



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

CACHES.

## HUNTING CUSTOMS OF THE OMAHAS.

### PERSONAL STUDIES OF INDIAN LIFE.

**I**N the life of the American Indian so much has ever depended upon the skill of the hunter that in the hazards of the chase he has sought supernatural aid to supplement his own inadequate powers; thus, in every tribe, we find rites connected with hunting carefully observed, and frequently forming an important part of the tribal ceremonies.

Mention has been made, in my previous papers, of the Indian's custom of retiring into the forest or to the mountain to fast, that there might come to him in a vision some manifestation of the powers of nature. Whatever appears in this vision,—beast or bird, or symbolic form,—the man makes diligent search for its natural counterpart, and secures it as an amulet; or, in some tribes, he makes a model in wood or stone, which he carries always with him, to bring the game near while he recruits his strength in sleep or needed rest. Songs also which come in dreams are believed to be able to beguile by their mysterious power the deer and the elk, and to entice the beaver to enter the trap; but notwithstanding this dependence upon the supernatural for aid, the Indian hunter does not neglect expedients of a very practical sort. He resorts to strategy: he covers

himself with the skin of a deer, and, fastening the branching antlers upon his head, creeps among the unsuspecting herd, and sends his keen arrow with fatal precision; he entices the eagle to its prey, beneath which he lies concealed; he brings the elk within his reach by imitating the cries of its young; he spreads honey before the covert where he hides waiting for the bear to be attracted by the fragrant bait; and in regions where the antelope and deer once abounded earth inclosures have been discovered into which it is probable the game was driven to meet a certain death. When hunting the buffalo no mystery-songs were used, as when trapping smaller game; no decoy calls, as for deer and elk. Success in taking the buffalo depended upon the skill and the supernatural favor received through the leader. The power otherwise gained through mystery-songs here came through a regular ceremonial in charge of a gens and an authorized leader, who became for the time being something of a priest.

The physical training of the hunter was a part of the education of every Indian boy, and different tribes had different modes of developing the powers of endurance. Among the Omahas



the youth were taught to run — not so much to run rapidly for a short distance, as to keep up an even pace for many miles; and the habit of careful observation was also inculcated. The runners' services on the tribal hunt were important: it was necessary for them to be able to travel far in search of the buffalo, and to return quickly, so that the tribe could go forward, and the hunters encompass the herd before it could move any great distance. They must also closely note the topography of the country as they ran here and there in search of the game, so as to be able to direct the tribe to the herd over the shortest route, which they might not themselves have traveled. They must also be constantly on the watch for tracks or signs of an enemy, lest they should bring the tribe into danger. It was not uncommon for these young men to run from seventy to one hundred miles within twenty-four hours, taking very little rest and food.

Among the Nez Percé Indians of Idaho a part of the training of the hunters and fishermen was to plunge into the river in mid-winter, and struggle with the ice and the rapid current. Many of these Indians believed that meat made a man short-winded, and some of the most noted hunters lived exclusively upon fish and roots. Two methods of strengthening the body were common in all tribes: enforced vomiting and the sweat-lodge bath. A concoction of herbs was taken as an emetic, or the result was reached by thrusting peeled willow twigs down the throat. This practice required considerable resolution, and was associated somewhat with the notion that a plan or purpose strongly conceived at the time of the operation would surely come to pass. Heaps of stones were raised where this ordeal took place, and the willow twigs used were inserted in a split pole firmly set in the center of the pile of stones, to remain as a memorial until the winds and the frosts of years should destroy the witness of the man's endurance. The sweat-lodge was a place of purification and physical refreshment. Water was thrown upon heated stones within the lodge, where the men sat crouching and perspiring in the steam; they afterward plunged into a running stream even in the winter season.

The strength of the hunter was often severely taxed, not only in the chase proper, but in encountering fierce animals by the way. The bear figures largely in hunting-tales told around the camp-fire to a group of interested listeners, among whom sits the boy longing for the time

to come when, like some well-remembered hero of the tribe, he shall be able to grapple single-handed with the powerful grizzly bear, and tear its fearful jaws asunder.<sup>1</sup> Men of great strength became famous, as the man who could carry three deer, one on his back and one with each arm; or he who, unaided, could bring an elk in from the forest.

In couples and in small companies the Indians hunted the deer, elk, and antelope; and while danger was always present, tragedies sometimes occurred in which neither wild beasts nor inimical tribes had part, but which arose from feelings and impulses common to human nature.

The following well-authenticated adventure took place in the last century. Two brothers loved the same woman. She favored the younger, but by some means the elder took her to wife. They were married in the fall of the year, and winter passed by, and one day in spring the brothers went forth to hunt together. Walking near the breaks of the Clear-water, the elder stopped to look over the edge of the cañon, where, a thousand feet below, the river glistened in the morning sun. Half-way down the rocky wall, upon a ledge that jutted out from the sheer face of the precipice, he saw a nest of young eagles. He called to his brother, who returned, and looked down upon the nest. "I know what I will do," he said; "I will make a rope." So the two set to work. They stripped the bark from young willows, and plaited it into a rope strong enough to hold a man. This done, they threw one end over the precipice to see if it was long enough to reach the nest; but it fell far short. Then they worked on, lengthening the rope until finally it rested upon the ledge. They agreed that one was to let the other down to secure the eagles. The elder tied the rope about his body, and the younger lowered him carefully until his feet were well on the ledge. As he walked along toward the nest he saw the rope suddenly tossed over the cliff; instinctively he steadied himself, caught the rope, and pulled it in. He was alone, with a precipice above and a precipice below, on a narrow ledge, with no living thing but himself and the half-grown eagles. By and by the old eagles returned, and, seeing the intruder, were inclined to be hostile; but the man was careful not to anger them, and when they went away again he secured a part of the game they had brought to their young. Days wore on, and the man's life was sustained by the food the old eagles brought;

<sup>1</sup> The niece of a noted Nez Percé Indian hunter, now a very old woman, relates that her uncle performed this feat, and her story is well corroborated in the tribe. Attacked suddenly by the huge animal, the man seized it with one hand by an ear, into which he

thrust his fingers, while with the other hand, at the expense of a thumb, he tore apart the muscles of the jaws, and left the helpless beast to die on the steep mountain-side.

*This is a hoax. Z. P. D.*



but his distress from thirst was great, so he cleared out the little hollows in the rock to catch the rain, covering them carefully to prevent evaporation. The young eagles became accustomed to his companionship and the touch of his hand; but by and by the time came when they were ready to fly, and death looked the lonely man in the face. He resolved to make an effort to reach the ground. He had hidden his rope in a crevice in the rock to keep it from drying; he now tied it firmly about his body, fastening each end strongly to an eagle, leaving sufficient length between the birds and himself to give full play for their wings. He reasoned that if the eagles were not able to fly with his weight, they would break his fall by their endeavors to save themselves. At all events, it was death to remain upon the ledge after they had gone. When all was ready, with his bow and quiver fastened upon his back, he pushed the wondering eagles off their nest over the cliff, and they bore their strange burden down, down the cañon, and finally, weary with their enforced flight, alighted upon a tree at the bottom. The man took a feather from each of his preservers, and released them; then he swung himself down through the branches to the ground, and, taking the shortest trail to his home, came upon his brother and his wife sitting together outside the tent. It took but a moment to send an arrow through the unsuspecting man who had so cruelly betrayed him; then, confronting the woman, in intensity of hope he asked, "Are you glad I have come?" She was silent, but her face told him the truth, and a second arrow pierced her heart. Her body fell over the prostrate form of the younger brother before any one in camp realized that he who had long been given up as dead had returned to avenge his grievous wrongs.

The wild animals of the country were to the Indian the symbols of the permeating life of the universe, and as such were objects of his reverent wonder; but they were also actually necessary to his existence, and he slew them. Every bird or beast killed by him served only for food, clothing, or ceremonial. Long centuries of his occupancy of the continent had not lessened the vast herds of buffalo, or driven the bear and cougar to the fastnesses of the mountains; but with the advent of our race came the trader, who looked upon the game as a source of revenue, and the Indian was induced to slay for new motives—motives which have been potent in crushing out his ancient arts and customs.

In the early settlement of the country the men who traded with Indian hunters not only influenced the relations between different tribes, but affected the attitude of the tribes toward the colonies, and toward the government itself. During the Revolution the British traders rallied

the Indians under his control to the cause of the king, as in like manner, at an earlier date, the French trader had turned certain tribes against the English. For nearly two centuries Indian traders kept alive on this continent the rivalry of foreign nations, playing Indian against Indian, and Indian against white man. Their influence was potent in the border disputes, both prior to 1812 and during the war of that year, as well as in the later controversies over the Canadian boundary line and on the North Pacific coast, where Indian tribes became involved in wars with us and with each other upon issues foreign to the Indians themselves.

The political importance of making the traders directly responsible to the government was early recognized by the United States. In 1795 Congress appropriated \$50,000 for the purchase of goods to be sold to the Indians under the direction of the President; and in the following year Washington suggested the establishment of trading-houses, which Congress afterward authorized. For twenty-five years these "factories" were under the charge of a superintendent of Indian trade, with headquarters at Georgetown, D. C. The government then retired from direct business contact with the Indian hunter, leaving the field to private individuals or companies legally licensed. Treaties made with various tribes bear ample testimony to the extent and importance which the trade in pelts had assumed. A large proportion of the money received by Indians from the sale of their lands passed directly to the trader for "debts." And these "debts" in several instances led to new cessions, and the consequent removal of Indians from their old homes. Thus the Indian hunter has played no small part, directly and indirectly, in bringing about the present conditions of his race.

The customs of tribes living in the country over which the buffalo roamed were largely influenced by the habits of this animal. Its movements in vast numbers necessitated the adoption of elaborate rules to systematize the hunt, so as to prevent a few men, while securing their own supply of food, from scattering the herd beyond the reach of the many, thus leaving the greater part of the tribe to suffer from hunger.

The Omaha hunting-grounds lay between the Platte and the Niobrara rivers, and extended from the Missouri nearly to the present western boundary of the State of Nebraska. Upon the south lay the land of the Pawnees; to the west dwelt the warlike Padoukas; the Dakotas hunted to the north of the Niobrara River, and often trespassed upon the tempting Omaha range, when warlike encounters were sure to take place. Upon their extensive range the Omahas often traveled many hundred miles



from the time they left their village by the bluffs of the Missouri until they returned to it laden with the trophies of their annual chase.

When on the hunt the position of the Omaha tents in the tribal circle, or Hoo-thu-ga, was in the order of their gentes or clans. The Hun-ga gens had charge of two sacred tents, which stood a short distance in front of the lodges of this gens; the one nearest the opening of the Hoo-thu-ga had red spots painted on the tent-cover, representing the buffalo-wallow, and it contained the pole; the other, upon which cornstalks bearing ears were painted, contained the hide of a white buffalo cow, and it was from this tent, in the spring, that kernels from a red ear of corn were distributed to the families of the tribe as a signal that the time for planting had arrived. Later, when the corn was well up, and it had been hoed twice, preparations for the tribal hunt were in order.

The office of leader of the hunt was held in great honor because of its grave responsibilities, which demanded a man of high character and recognized ability. He must be of undoubted valor, a good hunter, a man reverent and just. The entire tribe was placed under his control, the principal chiefs acting as counselors, but complying with his instructions. He directed the march of the people, and selected their camping-places; he chose and despatched the runners in search of the buffalo, and organized and directed the hunt when the game had been found. If the tribe encountered enemies, he was the leader of the warriors, taking his place at the post of greatest danger, and he was held responsible for everything that occurred, from the successful pursuit of the buffalo, and the health and welfare of the people, down to the quarreling of children and dogs.

He who desired to fill the office of leader was required to procure a buffalo-hide from which the hair had been removed, a crow, a golden and a bald-headed eagle, a shell disk, a quantity of sinew for thread, a red-stone pipe

with its flat stem ornamented with porcupine-quill embroidery, and a kettle. These he presented to the Hun-ga gens, through the keepers of the two sacred tents, after he had been appointed to the office by the chiefs. If there was no candidate for the position, the chiefs appointed a man from a sub-gens of the In-kae-tha-bae gens.

The leader having been secured, the principal chiefs, with the newly appointed leader, met in council to decide upon the time of moving out, and the direction to be taken upon the annual hunt. Before the sun was up the food to be used at this council, which must be either buffalo-meat or maize, had been cooked. As the sun rose, the sacred pipes were filled, during the chanting of the appropriate ritual by a member of the In-shta-sunda gens.<sup>1</sup> At this council every man wore an entire buffalo-hide, the hair side outward, the head upon the left and the tail upon the right arm, and sat with bowed head and arms crossed over the breast, this attitude bringing the robe upon the head like a hood. No feathers were worn, and no ornament or article pertaining to war was allowed in the tent. When the council was seated, the sacred pipes were smoked, being passed with much ceremony by two bearers from the Thatada gens—one pipe starting from the head chief, and the other from the official herald, who sat directly opposite at the other side of the lodge. The smoking was in silence, with bowed heads, and after the circle had been completed by both pipes they were handed to the keeper of the ritual, who alone had the right to clean them. Much circumspection was used in handling the pipes, for if by any chance they should fall, death would come to the man who caused the accident.<sup>2</sup> The council was opened by the head chief, who mentioned the terms of relationship between himself and each one present; each man, as he was designated, responding by the term of assent or approval, "Hough!"<sup>3</sup> He then discoursed upon the duties and obliga-

<sup>1</sup>The two sacred tribal pipes in charge of the In-kae-tha-bae gens were always used together. Each had a bowl of red catlinite, and upon the bare, flat stem of one were seven woodpecker heads tied on in line; these represented the seven chiefs comprising the oligarchy. The stem of the other pipe, also flat, was ornamented with porcupine embroidery and one woodpecker head with its bill opened and the upper mandible turned back; and falling from the under side of the stem was a tuft of buffalo hair. This single woodpecker's head represented the unit of authority. As indicated in the mythology of the tribe, the woodpecker was associated with the sun. For the unanimity of authority, see *THE CENTURY* for January, 1893, page 441 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup>This misfortune happened to the last keeper of the ritual; he died within a fortnight, and the ritual died with him. This man had two sons, to whom the ritual would have been intrusted; but they were hasty of

speech and action, and the father hesitated to place within their keeping so sacred a charge. While he hesitated death overtook him, and this ancient ritual, requiring several hours to recite, and containing much of linguistic historical value (as many of its words and phrases have long been obsolete), is now forever lost to the student. It may be interesting to note in this connection that the sub-gens in the In-shta-sunda gens, to which this tribal ritual was confided, survives in only two representatives—a father and son.

<sup>3</sup>Indian custom forbids the mentioning of a person's name in his presence, and no one is ever so addressed. The only exception to this rule among the Omahas is in this particular council to fix the time for the hunt, when the head chief, speaking to the two men from the Thatada gens, calls upon them by name to pass the sacred tribal pipes.



tions of chiefs, and the gravity and importance of the subject they had met to consider, and called upon his associates for their opinions. If, since the last council of this nature, any chief had given way to violence, he did not speak lest he should bring disaster on the people. So long as he remained silent his unchieftainlike conduct would bring trouble only upon himself, whereas any official act might transfer it to the people. After all who desired had spoken, with long intervals of silence, the chosen leader was called upon; his words were generally the consensus of all the others. If there was any difference of opinion, the men must remain in council until unanimity was reached. The official herald then went out and proclaimed the day of departure, while the chiefs remained in their bowed attitudes, and partook of the sacred food served in seven wooden bowls, which passed successively four times around the circle of the company, each man taking a mouthful from a black horn spoon, no one being allowed to touch the food with anything else, not even with his fingers. The sun must go down before this ceremony could be closed and the chiefs could lift their heads (which had remained bowed during the entire council) and go out to their homes. The day for starting out, once fixed, could not be changed, as it would be a lie, and Wakanda would be angry.

Throughout the village the bustle of preparation would set every one stirring, from the old grandfather looking over his odds and ends of possessions, and the busy housewife putting the surplus food and family treasures into raw-hide packs and storing them in caches, down to the children and dogs running hither and thither in the way of everybody. The entire tribe was expected to go out, with the exception of the very old and the sick, who remained at home protected by a few warriors left behind for that purpose.

On the appointed day the boys are off by dawn, scouring the hills, and driving in the ponies, and the sun rises on the busy scene of breaking camp. The first to move out is the leader; he advances slowly, carrying no weapons, but only the *wa-sha-bae*, or staff of his office, its feathers fluttering in the morning breeze.<sup>1</sup> He walks apart in reverent supplication for power to guide the people aright, and lead them by a peaceful way to the prosperity of success.

Then the keepers of the two sacred tents start out with their charge, and decorum marks

the movements of those bearing the pole and the white buffalo-hide in its pack. Care is taken by the families which follow next in line not to press too closely; for, should anything brush against the consecrated articles, disaster would ensue, unless at the first halt the offending thing should be brought with a gift to the sacred tent containing the thing profaned, and there be sprinkled by the keeper with warm water thrown from a spray of artemisia.

Thus led by those dedicated to religious service, the tribe leaves its village, the people by families dropping into line — men, well mounted, bearing their weapons ready for use; women, in gala dress, riding their decorated ponies, older ones leading the pack-horses; little children in twos and threes upon the backs of steady old nags, or snugly stowed away in the swinging pouch between the tent-poles; and the dogs trotting complacently everywhere. Here and there along the line of the cavalcade is a lad being initiated into individual responsibility. He has been upon the hunt before, as one of the family, but this is the first step toward going independently, uncared for as a child. The father has lassoed a wild horse, saddled and bridled him, and now bids his son mount the animal. The boy hangs back; the colt is a fiery creature, and already restive under restraint. The father tells his son that the horse shall be his own when he has conquered it, but the lad does not move. The lookers-on are smiling, and the cavalcade does not wait. "Get up," says the father. The boy slowly advances, and the colt quickly recedes; but the boy, grasping his mane, swings himself into the saddle. The father lets go, and so does the colt — rears, jumps, wriggles, humps his back like an infuriated cat, stands on his fore legs and kicks at his own tail, paws the air and stamps the earth; but the boy clings to him until with a sudden jerk the saddle-girth is broken, and he is landed over the head of the excited creature, which runs for dear life and liberty. Brought back, protesting by twists and shakes of his head, he is again mounted, and again frees himself. After two or three repetitions of this sort of thing, the boy becomes angry, and the mother grows anxious. She runs to her son as he is scrambling up from the ground, feels him all over, and moves his legs and arms to see if he is hurt. He is impatient at the delay; he is going to master that pony now or die for it. This time he stays on. In vain the animal lashes himself into foam

<sup>1</sup> The *wa-sha-bae* is a staff, or badge of office, about eight feet in length, shaped like a shepherd's crook. It is cased in buffalo-hide dressed without the hair, and sewed together with threads of sinew. At the end of the crook hangs a bunch of white feathers from

the bald-headed eagle, and along the staff are fastened golden-eagle and crow feathers. The materials for the *wa-sha-bae* are furnished by the leader, but the Hungas alone has the right to manufacture it.



and fury; the boy sticks to him like the shirt of Nessus, and the father at last leads the indivisible pair between the tent-poles which trail behind a sophisticated family horse, and there, fenced in, they journey all day, trying to get used to each other. The pony does not see his way out of the poles, and is forced to keep up with the procession. At the first halt strife is renewed. The pony jumps over a nest of children slung between tent-poles, and rouses the ire of the dogs. With them at his heels, and the boy on his back, he is an object of terror as well as of mirth to the camp. He goes where he likes. All the boy can do is to hold on; but hold on he does, until at nightfall he dismounts without the aid of the pony. The animal recognizes this as a defeat, and the struggle is over. An admiring uncle presents the boy with a whip, the handle of which, decorated in porcupine-quill work, is terminated by a tassel of elk teeth; and thenceforth he rides his pony with the pride of a conqueror, while the pony himself prances along as if he too were proud of his own part of the performance.

Many similar scenes occurred along the line of march, when more than a thousand men, women, and children, with many more ponies and colts, stretched out over the prairie. The line was guarded on both sides by warriors appointed by the leader to act as soldiers, whose office was not simply to protect, but to prevent any slipping out on a private adventure of any sort.

At the close of a day's journey, at a point designated by the leader, the tribe halted, the tent-poles dropped from the sides of the ponies, and each woman, according to the gens of her husband, set up her tent in its relative position in the Hoo-thu-ga, which shaped itself with marvelous precision and rapidity. The girls ran to the creek for wood and water, men and boys unpacked the ponies and staked them outside the camp, and in an incredibly short time smoke rose from the numerous tents, and the evening meal was ready for the tired multitude.

If it was decided to continue the journey on the morrow, the smoke curled up from the circle of tents beneath the morning stars, and breakfast was over before the half-opened eye of the sun on the horizon line looked along the prairie upon the pleasant scene. Pack-horses were waiting for their loads; the youngsters were impatiently running here and there, intent upon the performance of their little parts. Tent-pins had been loosened, the fronts unfastened, and outside each tent stood a woman grasping the long poles that held the smoke-flaps. The impatient, fluttering canvas broke the slanting sunlight, and every one watched the tent of the leader. When that fell, down dropped the tent covering of the entire camp,

and the naked poles stood stark against the brightening sky, with the busy hives beneath, where all were at work tying up bundles and babies and other items of the family belongings.

When the leader judged that the buffalo were not far off, he selected a number of young men swift of foot and cautious in action, the sons of noted persons, and sent them out as runners to find the game. The herd found, they hastened back, and, coming in sight of the tribe, signaled the people by peculiar waving movements of their robes. If the tribe chanced to be moving, an immediate halt was ordered, and if the signals indicated a favorable report, the wife of the keeper of the pole, wearing the buffalo-robe ceremonially (with the hair outside), took the pole upon her back, and the wife of the keeper of the white buffalo-hide, similarly clothed, took its pack, and the two together went out to meet the runners, who were coming in one at a time. The official herald, also ceremonially clothed, went with them. Arrived beyond the line of the camp, they halted, and the women set up the pole and the pack on their respective supports, and the herald, stepping in front of the pole, sat down with crossed arms and bowed head. The foremost runner arrived and whispered to the pole, over the shoulder of the herald, then stepped aside to the right. A second runner approached and repeated the tidings. Meanwhile a messenger had sped to the leader, who immediately retired to his tent, and remained there until he heard the herald making his way toward the sacred tent of the white buffalo-hide, shouting as he went:

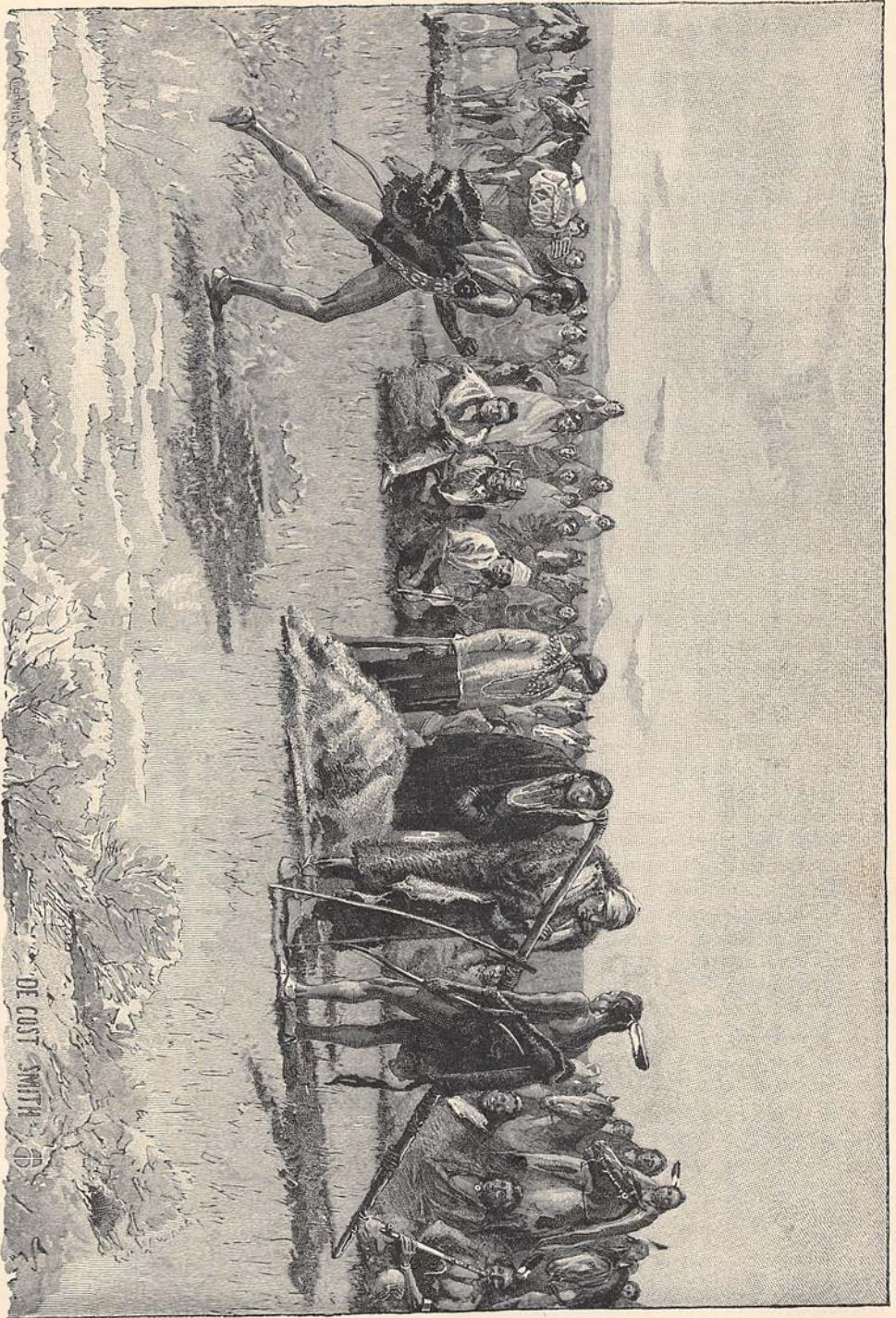
"It is reported that smoke is rising from the earth as far as eye can reach!"

Then the leader also went to the tent to meet the Hun-ga, who had already gathered there with the seven principal chiefs and the herald. Within the sacred tent the chiefs sat with bowed heads, while the leader gave his commands to the herald. The hunters were to go forth; two men were designated to precede the hunters, one to carry the wa-sha-bae, the other the pipe to which the shell disk had been tied;<sup>1</sup> and the herald left the tent, turned to the left, and circled the camp, calling out as he went, in the name of the leader, the command:

"You are to go upon the chase; bring in your horses.

<sup>1</sup> This pipe and the shell disk were provided by the leader when a candidate for the office; the pipe is smoked with religious ceremonial in the sacred tent by the leader, the Hun-ga, and the principal chiefs. The leader did not go personally to the hunt proper, but sent the wa-sha-bae as the badge of his office, and the pipe to symbolize his dependence upon Wakanda; in a word, the two stood for the temporal and spiritual power of his office.





DRAWN BY DE COST SMITH.

THE RETURN OF THE RUNNERS.

DE COST SMITH

ENGRAVED BY C. W. CHADWICK.



"Braves of the In-stha-sunda, Hun-ga-chey-nu,<sup>1</sup> pity me who belong to you!

"Soldiers of the In-stha-sunda, Hun-ga-chey-nu, pity me who belong to you!

"Women of the In-stha-sunda, Hun-ga-chey-nu, pity me who belong to you!"

If the buffaloes had been descried at a distance, the women with the pole and the hide stood in their places until the tribe was ready to move, and then they, with the seven principal chiefs, wearing their robes ceremonially, led the advance to the designated camp. If, on the contrary, the runners had detected the herd in the near vicinity, the women returned to their respective sacred tents, and the soldiers rode about the camp enjoining silence and holding the excitement in check, ordering all dogs to be tied up. If the dogs should bark they must be killed, and if the boys should shout they must be whipped by these officers of the law.

In silence the hunters make ready, every one helping to speed their departure. Each man is attended by one or two mounted boys who lead the fast hunting-horses and the steady old ones to bring in the meat. The bearers of the wa-sha-bae and the pipe are the first to leave the camp, going on together until they come within sight of the herd, where they dismount and sit waiting for the hunters to come up. The soldiers are also there to prevent any one from passing beyond. When all have assembled, the hunters divest themselves of their clothing, with the exception of the breech-cloth and moccasins, toss their discarded garments to the attendant boys, mount their fresh, fleet horses, and are ready to follow the wa-sha-bae and pipe bearers, who now advance, running against the wind, diverging from each other, and, one going to the right and the other to the left, passing entirely around the herd. The hunters, in two parties, follow. When the two bearers meet, the wa-sha-bae is thrust into the ground and the pipe tied to it; this is the signal to the soldiers, who give the word "Go!" and the hunters, with shouts and yells, rush upon the bewildered buffaloes from all sides, shooting, and driving the herd toward the camp. Up to this time, if any one had broken from the ranks, the soldiers would have scourged him back by a whip of small cords on his bare body.<sup>2</sup>

Two boys appointed by the leader have been sitting at the spot where the hunters divided, waiting for the signal of attack. As soon as the

first buffaloes fall they rush toward them, dodging in and out among the men and animals, and in a peculiar manner cut out the tongues and hearts. When they have secured as many as they can string upon their bows, they start for the camp, running a race to the sacred tent of the buffalo-hide, where they deposit their burden, which is to be cooked and eaten at a ceremony to take place that night. Four times during the annual hunt these boys, on foot, with unstrung bows and no arrows, must perform their hazardous task to provide for this repeated ceremony.<sup>3</sup>

The day's hunt over, mingled emotions excited by its changing scenes still linger, to be revived again and again around the camp-fire. The sunlight and shadow on the rolling prairie where the peaceful herd is grazing; the unsuspected environment of the horsemen; the sudden wild tumult of the onslaught; the trampled grass covered with the dead and dying; here a wounded bull shielding with his huge body the frightened cow from a persistent hunter who has spent his quiverful of arrows upon the faithful guardian, and now waits a chance to send his last shaft into the coveted game; yonder the crying calves, seeking their lost mothers — these scenes, compelled by man's necessity, exercise no small influence upon the mind of the Indian, binding, as they do, life and death together in one inexorable bond, and tincturing his thought with a tinge of fatalism. But the practical work of securing the results of the chase is now all-absorbing.

No man was in haste to claim his game the moment it fell, because his arrows had some peculiarity in their decoration by which they could be identified, and later his bullets were marked. The Omahas were expert hunters, and many a man could boast of having sent an arrow clean through one buffalo to lodge in a second beyond.

The flaying and cutting up of the animal takes place upon the field, and the meat and pelts are packed upon the ponies in charge of the boys. The method of skinning and dividing the buffalo, elk, and deer is according to fixed rules: there are twelve cuts, four specified ones, with the hide, belonging to the slayer of the animal. The first man who comes to assist in the cutting up of the game is entitled to his choice of two of the remaining pieces, with the exception of "the breast," which is always the

<sup>1</sup> In-stha-sunda, Hun-ga-chey-nu, are the names of the two sides of the Hoo-thu-ga. This was the manner of addressing the entire tribe. The cry, "Pity me who belong to you," was an appeal to the honor and compassion of the people to avoid all dissensions and imprudences that might bring disaster, since any trouble would fall upon him, the leader, who by virtue of his office represented the people, suffered for them, and was responsible for their welfare even to the sacrifice of his own life.

<sup>2</sup> These soldiers were men known to be intrepid and impartial; no leniency was shown to any one breaking the rules of the hunt; any resistance to the soldiers was severely punished, and cases have occurred where a hunter has been so severely whipped as to be paralyzed.

<sup>3</sup> If one of these boys is seen running toward a fallen buffalo, the slayer of it may not touch his game until the heart and tongue have been secured, as they are to serve a sacred purpose.





DRAWN BY DE POST SMITH.

THE HUNTERS DIVIDING INTO TWO PARTIES TO CIRCLE THE HERD OF BUFFALO.

ENGRAVED BY M. HANDEK.

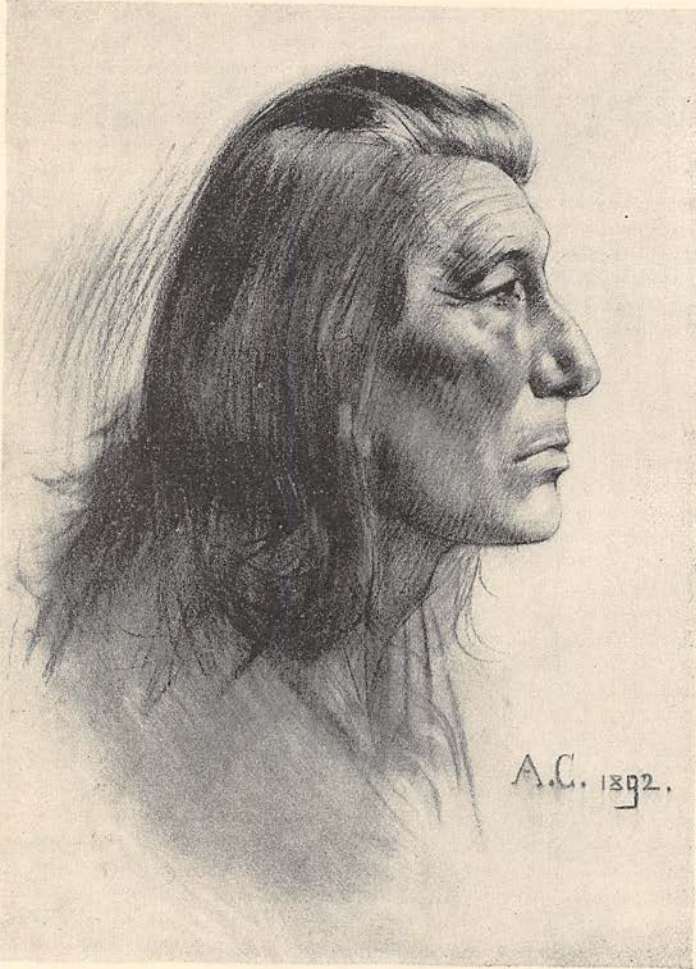


property of the last to give his services. This disposition of the pieces gives opportunities to the poor and the luckless to obtain provision for themselves and their families. If a hunter has borrowed a horse or a weapon, half of his share must go to the owner.

Women never go upon the hunting-field

preferred because of its weight, and the animal is cut and flayed differently from the others.

The tribe was absent upon its hunting expedition about two months, during which time there were many separate hunts,—always four, if possible,—and they were all conducted in the same ceremonial manner.<sup>1</sup> After each



DRAWN BY A. CASTAIGNE.

AN OMAHA INDIAN.

unless to assist a childless husband in taking care of the game. After the laden ponies have reached the camp, the duties of the women begin in the preservation of the meat. They cut the hind quarters into thin slices, and hang them upon frames to dry; the muscle over the ribs is cut in strips, dried, and braided; and when the meat is well cured pemmican is made. The drying or tanning of the skins then requires attention; the summer pelts are used for moccasins, clothing, and tent-covers; for robes and for bedding only the winter skins are used. For the latter purpose the hide of the bull is

hunt the men whose tribal duty it was to serve the sacred tents went out and brought in the wa-sha-bae and the pipe, and delivered them to the leader. When the final hunt was over the wa-sha-bae was left standing in the ground. Its purpose accomplished, it became meaningless.

The annual hunting expedition was full of vicissitudes; the journeys and the camp gave opportunities to the young folk for sports and friendly intercourse not possible at other times. The invisible line dividing the In-stha-sunda

<sup>1</sup> The Omaha hunted the buffalo in this manner on foot before the introduction of horses.



side of the Hoo-thu-ga from the Hun-ga-chey-nu was very clearly defined in the eye of the small boy; it was dangerous to cross that line—it could not be done without a skirmish. If a lad was sent with a message to the opposite side of the camp, his first duty was to collect a strong body-guard; and even with that he sometimes failed to fight his way through. When these juvenile battles waxed too violent, the timely approach of a soldier would cause a scurry to cover to escape his inexorable whip. Good-natured kicking-matches often occurred, in which no boy could kick below the waist, or use his hands either for offense or defense. When outside the camp circle these belligerent boys would join in an amicable chicken-hunt, roasting their game and having a love-feast in some cozy nook beside an improvised camp-fire.

During the journeys it was interesting to note how many saddles would slip on the horses of the young women, and how instantly young men appeared to adjust them, and how exceedingly slow was the operation; or to observe the frequency with which, in the movements of the multitude, certain couples would happen to be thrown together. The shadow of ever-impending danger seemed never to fall upon the young. War-parties might fall upon the people as they traveled, or the camp be attacked, or the horses stampeded; so it behooved the elder man to be always ready, unencumbered, as he rode, of all but his weapons.

When disasters were frequent, or sickness or dissensions came among the people, and there was much trouble, they appealed to the chiefs, saying: "The way is bloody; give us another leader"; and the man was obliged to retire from the office: the favor of Wakanda was not with him. Sometimes the buffalo was hard to find, and the people suffered for food; this also gave cause to depose the leader.

During a certain hunt a half-century ago, the runners could find no buffaloes, and there was nothing to eat. The crying of the hungry children went to the hearts of the chiefs, and sent them to the sacred tent, where, in their ceremonial robes, with bowed heads, they counseled together to find a new leader. They sent for man after man, but no one would take the responsibility. Finally one of the chiefs, noted as a quiet, reverent man, said without raising his head, "It is very hard, but I accept it." At dawn he ordered the camp to go forward and meet the buffalo, while he remained behind

wrapped in the skin of a buffalo calf. No one was there to know what appeals he made, clad in this strange guise, as he wrestled in faith for his people; but the tribe had not gone more than a few miles when they came in sight of a herd. The people made haste to be ready; but the buffaloes came upon them in such numbers that the hunters slew them right and left all that day, until they had more meat than they could cure, and the flies appeared in such swarms that they call the spot to this day "the place where the maggots frightened us."

This leader has been dead forty years. His name and story were told me ten years ago by trusty Indians who knew the man, and shared not only in this experience, but in a similar one when this same man again came to the relief of the tribe. He never served as leader except in such extremities. Occurrences like these threw a glamour about the office of leader, and seemed to give miraculous testimony to the truth of the Indian's belief that whatever happened to a man was in some way the result of his character; consequently, if a man assumed official responsibilities, any good or ill fortune which befell the people was due to the personal relation between their leader and Wakanda. For instance, a man was once leader, and the tribe had nothing but ill fortune under him. After he had been deposed it was discovered that he had committed a murder which had never been atoned for,<sup>1</sup> and this explained to them why no good thing could come to the people through such a man.

The hunts over, the tribe turned homeward; and when within about four days' march of their village the annual ceremony of thanksgiving took place. Sometimes friendly tribes would hunt together, when the invited Indians would fall into the customs, and be present at the public religious ceremonies, of the tribe.

Hunting the deer, elk, or other solitary game, while it developed individual prowess, did not call for associated effort, and consequently had little, if any, influence on the growth of the organization of the tribe; on the other hand, the habits of the buffalo were such as to invite and necessitate the combined action of the people depending upon it for their food. As a result, the tribes living in the buffalo country reached a higher social organization than those outside its limits. The Omaha tribe bore proof within itself that its government had been modified and developed since it came to dwell within the range of the buffalo. From the supremacy of the warrior

<sup>1</sup> Murder was atoned for in two ways: by large and valuable gifts, which were bestowed with certain ceremonies upon the near of kin of the deceased by the offender and his immediate relatives; or else the murderer must suffer exclusion from the tribe for a term of years, living apart, sewed up in hide, and not permitted

to speak to any one but his wife, who could share his exile. He could wear nothing that might wave in the wind, since such movements would attract the attention of the spirits, and trouble that of the man he had murdered.





DRAWN BY DE COST SMITH.

AN OMAHA HUNTER.

ENGRAVED BY C. A. POWELL.

chief it passed to the rule of an oligarchy, in which the attainment of a place was dependent upon the accumulation of property; and those chiefs who reached this high position ceased to be warriors, and became the conservers of peace. The laws which grew up around the buffalo hunt, bred of the exigencies of the tribe and the habits of the animal, were based upon the recognized fact that the rights of the whole people were greater than those of the individual. These laws bore equally upon all, and the Indian comprehended that the con-

tinued existence of the community rested upon the impartial execution of them. It is one of the peculiarities of the American Indian that in grasping the idea of the authority of law, he did not centralize and embody it in a despotic form, but kept it in the ideal, as something to be administered by him only who possessed the requisite ability.

The study of Omaha hunting reinforces the testimony given by other races as to how great a factor the method of obtaining the food-supply has been in the development of social order.

*Alice C. Fletcher.*