

THE CHIPEWYAN INDIANS: AN ACCOUNT BY AN

EARLY EXPLORER

edited by

Diamond Jenness

INTRODUCTION by Diamond Jenness

This account of the Chipewyan Indians comes from a copy, in the Dominion Archives, Ottawa, of an unpublished MS. among the Masson Papers in the library of McGill University, Montreal. It was probably written by one of Sir Alexander Mackenzie's contemporaries, John Macdonell, who may have used some of the same informants as the great explorer and was perhaps acquainted also with the narrative of Samuel Hearne. The original MS. contains a description of the mineral, vegetable and animal resources of Lake Athabasca, and an account of a journey from Lachine to the Red River; but I have extracted only the portion that relates to the Chipewyan Indians, because this records customs and beliefs that disappeared during the 19th century. The spelling and punctuation of the original have not been changed, but I have added a few notes at the end directing the student to relevant passages in the works of the author's contemporaries, Hearne, Mackenzie and Thompson.

The Chipweans are the principal nation who inhabit this part of the country (Lake Athabasca) and are much more numerous than either the Crees or Beaver Indians whose residence is generally within the boundaries of Peace River where plenty of animals of all sorts peculiar to the country are to be found and are killed by them with great dexterity. The Chipweans, on the other hand make this place their chief resort, which from its natural situation, being a never failing resource at all times for living on account of the fish that may be taken at any season of the year, for which cause it seems to be the most eligible place for them as they would be unable to live were they necessitated to depend entirely on the Moose or Red Deer for sustenance, the generality of them not knowing

the method of killing them as is practiced by the other nations. But to compensate for this deficiency in hunting they surpass all their neighbors in the art of fishing (1) at which they become very expert by their constant practice as frequently they are compelled to leave the woods and mountains either by natural causes or indolence and fly to this grand magazine of nature to save their lives and some have been known to have died by famine before they could reach the lake which on the north side is one continued chain of mountains that extends for more than a hundred and fifty miles in length and many of them almost perpendicular above the water; on their surface the greatest sterility prevails as hardly a shrub or tree are to be seen on their rugged tops. On the opposite side of the Lake the face of nature bears quite a different appearance; instead of gloomy, desolated hills, nothing but sand is to be seen and the country generally flat and full of marshes which appear to have detached from the lake as there is only a narrow dyke of sand that separates them, which seems to have been formed by the face of the breakers during a series of storms with which the lake is often agitated to such a degree at times as to threaten a deluge over the lower part of its boundaries which be very low. Beyond the influx of the Athabasca River which is situated almost at the western extremity of the lake, little or no current is discernible but what is caused by the winds and even where the waters of Peace River swell beyond a certain height it changes its course and runs in opposition to its source and the many rivers which fall into it. Towards the east end of the lake on the south side there are mountains of a great height composed entirely of a fine yellow sand which extend into the interior of the country as far as the eye can reach; on some of them that are nigh the lake the tops of huge pine trees are seen forcing themselves through their surfaces which comparatively do not appear to be of more than eighty years standing and on the same principle as many feet in height; in the intermediate spaces between the trees not a shrub nor root is to be seen, which is an evident demonstration that this mass of sand has been detached from the main body by some great natural cause as it would be absurd to imagine that vegetation could make its way through such a mass of unfertile matter; as a further proof of this hypothesis there is a small river that takes its course through the middle of these sandy deserts whose waters are black colored; its banks and soil are composed of clay, and earth which appear to be in its original situation. Even the Indians philosophize on

the formation of this singular phenomenon but in so ludicrous a manner as would make it absurd to believe the existence of such a thing and had I not seen it myself I should not have dared to advance a word on the subject and even at the time that I saw this curiosity I had neither leisure or capacity to make a full investigation of its apparent origin and formation etc.

The whole population of the Chipweans used to frequent this post.

The territories of this nation are so extensive which allows them to run from one place to another as renders it impossible to determine accurately the number of souls that make the lake their local residence as from their naturally unsettled disposition they very seldom attach themselves to a particular place for any long period of time.

In the years 1801-2-3 there were not fewer than fifty tents that were at the Post at the lake, which at an average, by allowing two beaver hunters, two women and four more including superannuated men and women would make in all four hundred souls, etc.

THEOLOGY

The Chipweans have always been and are even at this day in a state of the darkest superstition and ignorance, which is somewhat singular, considering the long and uninterrupted intercourse they have had with the Europeans, as it might reasonably be expected that they would have become more enlightened but so far to the contrary they seem to be more tenacious of their doctrines than they are said to have entertained at a more remote period, which may arise from a twofold cause, viz the licentious manner of the Europeans, and the cautious attention which is shown to them must no doubt flatter their pride as they have a firm belief that they are superior in knowledge to the white people. Notwithstanding they believe that there exists a Supreme Being whose power can bring down Death and Famine upon them, yet they cannot be made to comprehend that the same Omnipotent Being has created the world, the heavenly bodies or mankind although they pay great attention when told of it but as their contracted ideas allow them to soar no higher than natural objects, made or formed by man it would be impossible to convey to them this knowledge in such a manner that they might

understand it and the time still seems at a great distance when they might attain to a more exalted notion of the Deity; however in affairs of a momentous nature they always implore his interposition whether in regard to the danger of war or dread of famine and previous to any great undertaking they generally allot a certain period of time for fasting, which is religiously observed, when in like manner they make sacrifices and offer up prayers to the Master of Life (as they style him,) deprecate his wrath on account of their bad lives. On the whole they are more afraid of the Devil or Bad Manitou than they are of the Great One; as they believe the former to be more wicked and mischievous they think that he is the hidden cause of their frequently missing their aim while firing on animals and also that he is often the cause of sickness and disease with which they are sometimes inflicted and of which they are extremely timorous so much are they afraid of dying. (2) There are a number of professed jugglers or conjurers amongst them whose sayings and dreams are looked upon as ominous in regard to future events and even influence the passions generally of them to such a degree particularly when they are of a dubious or disagreeable nature as will throw them frequently into a state of sadness and despondency. So credulous are they that they attribute many of their misfortunes to arise from the mauvaise médecine of which they believe the Europeans to be possessed as well as of juggling in a superior manner to themselves, owing to their knowledge of books of which the Chipweans conceive a great opinion. Generally every man amongst them has a small leather bag in which he deposits some things for which he has a regard and ever afterwards it is looked upon as sacred as he believes it to be the invisible residence of his tutelary deity; he takes it with him wherever he goes as the women must not touch of it for were they to touch it they think that it would immediately lose all its virtue; it is always hung up immediately over the place that he occupies and on all particular occasions they hold out the calumet; this greasy absurdity and at the same time repeat a few words by way of respect, as a neglect of this duty would be looked upon as a great sin.

Their notions of a future state are something similar to those entertained by the ancient heathen. After death they believe that there is a state of rewards and punishments but they do not determine the period of its commencement. The ideas they annex to God are activity and dexterity in hunting, a charitable

disposition in regard to worldly effects and the not destroying of any of their nation. Those who possess those qualifications are accounted righteous and after death they believe them conveyed safely across a river in a canoe made of stone into a fine country where there is plenty of animals of all sorts, that may be killed without the least difficulty and in fine, abounding with everything that is necessary to enable them to lead a happy life, free from care and trouble or of enemies. On the other hand how different do they believe the lot of the bad Indian who approaches with fear and trembling to this stony vehicle which is supposed by them to determine intuitively their irrevocable doom as it moves with the victim partly across the river so as to tantalize him for a short time with a view of the happy Elysium on the other side when lo! all of a sudden it instantaneously sinks into the gloomy river with its wicked load which is never heard of again as should it not be immediately devoured by the fishes and beasts of prey it is thrown out and is consumed by the sun and water and once more becomes as earth. (3) Thus, their notions of rewards still to be conferred on a material body without the most distant thought that they possess a soul which can partake of either happiness or misery.

ORIGIN, MANNERS, CUSTOMS AND DRESS

The Chipweans like most other Indian nations have not the least idea of their origin than what is involved in fabulous suppositions; they are even so stupid as not to be able to calculate time further back than the period while their grandfathers lived, which to them is a very ancient date. However, if we may be allowed to judge from analogy it would not be easy to determine whether they are an original nation or not as the Beaver Indians whose territories are almost adjoining, although a distinct nation speak almost the same language as the Chipweans but of very different manners and dispositions being both braver and more haughty in their natures. But let us leave this credulous race which is almost void of reason and proceed to the southward where we shall find the nation, whose language, manner and behaviour bear the greatest affinity to the Chipweans except in their warlike disposition. They were formerly a great and powerful nation but are now almost exterminated as a people having been the envy and terror of all the nations on the plains, who have taken every method to reduce them to their present number which is comparatively the smallest of all those

who dwell on the banks of the Rivière du Pas. While on their war expeditions they never hesitate to give battle to their enemies altho' they may consist of double their own number but they rush forward with a blind impetuosity and generally fall victims to an imprudent valor.

Notwithstanding the dissimilarity of character on this head from the Chipweans may not this people have been descended from them and that more enterprising than the rest have been enticed to leave the colder latitude and penetrate into the southward where they may have remained on account of its being a better country. Or may they have been the original inhabitants of the country they now possess and that some of them of a mere pacific disposition than the rest have been dissatisfied with their mode of life, living continually under the dread of enemies might have been tempted to leave their native lands and migrate to the northward so as to cultivate the arts of peace and remain secure and unmolested from the depredations and threatenings of their former adversaries.

The Chipweans at this day are of that peaceful disposition which must be a great cause of their having become such a powerful nation as they are at present and which seems to be the only argument in support of their being an original people. However, allowing the Crees, to be descended from them or they from the Crees it does not preclude the possibility of their having been at some time or other the same people as the former may have been rendered brave by the continual attacks they may have suffered from their troublesome neighbours, while on the other hand should the Chipweans be their descendants they may have in like manner forgot the art of war by finding none to oppose or disturb them in this extensive country.

The Chipweans are of a middling stature and rather slender-bodied but have very expressive and open countenances and open in appearance but in their nature are neither so active or yet are they able to endure so much misery and fatigue as the Europeans.

The Chipwean women are generally of a short, stout make, particularly downwards from the breast; they are much softer and more awkward in their manners than the females of the neighbouring nations who look upon the Chipwean ladies as greatly inferior to themselves in every respect. The men are possessed of

great patience, perseverance, and display a great deal of ingenuity in imitating the mechanical productions of the Europeans, which frequently they do with great nicety. Their only tools are the axe, the file and the crooked knife (4); with these they will make treens dovetailed in so neat a manner as might make one believe that they had been made by the hands of a professed mechanic; these they varnish with a substance composed of castorum and grease which give them a deep, glossy colour.

Their designs in forming calumets of various shapes from the crude marble indicate a latent genius, which, if improved might vie with the civilized European, as even in their native state they observe the most just symmetry and proportion in all their works; they are even indefatigable in investigating the operations of the mechanical powers and causes and indeed the whole bent of their genius seems to be centred in that art as they equally find it to be an amusement and of service in regard to mending guns, axes, treens, kettles, etc; their anvil is a stone and the hammer of the same substance; with these alone they will make both old axes and chisels into thin plates of iron, which they convert into various uses. In making of their snowshoes, which is a form peculiar to their nation (5), they show a greater nicety and dexterity than the Crees or Beaver Indians and the women also perform the part of matting them in a neat manner. Notwithstanding, altho' they possess so much ingenuity, they are at times very stubborn, choleric but on the whole of an inoffensive nature, which is fortunate for the adventurers to this country as by their going to Hudson's Bay they might live there free from all danger or fear of being molested from this quarter; on account of the great distance from this place they say themselves that they post nigh three moons to go to Churchill via Lake Athabaska but whether this behaviour in them entirely proceeds from principle alone may be doubted as when they find themselves superior in number to the white people they then assure a consequential greatness and would exact the most rigid submission were they to be in the least given way to; however when they are at the houses they are easily kept in awe; they are also of a very hoggish nature in their way of living as they always keep the best of the provisions for themselves and think anything good enough for the traders. They are very beggarly and are even not ashamed to ask the shirt from a person's back, however they do not take a refusal much amiss; they will not give a yard of line to anyone

without asking payment and even they never risk giving a present in case it should be accepted as such. They live in tents the same as the other nations but still more wretchedly as from their incapacity of killing the moose are necessitated to make them of parchment skins or in fact anything that they can find to screen them from the extreme cold of winter. Notwithstanding they suffer greatly on that account. Formerly they were clothed with the skins of the caribou but they have now partly left off that dress and men now follow that of the Canadians which they are very fond of as also of the French language, which causes us frequently to colour our words as many of them would understand us, so great is their facility for learning it; the women's dresses consist of a blue, red green cloth petticoat; a sort of sleeves of the same sort sewed from the wrist to the elbow and are left open above so as to join both behind and before, which almost covers their nakedness as the jupon is constructed to come up as high as the shoulders. Stocks of cloth is the fourth and last grand division of their parure; the hair is no ways adorned and is left to stand as it grows; this is their summer's dress and in winter they wrap themselves in a blanket or a caribou robe. Those females are extremely prolific, notwithstanding the slavish life they lead with their haughty lords and masters who look upon them in no other light than as fit to be used as beasts of burden, to conduce to their sensual pleasures and to bring forth children. Even in the infancy of the slave-devoted female she is not esteemed either by father or mother so much as the boy who is generally allowed to act according to his fancy or caprice; he will frequently usurp in a tyrannical manner over his sisters altho' elder and use them ill without being checked in the least by his father, who on the contrary glories to see his son treading in his own steps. When such conduct is permitted in childhood it is no way surprising that it should increase in a maturer age. The women are obliged to do all the work at the tent, such as culling wood for fire, poles to stretch the tent, clear away the snow, prepare the victuals and when all this is done his lordship sits down at his ease while the obedient wife takes off his shoes and puts on dry, comfortable ones for the night, brings him water to drink and, in fact, does everything in her power to make him easy; thus the life of those poor wretches, compelled to drag a sledge, weighing more than 150 lbs, through deep snows, thick woods, over mountains and precipices, in the meantime many of them are so far advanced in a state of pregnancy that they bring forth at these times unattended by anyone and what is

more surprising as soon as they are delivered they wrap up the tender child in a piece of caribou skin or blanket and proceed forward with their load as formerly. Little girls of 11 or 12 years of age drag incredible loads, while the boy of nearly the same age will be sitting at his ease on his mother's sledge. The men take their guns and proceed straight to the place where they intend to stop for the night as they very seldom remain long at one place. It is true the men have to undergo the fatigues of the chase but still the women must carry the meat home (6). When the Indians arrive from hunting they are not in a hurry to tell whether they have been successful or not, nor does anyone put the question to them -- when they have smoked a pipe which is prepared by the women and have reposed themselves a little they begin to drop a few hints, which are well understood by the women. The women set off early next morning, which will probably be a day's journey from the campment in quest of the fruits of the chase, which they must carry either on their backs or drag on a sledge about eight or ten feet long, one in breadth, made of birch or pine boards of half an inch in thickness made with the axe and crooked knife; upon this they can bring good loads as it slides pretty well over the snow. In times of scarcity they leave nothing of the animal, even the blood is brought home and is boiled with grease. The skin they scrape and dress into leather; they take the brains of the animal and rub it upon the skin to make it pliable and soft; afterwards they smoke it well and then soak it in warm water for a night in order to render it easy to work with a piece of iron made for that purpose. This laborious process is done wholly by the women as the men would think it below their dignity to interfere in works of that kind. Upon the whole the women of this nation are more healthy and robust than the Cree fair sex, which may be greatly assisted by their abstinence from spiritous liquors which the latter use to a shameful excess. One would be naturally led to believe that the spirits of the Chipwean women would be entirely broken but so far is it otherwise that as soon as they leave this state of slavery to cohabit with the French people they assume an importance to themselves and instead of serving as formerly they exact submission from the descendants of the Gauls, who are afraid to dislodge them for fear they should elope the first opportunity. Notwithstanding this good usage they frequently desert and return to their relations, where they submit implicitly to the yoke as formerly but generally they evince a greater spirit of dependance than when with them before when the Indian in his turn must act with

more condescension to avoid giving her occasion of leaving him. She has always enough of policy to insinuate how well off she was while living with the white people and in like manner when with the latter she drops some hints to the same purpose - by this plan she forments hatred and suspicion "entre le sauvage et le civilisé," which prevents her coquetry from being detected while at the same time she is courted by both parties. A plurality of wives is looked upon amongst these people as a great honour and he who can attain to that point is accounted a great man as it can only be a good hunter who is able to do it. This, in fact, is of great service to them and even to the traders, since it enables the Indian, to prepare and bring greater quantities of provisions, leather, etc., to the houses as when he has only one it is all she can do to carry wherewith to supply himself and family. One might naturally conclude that it would be solely from a love of variety that he kept several women but the natural disposition of the Chipwean appears not to be half so amorous and lascivious as the European. They are extremely jealous of their women; the generality never allowing them to go out of their sight and is probably with reason as their ladies are said to be a little fond of variety and some of them are even said to anticipate nature a fortnight d'avance in the diseases peculiar to their sex whereby they may withdraw from the tent into a small hut at a little distance where they usually retire at these times; the fire she makes serves as a signal for her friends to come and pay her a nocturnal visit while the unsuspecting husband is fast asleep. The Chipweans are entirely free from the inquietudes of a long courtship and unacquainted with languishing and sighing, the young female being wholly regulated in her affections by her parents, who adopt the same maxims practiced by Europeans of studying how they may dispose of the daughters to the best advantage without any regard to the inclinations of the young women, for if the son-in-law be a good hunter he generally supports the family of the wife's relations should they require it. She is bestowed on him about the age of thirteen or fourteen and the young couple generally remain with her relations until the time she begins to bear children which is seldom earlier than at fifteen and leaves off at thirty-five. There is no marriage ceremony amongst them (7) excepting that while the intended husband is out (often on purpose) the young woman takes possession of the place he occupies in the lodge which serves as a sign that all goes well and from that period they become as "one flesh." In

both sexes they make it a point of rooting out all nature's exuberances, that of the head excepted, the only reason they assign for so doing is that they conceive it to be more cleanly (8). Both men and women are pretty modest in their conduct altho' not so much so in their manner of speaking which would be indelicate to chaste ears. They generally live to a good old age; comparatively speaking they are subject to few diseases; some of them are haulted with a sort of dry leprosy which may be owing to their dirty mode of living as they will eat fish guts, gills, eyes etc., the moment they are taken from the fish - even in the midst of plenty they will cut off a slice of raw brochet and eat it with as great pleasure as an European would do an oyster. Still in spite of their uncleanness they abhor the idea of dog flesh and even are afraid of such Frenchmen as eat it because they believe they would be able to eat a piece of a Chipwean were they starving and in fact they despise many of the white people on that account (9).

The Chipweans like other nations descry objects at a great distance and shortsightedness is unknown amongst them except from accidental causes they may be haulted with weak eyes. The women bring forth their children with little hartle or pain to themselves and decrepid children or idiots are never to be seen with them which is somewhat singular considering the cruel manner with which they are treated by their unmerciful lords who beat them without showing any mercy on account of the young in the wombs but will lay on them with the helve of an axe, a paddle or anything that the barbarous savage can put his hands upon. In other respects they are much slighted as they are not even allowed to smoke with the same calumet as the men nor are they permitted to touch the guns or walk in the same tracks where animals have passed as that would entirely spoil the conjurations and would stop them from taking a true aim but should the poor woman unfortunately step over the gun pendant qu'elle a son mal - now this is perdition to them; should the hunters be unlucky and starve they conclude that the woman's unfortunate stride is the cause of all their misfortunes as they believe that the Manitou looks upon the females as inferior creatures. New conjurations, councils, etc., take place, the poor Indian being in a state of despondency the most wretched and looks upon his wife to be the cause of all - again he goes to hunting and should he be fortunate he immediately believes that his juggles and sacrifices have had the desired effect but

if to the contrary miserable will be the fate of the poor woman even from her own reproaches so miserably superstitious are they. The men are great adepts in dissimulation - we read, they might be with the most polite courtier so much eloquence do they possess in their way. They exert themselves most when they wish to procure goods on credit altho' they have no inclination to pay them; from their great penetration in observing the vanity and passions of the Europeans they always choose the most prominent failing in those whom they address to dwell upon; they begin first to depreciate the foe whom they know we have no partiality and then by indirect flattery they endeavour to soften your heart and lastly when they observe by your countenance that you have been giving attention to what they have been saying they then disclose their minds and ask the things they would wish to have which if granted they promise to pay with so much seeming gratitude and sincerity - by their professions of honesty delivered in so pathetic a manner as would almost make us believe that they were equal to the primitive Christians did we not know them.* On the other hand should you appear to be dubious concerning their faith or honour they will exert themselves to the full extent of their reasoning faculties and solicit with such unremitting assiduity that a person is often at a loss to find out arguments forcible enough to refute their reasonings and it frequently happens that they get the better of many merely by their great loquacity. But no sooner are they gone than they praise their own capacity in having been able to dupe the white people. It is an incontrovertible fact that if necessity did not oblige them to hunt the Beaver to supply their wants the debts they contract on principles of honesty would never be paid by them although if the reverse be the case which seldom happens those that may chance to owe them are never left at peace until they have paid and should they be refused payment they will not be taken in a second time notwithstanding they consider it as a crime to do so with the European (10). The want of a proper state of subordination amongst this people may be a great cause of their dishonest dealings as had they chiefs possessed of competent authority they might be made to act more honorably than what they do. But, indeed, the idea of a chief with this people is merely

* N.B. They form plans and complots to obtain goods individually; a chief speaks for all by consent.

nominal as those who have attained to this rank have not the least power or influence over their followers, even a child will not do an errand for them without being solicited in the most humble manner - how can it be otherwise - the laced coat and hat are the only distinguishing marks of this office which is also removable at pleasure according to the good or bad behaviour of the Indian, who has them bestowed on him by the traders on account of his being a good beaver hunter or more probably because he is a villain who would have it in his power to stir up the others to mischief - by making him a respectable character they gain his confidence and friendship while he keeps the rest in awe. Their government resembles that of the patriarchs of old, each family making a distinct community and their elders have only the right of advising but not of dictating - however in affairs of consequence the old men of the whole camp assemble and deliberate on the subjects which have caused their meeting; when once assembled the principal calumet is brought out (11), which they pass around as they are seated circularly not forgetting his holiness on the medicine bag, who is looked upon as supreme of the party; during this time all is quiet as the women and children have been previously turned out, at last often a few groans and pious ejaculations from the old men which are answered by the young with great readiness, all this ceremony being done, Quaker-like the spirit moves one of the elders who gets up and makes a long harangue. The young men are permitted to be of the Council and even frequently interfere in their debates which they do with great asperity, particularly when they regard the Europeans or the neighboring nations of whom they entertain an implacable hatred - however the sage councils of these old Patriarchs act as a counterpoise to the impetuosity of youth who would not hesitate to destroy a straggling European were they not ever awed. Some of them are great orators and are said to deliver themselves with great perspecuity and address but particularly they apply their speeches more to the passions than to the understanding; the greatest silence prevails and they made it a fixed point of never interrupting one another while speaking; in general they are grave but not serious and will either join in solemn or gay subjects of discourse. They respect their own mythology and even should they come upon the Europeans in acts of devotion they behave with the greatest reverence as they consider themselves bound to respect everything sacred. In their own way they are not deterred by a false shame to practice their

own method in public, however at the same time they would never forgive a man who would laugh at them so tenacious are they of their principles. On that head "they would wish to do as they would be done by." In general the young do not desert the aged and are even good to them from motives of regard (12) as they cannot be benefited after their decease either by their real or personal property; the first which is only their rights as Chipweans devolves on the community at large and the last is deposited in the grave with the deceased so as to be at hand when he may take his flight to the blessed regions. When anyone of their nation dies (but particularly if a man) they set up dreadful howlings and the near relations of the deceased will rend their clothes and throw away or break their guns, kettles and everything that belongs to them. Everyone in the camp (as they have no villages) will throw some things of less consequence out of respect to the deceased (13). When a young man has been killed by accident or by premature death then they make dreadful yells, men, women and children join in chorus, the women generally loudest but soonest over. The tents are likewise cut in pieces and thrown to the four cardinal points. In every drinking match this melody is repeated and probably for years afterwards. The method with them of counting time is the same as practiced by other nations viz by winters, moons and nights; they have names for the different moons such as in January, the Big moon, and in Spring according to the arrival of the different sorts of game. For the four cardinal points they have distinct names which none of the neighboring nations are acquainted with. They are likewise very expert in knowing the stars particularly the constellations of the Greater and Lesser Bear, Pleiades etc. They observe the rise and setting of the stars by which at night, if clear they are no more at a loss to find their way than with the sun. When they are travelling they always count by the number of nights they have slept to determine the distance but never by days. The Chipweans are not much addicted to commit crimes of an atrocious nature altho' several Canadians have suffered death by their hands but it is believed that it has been much owing to their imprudent conduct in regard to their women of whom they are extremely jealous. Incest in the eyes of this nation is looked upon as a crime of the greatest magnitude altho' their dissembling nature does not allow them to resent it in the presence of the guilty because they are afraid of offending his relations, still they hold them in the greatest abhorrence and will never invite characters of that description to any of the feasts or

entertainments which is as great an affront as can be done to an Indian who is of so proud and consequential nature.

Lying, cheating and theft are never punished but if one should be killed although by chance then the vengeance of the relations of the deceased fall upon the perpetrator of the deed who takes every method to take away his life; still they are afraid to attempt it while in a sober state but generally when intoxicated he runs a great risk. However if the murderer be possessed of property by giving it to the relations of the deceased it will often turn aside their blood-thirsty intentions for a time but he generally falls a victim in the end as revenge can never be entirely eradicated from the breast of an Indian. Were it to terminate there it would only be doing common justice but so far otherwise that it often causes a perpetual war among the surviving friends who mutually cherish an implacable hatred even until death. On the whole such instances as the above seldom occur with this nation as they generally fight it out with the fist and plucking of hair (14); an Indian would always prefer to have his body beaten black and blue rather than have the face marked. They have a custom of pillaging women one from another and he that is the strongest gets the lovely prize; during the combat the woman remains a concerned spectator waiting with patience and resignation to know her future fate as were she to refuse to go with the victor his vengeance would in turn fall upon her who would quickly give her a little discipline by way of introduction to her new state and be it good or otherwise she must remain to such time as a more determined hero may stand forth (15). This race is much given to wrestling, which seems to be the only amusement they have, as for dancing which all nations are so fond of they are totally unacquainted with the art (16). Their pastimes are taken up in chatting and smoking as tobacco with them is accounted a necessary ingredient for subsistence, so fond are they of it. The women in like manner employ themselves in cutting lines from the caribou skin scraped to serve for snowshoes and nets which are made almost in the same manner as those of the Europeans but not so pêchante on account of the roundness of the line being so much thicker than those made of thread and even in those there are great differences as the finer the thread is the greater quantities of fish are to be taken but a net made of various colours is preferable to any which I have proved by trial; however the colours are not all equally attractive.

The red, yellow and the bronze are the best. The Chipweans make their lines of the same substance as their nets and use awls or frequently a knot of the pine tree inverted which makes a good substitute for hooks - these they set under the ice baited with a piece of red carp which is the best for that purpose; they visit them every morning and generally find trouts of a considerable weight. When they angle in winter they make use of the stomach of the white fish for bait which must be kept very clean; the Canadians likewise do the same and we frequently take from fifteen to twenty trouts in a few hours but principally in the month of March.

To sum up the character of the Chipweans in a few words: they are beggarly, cowardly, and mean in their nature but on the other hand they are susceptible of slights, persevering and ingenious; this last seems to be the most prominent feature as they neither can be called good nor bad Indians. The Crees or Beaver Indians only differ in being more brave and greater drunkards and more prouder than the Chipweans as the former cannot brook a refusal.

NOTES

- (1) Thompson (165) makes the same remark.
- (2) This doctrine of two Great Spirits, one good and one evil, the Chipewyan evidently borrowed from the Cree. At least it seems to have been unknown to other Athapaskan tribes, but was widely current among the Cree and their neighbours to the south. The name for the good spirit, "Master of Life," is Cree. Cf. Mackenzie, c; Hearne, 325; and Thompson's remark (559) "This present race (of Chipewyans) almost every way imitate their neighbours the Nahathaway (Cree) Indians."
- (3) Cf. Mackenzie, cxix.
- (4) Cf. Hearne, 135.
- (5) For the shape of the Chipewyan snowshoe cf. Hearne, 312; Mackenzie, cxxvi.
- (6) For the status of women cf. Hearne, 102, 128-130, 301-304, 319-320; Thompson, 129-130, 161-163.
- (7) Mackenzie (xciii) mentions this as a Cree custom, but states also (cxx) that Chipewyan men generally eradicated their beards. Hearne (298) agrees with Mackenzie.
- (8) Hearne (301) and Mackenzie (cxxiii) confirm this.
- (9) Thompson (131) explains that they considered themselves to be descended from the dog. Cf. Hearne, 324-5.
- (10) Cf. Hearne, 299-301.
- (11) Smoking was unknown to the Athapaskan Indians in pre-European times. This ceremony with the calumet presumably reached the Chipewyan from the Cree. Cf. Mackenzie, ci et seq.
- (12) Cf. Thompson, 131; Mackenzie, cxxviii, and Hearne, 219, 325-7. In this last passage Hearne estimates that at least one half of the aged persons of both sexes were abandoned to

die of starvation and exposure.

- (13) Cf. Mackenzie, cxxix.
- (14) Cf. Thompson, 161-4, 219; Mackenzie, cxxv; Hearne, 141-3.
- (15) Cf. Thompson, 130; Mackenzie, cxxvii; Hearne, 318-9.
- (16) Cf. Thompson, 158, 165-6; Hearne, 315-6.

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