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SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF NORTHWESTERN
INDIANS.

THE Kootenay Indians, who number between five hundred and a thousand persons, inhabit a strip of country between the Rocky and the Selkirk Mountains, partly in the United States and partly in British Columbia. As a rule, their moral character and behavior are good, and they are honest, kind, and hospitable; but a few incidents cited by Dr. A. F. Chamberlain, in his report concerning them to the British Association, indicate that they are sometimes moody and easily offended, especially when their demands are refused. They have also a keen sense of the ludicrous, and laugh at the misfortunes that befall their fellows. A favorite Sunday amusement among the Lower Kootenays is horse-running. "All the horses are assembled in a large, open space near the camp, and the Indians form a large circle round them, and, provided with long whips, they drive the horses to and fro for an hour or so, laughing and yelling to their hearts' content. Even the little boys take part in this sport. They also take great delight in breaking stubborn horses, and the whole camp looks on until the young man has succeeded in controlling his animal, guying him unmercifully if he makes mistakes." Although no

picture-writing upon rocks has been attributed to them, they have marked artistic ability, and exhibit their skill in ornamentation upon articles of dress and the implements of the chase. Indians who had had no instruction in drawing from the whites, employed by Dr. Chamberlain to make a series of drawings, drafted very good maps of their country, and seemed to have well grasped the idea of their work. Some of them were also able to recognize with ease the various physical features prominent in the printed maps of the Kootenay district. Their drawings of weapons, implements, etc., were excellent, and those of one of them in particular would never be suspected of being the product of aboriginal genius. "Pictures of houses, railway trains, etc., have a certain conventionality that is characteristic of savage races. Several of the Indians were able to draw an excellent and easily recognizable picture of the little steamboat that plied up and down the Columbia River. In their drawings of human beings, especial stress is laid upon the distinguishing features, and any peculiarity or abnormality is brought out with full force. Thus, a Stony Indian woman has no nose, a Chinaman has an immense single braid of hair, a white man an enormous beard, a certain Indian a colossal nose, and the like."

They have fourteen distinct names for colors, and their horses may be white, black, half white and half black, roan, "buckskin," "blue," sorrel, or mouse-colored.

The social position of women is not greatly different from that among the other surrounding tribes. Girls may be married at fifteen and young men at twenty years of age. In the olden times the young Indian wishing to marry "went at night to the lodge where slept the object of his affections, and, quietly lifting up the blankets to make sure, lay down beside her. The girl's people soon found him there, and threats were made. The young man's father meanwhile inquired where his son was, and, on being told that he was in such-and-such a lodge, went thither with his friends and discovered the young people together. The girl then left and went with her husband to his own people. He was at liberty to send his wife back to her relatives within a year if she turned out to be bad or he was dissatisfied with her. When guilty of adultery she was punished by having one of her braids cut off by her husband." Descent seems to be traced through the mother.

Private property in land was unknown, the country belonging to the tribe collectively; and demands for money are still made by the Lower Kootenays from any stranger intruding upon their domain. The hunter had no absolute right in his game, and it was distributed among the camp in order that all might have food. Women could hold property as well as men. The horses

were the property of the grown-up male children, as well as of the father, and could be gambled away by any one of them. The lodge seems to have been secured to the widow and children on the death of the father. The women inherited the kettles and other utensils, besides their saddles, blankets, "parfleshes," etc. The horses, canoes, weapons, etc., went to the male children if they were of age. In early times the dead man's relatives would swoop down upon the lodge soon after his death and appropriate the property substantially at their will. If the dead man left no relatives, the "strong man" of the tribe took possession of his property.

The Kootenays paid a worship to the sun, and they believed in the existence of spirits in everything animate and inanimate; even little stones, bits of rag, shavings of wood, have their spirits. These spirits can go anywhere, through glass, wood, or any substance, as through air. The touch of them causes death and disease. At the death of Indians their spirits may enter into fishes, bears, trees, etc.; in fact, into anything animate or inanimate. When a man is alive his spirit may exist in the form of a tomtit, a jay, a bear, a flower, etc. The spirits of the dead can return and visit their friends. In olden times sacrifices appear to have been made to the spirits of the mountains and of the forests to secure success in hunting, and to appease them when they were angered. Their language is supposed to differ from the ordinary Kootenay. A great or strong man has many spirits. The spirits were supposed to come often at the prayer of the medicine men, in the form of birds or the like. A tree is pointed out in the Kootenay region, in northern Idaho, from which Indians have jumped off on two successive occasions, in obedience to the promise of the medicine men that they should be able to fly like birds if they did so. Certain death, of course, awaited them. The shamans treated the sick by pressure upon various parts of the body, by pinching, etc.; practiced bloodletting, and pretended to extract the cause of the malady by suction with the mouth.

In the astronomy of the Kootenays the moon is regarded as a man and the sun as a woman. There was no sun in the beginning, and, after the Indians had vainly endeavored to discover it, the coyote was successful in making it rise above the mountains. Another version makes the chicken hawk cause the sun to rise. The coyote, getting angry, shoots an arrow at the sun, but misses, sets the prairie on fire, and has to run for dear life. The moon is said to have been found by the chicken hawk. A legend about the man in the moon may be of European origin. The stars are mostly Indians, who from time to time have got up into the sky. The Great Bear was an Indian woman, who sometimes was very angry; and the stars in her tail are Indians whom she has seized.

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The Milky Way is the dog's trail. The thunder is caused by a great bird that lives far up in the sky. The lightning is made by the shooting of its arrows. At first there were no clouds. The daughter of the coyote married the thunder, and her father gave the clouds for a blanket. The Kootenays believe that they came from the East; and one of their myths ascribes to them an origin from a hole in the ground east of the Rocky Mountains. Another account says they sprang from the hairs of the black bear, which fell on the ground after he came out of the belly of the great fish that had swallowed him. There were no women at first. By and by an Indian went up into the mountains, and from a spirit who lived there received the first Kootenay woman. The origin of horses is ascribed to a medicine man who made a stick into the shape of the animal and then threw it away, whereupon it became a horse. The belief prevails that the white men get their cattle from the sea. It is said that they go every year to the Pacific Ocean to receive the cattle which come out of the waters. Many of the animal myths remind one of Uncle Remus.

Some very interesting legends are related by Prof. George W. Dawson as communicated to him by Mr. J. W. Mackay, Indian agent at Kamloops, from the stock of the Shuswap Indians. Like most of the Indian people they have a culture or creation hero with supernatural attributes, who with them figures as a coyote or small wolf, and is named Skil-ap. In the old times the salmon could not ascend the Fraser River on account of a dam which two old witches had made at Hell-gate Cañon. He told the people he would go down the river and break the dam, so that the salmon could come up, and instructed them that he would make his approach known by a great smoke. He transformed himself into a smooth, flat piece of board, floated down to the dam, was picked up by the women, who undertook to use the board as a plate, emerged from it as a child, and was cared for by them, till one day when they were absent he put something on his head that made him invulnerable, and destroyed the dam, after which the salmon began to go up in great numbers. Then he followed the bank of the river, keeping abreast of the vanguard of the salmon, and making a great smoke by setting fire to the woods as he proceeded, so that the people knew that he was coming. Near the outlet of the Kamloops Lake he stopped to eat, and made a fish weir at a spot where some high rocks may still be seen. At the mouth of the Clearwater he completed a salmon dam he found the people making; and there are to the present day steep rocks on either side of the river, and above them a large pool or basin where he fished with his scoop-net and which is still a noted salmon-fishing place. On the rocks may be seen the prints of his feet where he stood to fish. Thus the salmon were

enabled to ascend into all the rivers of the Shuswap country. Skil-ap is expected to return at some distant period when "the world turns" and the good old days come back.

There were in the early times of Skil-ap other supernatural beings who roamed the world, the most important of whom was named Knil-i-elt; and it may be, Prof. Dawson suggests as a point worthy of inquiry, that in the stories related of Knil-i-elt and Skil-ap we find the mingling of mythological ideas derived from two different sources. Knil-i-elt had no recognized father or any relative but his mother, and was the offspring of the union of the woman with a root which is eaten by the Indians. Learning the mystery of his birth after he had become a great hunter, he reproached his mother concerning it, and said he would go away and never return to her. She then told him of all the evil and malignant monsters living in the country farther down the river, and he resolved to extirpate them. Among his exploits was a trial of strength with two friends, in which each should push his head against a rock and see which could make the deepest impression. Each of the friends made a shallow indentation, but Knil-i-elt pressed his head in to the shoulders. Impressions in the rock are still shown by the Indians, and Hat Creek, near the mouth of which they were made, was named from the incident. A conflict with the eagle monster resulted in the death of the eagle and the capture of its eaglets, pulling out the tail feathers from which, Knil-i-elt reduced them to common eagles, able to harm no man. At the outlet of Kamloops Lake was an elk monster that lived in the middle of the river and killed and ate men. Knil-i-elt, having made a raft, embarked and floated down the stream, when, before long, the elk seized and swallowed him. His friends, who were looking on, thought they had seen the last of him, but Knil-i-elt stabbed the elk to the heart with the weapon he carried, and then cut his way out of its belly and came to shore, bringing the elk with him, and invited his friends to eat some of the meat. He then reduced the elk to its present position, saying to it: "You will no longer kill men; they will in future always kill you." The badger was also in this early time a formidable monster, and had its lodge stored with dead men, collected for food. Knil-i-elt caught the badger, and striking him on the head said, "Hereafter you will be nothing but a common badger, able only to fight with dogs when they attack you." He further brought to life again all the people whom he found dead. Knil-i-elt met his fate from four witches, whose supernatural power was superior to his, and who turned him and the two friends who had accompanied him in all his adventures into stone.

On the trail leading from Kamloops toward Trout Lake the scanty remnant of an old stump protrudes from among a few

stones which are piled about it, in passing which the Indians always throw some little offering upon it—such as matches, a fragment of tobacco, or a shred of clothing, which were seen by the author. The story attached to it relates that a lonely woman called Grizzly Bear made of pitch the figure of a girl to be a companion to her, who became her daughter. She warned the girl that when she bathed she must not afterward sit or lie in the sun to get warm. The girl tried the forbidden experiment after her fourth bath, and was melted away. Grizzly made another daughter of clay, and told her that she must not rub herself when in the water. This girl disobeyed likewise and was washed away. The old woman then made another daughter of wood, on whom it was not necessary to impose restrictions. This girl, after a fourth bath, was accosted by a trout, which she said she would like for a husband. On repeating her wish the fourth time the trout appeared as a young man, became her husband, and took her with four efforts, the first three of which were balked, to his lower country. A boy and a girl were born to this couple. They were taunted about having no grandmother, and, questioning their mother on the subject, were told that they had a grandmother living in the upper country. They might go up there and would find her as an old woman digging roots on the hillside, but must not speak to her, though they might go to her house and eat whatever food they might find there. The children acting upon these instructions, the woman missed the food, and, observing the footprints of the children, concluded that none but her daughter's children would visit her house in that way. She therefore prepared some potent medicine, and, going to a stump in the hillside where she was accustomed to work, told it that when the children appeared it must move and seem to be a woman digging. The woman then concealed herself in the house, while the stump acted as it had been bidden. The children, after regarding the stump for a time with some doubt, ventured into the house, when the woman threw her medicine upon them. The medicine fell all over the boy, who was changed to an ordinary human being, but only partly over the girl, and she became a little dog. The boy and the dog, in whom he failed to recognize his sister, had some curious adventures, in the course of which he learned the truth. He went to his grandmother and questioned her on the subject. She told him that if, when shooting, his arrow should lodge in a tree, or anywhere above his reach, however little, he must not climb up to get it. Soon afterward he lost three arrows in this way, but a fourth time his arrow stuck in a tree not far up, and he climbed on a branch to get it; but the arrow continued to move further up and he had to climb after it, and though he thought that he had not gone very far, he looked

down after a time and found that he could not even see the earth. So he went on climbing till at last he reached another country above, which was very pleasant and populous, and there he remained. The old stump by the wayside is the remnant of that tree.

Another curious story relates to a mosquito gorged with blood, which flew up where the thunder is. The thunder asked the mosquito where it got the blood, and the insect falsely replied that it was sucked from the buds at the very top of the trees below. Hence the reason that the thunder (or lightning) strikes the tops of the trees.

Some curious myths are associated with particular places. The lakes are supposed to be occupied by peculiar beings called "water people," who are alleged to have remarkable powers and to use them in performing strange acts. It is dangerous for canoes to pass Battle Bluff, on Kamloops Lake, because of the water people, who in this instance are described as of human shape, but hairy in the upper half, with fishlike tails below. It is also told of this bluff that some hostile people, once coming by land to attack the Kamloops Indians, looking down over the front of the bluff as they passed, saw a woman or witch dancing in a niche part way down the cliff. They sat down on the edge of the cliff to watch the woman dance and were turned to stones. "Little men" are reported to exist in several places, to hunt with bows and arrows, to be only two feet high, and yet able to carry a deer easily. In contrast to this, when a squirrel is killed, they skin it and take only a part, as the whole is too heavy for them. The Indians are very much afraid of them. The Indians aver that unknown beings sometimes throw stones at them, particularly at night, when stones may be noticed occasionally falling into the fire. A Kamloops Indian, long since dead, once saw a white object following him by night. He drew back from the trail and shot an arrow at it as it passed. In the morning he returned and found his arrow buried in a human shoulder-blade. It is believed that burning wood from a tree which had been struck by lightning brings on cold weather. This appears to be based on the fact that cold follows a thunderstorm. Thus, in the spring, when Indians may be traveling over the snow on high ground, splinters of such wood are thrown on the fire to reduce the temperature, in order that the crust may remain unmelted on the snow. A small splinter of such wood wrapped up with the bullet in loading a gun is supposed to increase the deadly effect of the bullet. The plant *Parnassia fimbriata*, worn in the hat or rubbed on it and on the soles of the feet, is believed to make it certain for the deer-hunter that the deer will be seen and caught. The rattle of a rattlesnake is worn as a preventive against headache.

The Pleiades are called by the Shuswaps "the bunch," and also "people roasting." The latter name is given from a story of their origin, which relates that a number of women who were baking roots in a hole in the ground were changed into this group of stars. The morning star has the names "coming with the daylight" and "one with hair standing out round his head." The four stars forming the bowl of the Great Dipper are known as the bear stars, and the three following large stars are three brothers in pursuit of the bear. The first hunter is brave and near the bear; the second leads a dog (the small companion star); and the third is afraid and hangs far back. The stars of Orion's belt are called "fishing," and the Milky Way is the road or path of the dead. The months, beginning about March, are "spring," "grass month," "root-digging month," "strawberry month," "berry month," "salmon month," "month when the salmon get bad," "month when the deer travel," "month in which they return from hunting," "midwinter month," and *Pit-tshik-in-tin* (which is not translated).

Several native roots still constitute notable items in the food of the Shuswaps, though their importance has diminished since the white man's preparations were introduced. Roots are always dug and cooked or cured by the women. In digging the roots a pointed stick, about four feet in length, with a crutch-shaped handle, is used. The lily, *Lilium columbianum*, is much sought after, and, like most of the roots, is cooked by baking in the ground. The roots of balsamorhiza, cinquefoil, claytonia or spring beauty, dog-tooth violet, and of other less familiar plants, are also eaten. The camass is abundant, and forms an important article of diet. No edible thing is ignored, and few edible substances of any kind are passed by; but the Indians never heard of any one eating a mushroom. The cambium layer of the black or bull pine (*Pinus murrayana*) is eaten when it is soft and gelatinous, at the time the leaves are still growing, and is sometimes dried and kept. The cambium of the subalpine spruce and of cottonwood is also sometimes eaten. The sappy and still nearly white parts of the large leaf-stalks and stems of the *Heracleum lanatum* are eaten in the spring, and, when taken at the right stage, are not much inferior to celery. The nutlets in the cones of *Pinus albicantes* are gathered in large quantities and eaten from the cones after having been roasted, or thrashed out and prepared. They have a rather pleasant taste, flavored with turpentine, and are nearly the size of small garden peas. Nutlets of yellow pine and Douglas fir are also collected—generally by robbing the mice and squirrels of their stores. The pith or inner bark of *Epilobium spicatum* is eaten while still young and sappy. A black, hairlike lichen, *Alectoria jubata*, is eaten roasted, and is

said to taste very sweet. A yellow lichen furnishes a coloring matter, and the root of a certain fern (*Asplenium* or *Aspidium*) yields a black dye. The leaves of the syringa (*Philadelphus lewisii*) were formerly used as a soap in washing clothing. The fiber plants are an *Asclepias* or milkweed, and the common nettle of the country.

The sweat-houses of all the Northwestern Indians are very much alike. They consist of a dome-shaped framework, formed by bending willow sticks over one another, covered with blankets or skins or earth, and a pile of hot stones in the center, or a hole in which hot stones are thrown. The Indian takes his place in the booth, and water is thrown upon the stones. The bathers sit in a suffocating temperature till they have had enough of it, and then rush out and plunge into the water, which they take care to have always near.