpower the garrison and help themselves, to the complete collapse of profit on the trade to the Hudson's Bay Company. Bars, bolts, locks, sliding-doors, and places to fire down upon the Indians, abound in every direction, and the apartments in which the Indians assemble to trade are cut off from all communication with the remaining rooms of the fort. In effect, the customers of this isolated mercantile establishment are handled very much after the manner of a hot coal, and surrounded, metaphorically speaking, with sheet-iron guards lest damage might result to the holder.

When the Blackfeet have accumulated a sufficient number of peltries to warrant a visit to the Rocky-Mountain House, two or three envoys, or forerunners, are chosen, and are sent in advance of the main body, by a week or more, to announce their approach and notify the officer in charge of the quantity of provisions, peltries, robes, horses, etc., which they would have to dispose of; and also to ascertain the whereabouts of their hereditary enemies, the Crees and Mountain Assiniboins. The envoys prepare for state visits of this nature by an assumption of their gaudiest apparel, and a more than usual intensity of paint: scarlet leggins and blankets; abundance of ribbons in the cap, if any be worn, or the head-band trimmed with beads and porcupine-quills, while the bulk of the cap is made of the plumage of birds; again, a single feather from the wing of an eagle or white-bird, fastened in the scalp-lock, or the hair platted in a long cue behind, and two shorter ones hanging down on each side in front, each bound round with coils of bright brass wire; round the eyes a halo of bright vermilion, a streak down the nose, a patch on each cheek, and a circle round the mouth of the same color, constitute the effective head-gear of the advance-agents. The remainder of the costume is modified by climate and seasons. In the summer they are almost naked, seldom wearing more than the *azain*, or loin-cloth. In the colder months they wear clothing made of the skins of wild animals, dressed, or with fur on; soft moccasins of deer-skin, brightly ornamented with pigments, beads, and stained quills of the porcupine; leather stockings or leggins of dressed deer-skin, ornamented generally by fringes of the same material, covering the moccasins and reaching nearly to the body, and suspended by a thong round the abdomen. With the females the leggins extend from the feet to the knees, below which they are fastened by a beaded and quilled garter. A shirt, made of soft buffalo-skin, and a necklace of bear's-claws and teeth, together with a fire-bag and tobacco-pipe—the inseparable companions of every Indian—complete the costume. The forerunner is anxious to make every article of his elaborate toilet tell with effect, as his mission is regarded as an important one, in which a failure to produce a favorable impression on the mind of the trader would be fraught with disastrous consequences to the prospective trade.

Upon arriving at the post, the envoys are re-

ceived and handsomely entertained by the officer in charge, who makes them presents according to their rank, and in proportion to the anticipated value of the trade. They are feasted, smoked, and, upon occasion, wine to a considerable extent. In turn, they report the number of peltries, horses, etc., to be traded by the band, and name the articles likely to be most in demand by their brethren. Such goods are at once placed where they may be easily accessible, and the quantity, if inadequate, is augmented by supplies procured at the nearest post, should there be sufficient time for that purpose. The forerunners are shown the stock of merchandise on hand, and the quality of the goods; the values of different articles are explained to them, and the fullest understanding upon all matters relative to the trade is arrived at. This completed, and a few days of long-ing indulged in, the advance-agents depart to their tribe, and the little garrison of the Mountain House prepare for the coming struggle.

Within the fort a searching examination is made of the efficient working of all bolts, locks, gratings, etc., and of the closing of all means of communication between the Indian-room—a large apartment in which the Blackfeet assemble previous to being admitted into the trading-store—and the rest of the buildings; guns are newly cleaned, reloaded, and placed, together with abundant ammunition, by the numerous loop-holes in the lofts above the trading and Indian rooms. From the shelves of the former are taken most of the blankets, colored cloths, guns, ammunition, ribbons, bright handkerchiefs, beads, etc., the staple commodities of the Indian trade, with a view of decreasing the excitement under which the red-man always labors when brought into immediate juxtaposition with so much bravery—an excitement which renders him oblivious to furnishing an equivalent in exchange, and tends to foster his habits of forcible seizure. Preparations are also made within the stockade for the reception of the ponies to be purchased, and their safe-keeping afterward, for the Blackfeet's fine sense of humor frequently leads him to ride away an animal he has just sold, by way of practical joke upon the owner.

All things being made secure, there remains for the use of the Blackfeet the narrow passage-way leading from the outer gate of the stout log stockade to the Indian-room—a passage tightly walled up with smooth logs, in which no interstices or footholds occur, in order, to prevent all entrance into the yard of the inclosure, the Indian-room itself, and the small hall-way leading from it to the trading-store. This latter is closed by two heavy doors, the space between being barely sufficient to accommodate two persons standing with their peltries. In trading but two Indians are admitted into the trading-store at one time, after the following fashion: The passage-door leading into the Indian-room is opened, and two braves admitted therein; then it is closed, and the other door leading into the trading-store opened. When the two warriors have finished trading, their return to the Indian-room is effected by a similar process, one door always being kept shut. Both these doors are

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made to slide into their plates, and are manipulated from an apartment occupied by the traders; so that the supply of customers is regulated as desired. The trading-store is divided by means of a stout partition extending from floor to ceiling into two parts, one for the goods and traders, the other for the Indians. In the centre of this partition an aperture of little more than a yard square is cut, divided by a grating into squares sufficiently large to admit the passage of an arm, a blanket, or a robe, but inadequate to the admission of the red-man in person. This partition is necessitated by the fact of the Blackfeet's forgetfulness of the existence of counters, and the exasperating pertinacity with which he insists upon close and personal examination of the goods. It sometimes happens, too, that he expresses his dissatisfaction at the price of a much-coveted article by desultory firing at the person of the trader, who, in the absence of such partition, has no means of escape or concealment. It is on account of a somewhat frequent repetition of this occurrence that the two loop-holes in the ceiling immediately above the grating are perhaps the most closely guarded of any during the progress of a trade. From time to time, as the shelves are depleted of their gaudy lading, advantage is taken of the absence of all Indians from the room to have new supplies brought in; care being taken to preserve an equilibrium, the loss of which would lead to a corresponding depression or excitement on the part of the braves. The furs and provisions traded are at once transferred to another apartment out of sight.

On the day appointed for the trade a moving cloud approaching over the prairie soon takes on a certain degree of individuality, and the picturesque throng come in mounted upon their gayly-caparisoned ponies, dashing over the ground at full speed, sometimes singly, most often in knots of two or three, or even larger groups. When the Blackfeet pay a visit to the Mountain House they generally come in large numbers, prepared to fight with either Crees or Assiniboins. The braves generally ride free, while the squaws and children bring up the rear with the ponies and dogs drawing the loaded *travaillés*. A *travaillee* is an Indian contrivance consisting of two poles fastened together at an acute angle, with cross-bars between. The point of the angle rests upon the back of the dog or horse, the diverging ends of the poles drag along the ground, and the baggage is tied on to the crossbars. The Indians use these contrivances instead of carts. It frequently occurs that, in addition to the packs of dogs and horses, the women are also heavily laden.

The Blackfeet, having successfully forded the river with their peltries by piling them upon the backs of ponies which they force to swim the stream, form a camp at some distance from the fort, pitching their *tepees* and spreading the wet robes out to dry. A *tepee*, or lodge, is generally composed of from ten to twelve buffalo-hides, from which the hair has been removed, and the skin nicely tanned and smoked. The usual number of Indians to a *tepee* is seven, of which at least two are warriors or able-bodied fight-

ing-men. The camp being completed, the ponies for barter are selected, and the furs and provisions made ready for transportation to the fort, and easily accessible during the trade. The ponies of the Blackfeet are generally of a superior breed to those found among other Northern tribes, and command higher prices. The braves are very fond of their horses, and very careful of them, differing in this respect from the Crees and Assiniboins, who are rough and unmerciful masters. They have a custom of marking their horses with certain hieroglyphics, painting them over with curious devices, and scenting them with aromatic herbs.

Everything being made ready in the Blackfeet camp—peltries collected in small bundles, provisions packed, robes and dressed skins dried and easily accessible, the best garments and most vivid paint donned by the braves—whatever is to be traded is now laid upon the backs of ponies and squaws, and the entire camp approach the fort in long cavalcade. Within a short distance of the stockade the procession halts, and the officer in charge goes out to meet them. A small circle is formed by the chiefs and headmen, the trader enters it, and the palaver begins. Many speeches are made; each brave, first embalming himself in a few words of feeling eulogy, assures the officer of his inordinate affection for the white race in general and his person in particular, and avows his intention of conducting the ensuing trade in a strictly honorable and orderly manner—the whole affair terminating by the principal chief illustrating his love for his white brother and his own “big heart” by loading a pony with an heterogeneous collection of robes, leather, and provisions, and handing horse and all he carries over to the officer. This is the Indian manner of beginning a trade; and, after such a present, no sane man can possibly entertain a doubt upon the big-heartedness of the donor. The custom has, however, one drawback—the trader is expected to return a present of twice the value. Unlike the Spaniard, when the red-man extends one the key of his house, he expects the offer to be taken literally, at the same time grimly smiling over the certain retribution which awaits the receiver. In fact, it is one of the inconveniences of having Indian friends that, if one expresses admiration of anything they possess, it is almost invariably handed over, and the unfortunate recipient of a penny is in for a pound. In this case it is certain that, if the trader purchases a hundred horses during the trade which ensues, not one of the whole band will cost so dearly as that which demonstrates the friendship and large-heartedness of the chief. For, immediately upon the knowledge of its receipt at the fort, the gate is again swung open, and there is sent out to the chief, in return, a gift of blankets, strouds, ammunition, and finery, under the combined weight of which he staggers off, looking like a vermilion Atlas. Such tangible proof of the corresponding size of the trader's heart being received, the chief addresses the assembled braves, exhorting them to conduct themselves in an orderly and peaceable manner, and not prove him the possessor of a forked tongue by rude

behavior. The braves, standing ready with their peltries, and eager to begin the trade, readily promise to observe his commands, and move up toward the gate of the stockade.

The trader having returned to the post, all preparations for the trade are completed, communication cut off, men all stationed at their posts ready for anything that may turn up. Then the outer gate is thrown open, and the eager crowd rushes into the Indian-room. In a moment the door leading into the little hall-way connecting that apartment with the trading-store slides back, and two Indians with their peltries enter. Then the door slides into place again, and the other one opens, admitting the braves into the store. They look through the grating, select the articles they want, and pay for them in installments. An Indian never asks at once for everything he wants, and then pays for it in one payment; but purchases one thing at a time, receives his change, then turns his attention to another. In this way he seems to get more for his money; and the linked sweetness of shopping is longer drawn out. The trade is rapidly pushed, and the braves are at once returned by the double-barred process to the Indian-room, and a fresh batch admitted, when the doors are again locked. The reappearance of each installment of fortunate braves, with the much-prized articles of ornament and use, continually augments the growing excitement of the waiting throng in the Indian-room. Each one is eagerly questioned as to what he saw, whether there was any of this or that article, and whether the supply would be likely to be exhausted before the questioner's turn arrived. Each succeeding statement that there were on the shelves but a few guns, blankets, a little tea, sugar, etc., intensifies the anxiety, and the crush to get in increases in proportion, under the belief that everything will be gone. The announcement by the trader, through a loop-hole, that there will be enough for all, scarcely allays the confusion in any measure, the universal desire and rush to obtain the first choice still remaining. Thus the trade progresses until all the furs and provisions have changed hands, and there is nothing more to be traded. Sometimes, however, the trade does not proceed so smoothly. It frequently happens that the Blackfeet repair to the fort with but a small collection of robes and leather, under which circumstances, being of a frugal mind, they object to seeing their stock in trade go for a little tea and sugar. These objections generally assume the shape of bullets and knife-hacking, of which the walls of the Indian-room bear plentiful evidence. Then the trading-store is promptly closed, only to be reopened when the sudden ebullition of anger has passed away.

Upon the completion of the exchange of peltries and goods begins the horse-trading; and the method of carrying it on depends much upon the humor which the Blackfeet exhibit. If they appear well satisfied with the trade of goods, then the horse-trading takes place immediately outside the stockade—the animals being led within as fast as purchased, and the Indians shown singly into the trad-

ing-store to be paid. If an aggressive spirit obtains, however, a single brave, with his pony or ponies, is admitted at a time within the yard of the stockade, the trade effected, and the owner paid and passed without the gate before the admission of a second. Perhaps a more than usual care is exercised during the progress of this trade, from the fact that the Blackfeet generally all gather about the stockade at that time, and, the majority being already supplied with goods, they fail to recognize the necessity of longer preserving peaceful relations with the traders.

A peculiarity of these trades lies in the fact that money values are unknown, everything being reckoned by skins, as is the case throughout a great portion of the company's territory. The skin is a very old term in the fur-trade, and is based upon the standard of the beaver-skin, or, as it is called, the made beaver. For example: a beaver, or skin, is reckoned equivalent to one mink-skin; one marten is equal to two skins, one buffalo-robe to six skins, a silver fox to twenty skins, and so on throughout the scale of furs. In a like manner all articles of merchandise have their value in skins. Thus a brave brings a pony, which is valued at fifty skins, and these fifty skins will be divided as follows: a kettle, five skins; a blanket, ten skins; a capote, ten skins; ammunition, ten skins; tobacco, fifteen skins. The brave hands over the pony, and receives in payment a capote, a blanket, a kettle, ammunition, and tobacco. The original skin, the beaver, now seldom makes its appearance at the Mountain House, those animals having been nearly exterminated in that part of the territory; but, notwithstanding the fact of the marked deterioration in the price of the beaver-skin, since it was originally adopted as the standard of value in the fur-trade, owing to the extensive use of silk in the manufacture of hats, it still nominally retains the fictitious value first placed upon it.

A somewhat amusing illustration of the universal passion for dress, which forms a distinguishing characteristic of the Blackfeet, equally with other Indians, occurs in these trades. The fashionable costume of the red-man is not generally regulated by the variable moods of the mercurial Parisian; indeed, it has undergone but little change since the memory of men. Certain interesting specimens of the race are said to have been seen attired in even less than the vaunted Mexican costume—a shirt-collar and pair of spurs. I myself remember to have seen one chastily appareled in a stove-pipe hat. But it frequently occurs, during the trades, that some doughty chieftain elects to appear in more than regal magnificence before his tribe; and for his benefit, and those of similar tastes, the company annually import certain ancient costumes prevalent in England some half-century since. The tall, stove-pipe hat, with round, narrow brim; the snuff-brown or bright-blue coat, with high collar, climbing up over the neck, the sleeves tightly fitting, the waist narrow—this is the Blackfeet's ideal of perfection in dress, and the brave who can array himself in this antique garb struts out from the fort the envy and admiration of all beholders. Often the high hat is orna-

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mented with a decayed ostrich-plume, drooping like the shadow of a great sorrow, which has figured in the turban of some dowager of the British Isles long years since. While the presence of trousers is considered by no means essential to the perfect finish of the costume, the addition of a narrow band of gold lace about the coat is regarded as imparting an air of tone to the general effect not to be obtained in any other way. For such a costume the Blackfeet brave will barter his deer-skin shirt, beaded, quilled, and ornamented with the raven locks of his enemies ;

his head-band of beautiful feathers and shells ; and the soft-tanned and flowing robe of buffalo-skin—a dress which adds a kingly dignity to his athletic form for one which *Pantaloons* would scorn to wear. Fortunately, the new dress does not long survive. Little by little it is found unsuited to the wild life which its owner leads, and, although never losing the originally high estimate placed upon it, is discarded at length by reason of the many inconveniences arising from running buffalo in a plug-hat, and fighting in a swallow-tail coat against the Crees.