

SOME ASPECTS OF THE FOLK-LORE OF THE CENTRAL
ALGONKIN.

BY ALANSON SKINNER.

THE material here presented is the fruit of six summers' field-trips for the American Museum among the Eastern and Plains Cree, the Northern and Plains Ojibwa, and the Menominee, supplemented by the continuous field-work of Mr. John V. Satterlee (himself a Menominee) among his own people and the Potawatomi, Ojibwa, and Ottawa, once of Manitowoc, Wis., now dwelling in the hardwood forests in the northern part of the State.

Additional data on the region and groups near by have been gathered from the classic sources, Riggs, Dorsey, Lowie, Schoolcraft, Blackbird, Copway, Peter Jones, Dr. William Jones, Lasley, and a host of others.

So far as I am aware, nearly all folk-lore the world over is comprised more or less of certain stereotyped concepts and properties set in different fashions on separate stages. In European folk-lore we find the fairy godmother, the imprisoned or enchanted princess, and so on. With them are frequently associated certain objects or properties, so that one never thinks of the witch without her broomstick or her black cat, and the like. Without these concepts and their concomitant properties, a fairy-tale could not be told. This is also true of North America; and, selecting the Lake Algonkin tribes and their neighbors of the same stock, I shall endeavor to give a list of these phenomena. That these properties and concepts are peculiar to the group I do not claim. I know, however, that they are found not only among the Ojibwa, Cree, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Sauk and Fox, and Menominee, but certainly also among some of their Siouan neighbors.

A study of the stereotyped properties utilized in Algonkin folk-lore of the Lakes region is interesting, and may perhaps prove of value in comparison with similar concepts found elsewhere in North America. By "properties" I mean objects found in the possession of, or associated with, the hero, and which are always suggested to the auditors of a story by reference to him, just as the average school-child immediately thinks of the hatchet when George Washington is named. Some of the most famous of these, exclusive of those found only in the culture-hero cycle (which I will not enumerate), are:—

I. THE MAGIC CANOE. — Among Menominee, Cree, and Ojibwa, we find frequent references to this property, generally, but not always,

in connection with the "Evil Father-in-Law" cycle. This is a canoe which goes by itself when its owner raps on its bottom with his paddle, or cries, "Niticmaun, pon!" or "Tcimaun pol!"

2. THE INEXHAUSTIBLE KETTLE. — This is a vessel of almost microscopic size, which usually holds only a single bean or grain of corn and a shred of meat; but, no matter how often it is emptied, it fills itself again until the user is satisfied. It is generally in the possession of an old woman. Variants occur, but always with the idea of inexhaustibility.

3. THE AUTOMATIC KETTLE. — This concept is not so widely known as the preceding. It consists of a kettle, which, at the command of its owner, fills itself, hangs itself over the fire, and cooks food.

4. THE MIRACULOUS PIPE. — A pipe, which, when smoked by the hero, gives forth clouds of turkeys and pigeons instead of smoke, but, when used by the impostor who enchants the hero, produces only dung beetles and flies.

5. THE INVINCIBLE WEAPON. — So far, I have noted this only among the Cree. This is an arrow which never misses.

6. FIRE ARROW. — Cree and Menominee. This is an arrow which sets fire to whatever it strikes.

7. THE SINGING SNOWSHOES. — A man has a pair of snowshoes which, when he is returning from the hunt, precede him, singing like birds, and fly through the smoke-hole into his lodge. Particularly Menominee.

8. BIRD EAR-RINGS. — A somewhat similar idea to the foregoing is that of live birds worn as ear-rings, which also sing. Oak-gall ear-rings occur. Both Menominee.

9. THE FISHER-SKIN MEDICINE-BAG. — Ojibwa and Potawatomi particularly. A bag which throughout the story aids its owner to escape from various disasters, etc.

10. THE ANIMAL-HEAD BALL. — A ball, really a lynx's head, which, when batted or thrown at any object or person, bites it, and brings it back.

11. THE WINKING-CLUB. — Peculiar to the Plains Cree. A club of the ball-headed variety, the knob of which is carved to represent a bird's head, the eyes of which wink from time to time.

12. THE MUMMIFIED DOG. — A dried-up dog which is kept in a box by the hero. When the hero is killed, his widow takes out the dog, which comes to life, collects the bones, and howls over them, and the hero revives. In a Menominee tale, little beavers are kept in a tiny box. When the box is opened, they come and assist the owner.

In addition to these set properties, we have also certain regular types of action. These concepts are also widely distributed. I shall give only a few.

1. **ANIMAL FOSTER-PARENTS.** — A child, lost or deserted by its parents, is adopted and brought up by animals, who impart to it certain of their characteristic powers or attributes, which serve it in good stead later on.

2. **ANIMAL WIFE OR HUSBAND.** — A human being marries an animal, by whom a child is born. One parent or the other finds life with animals or people intolerable, and leaves, taking the offspring, who has supernatural qualities.

3. **THE CONTEST MOTIF.** — More common than either of the preceding are stories woven about contests between either individuals or groups of individuals. These are races, games, or endurance tests.

4. **VIOLATION OF A TABOO.** — A man's familiar enjoins him not to do a certain thing; he disobeys and is punished, often by being turned into an animal.

5. **SUN-SHOVER.** — In order to delay the hero, the villain, to prolong the day, shoves back the sun with his bow.

6. **BEAD-SPITTER.** — As the title implies, the spittle or excrement of the hero is beads.

7. **MONSTER AND THUNDER CONTEST.** — The thunder-birds are constantly at war with the powers beneath, particularly the horned snakes. This occurs frequently in the stories.

8. **THE SACRED DREAMER.** — A man imbued with sacred power performs a series of miraculous acts, usually freeing the world of demons.

9. **THE MONSTER-KILLER.** — This is most apparent in the Lodge Boy and Thrown-away Group. A child or dwarf, usually aided by a twin-brother, destroys many monsters.

10. **THE VENGEANCE MOTIF.** — An animal or some natural force, insulted by a human being, seeks vengeance, which it usually obtains.

11. **THE SKY LOVER.** — A man or woman marries a sky being in human guise, generally only to be deserted in the end.

12. **THE IMPOSTOR.** — A man who overcomes the hero, and takes his place and honors until found out.

Nearly all the tribes in question begin their culture-hero stories with the statement that "the culture-hero was walking" or "traveling," and end them by saying that he has resumed his journey; and many have set facetious formulæ for the close of all other stories. A Plains Cree will say, "The clubs are falling;" a Menominee, "And then I came away."

Certain sets of magic phrases are apt to occur. The hero, in bringing a slain comrade to life, cries out as he shoots an arrow into the air, "Look out, the sky is falling!" or "Is this the way your grandfather did when he went courting?" whereupon the corpse comes to life. Humorous quotations from the culture-hero stories are used as by-words, and every one is cognizant of them.

In the main, the longer stories or fairy-tales of the Menominee, Ojibwa, Potawatomi, Cree, and probably the Ottawa, seem to fall into one class. The types of action are remarkably similar.

The Eastern Dakota possess many elements and not a few entire stories in common with the Ojibwa and Menominee. This is not to be wondered at, as we know they have long been in contact with the Algonkin peoples. With the Ojibwa, it is true, they have nearly always been at war; but they have been uniformly at peace with the Menominee. Menominee warriors joined them against the Sauk and Fox, and even against the Ojibwa. Moreover, the Sioux permitted them to visit the red stone quarry and to gather pipe material. This friendship for the Sioux was unique among the Central Algonkin, all other tribes of the group execrating the Dakota.

It is, therefore, to be supposed that the Algonkin influences came to the Eastern Sioux rather, although by no means wholly, through the Menominee than through the Ojibwa; and Siouan influence made itself felt through the Menominee, so far as the peaceful arts are concerned, more than through the Ojibwa, although a study of the Plains group of the tribe has shown the writer that in their war-customs Siouan influence is manifest.

The Cree, on the other hand, have acquired, and must have brought into the Central Algonkin region, northern currents from the Chipewyan and Eskimo; and although on the west they have introduced elements possibly obtained from the Blackfoot group (by which I mean Blackfeet, Bloods, and Piegan), they have imposed their folk-lore upon the Assiniboin without receiving much in return.¹ On the south we have so far observed no trace of southeastern influence.

Through the Great Lakes fur-trade route we have received from the East undoubted Iroquois influence, though not a great deal; but although long in contact with French and English fur-traders and pioneers, squaw-men and half-breeds, the Central Algonkin as a whole have not absorbed much folk-lore that is European. In fact, the European element is almost, but not quite negligible; and when it does occur, it instantly proclaims its origin by the introduction of such wholly extraneous matter as magic violins, tablecloths, swords, coaches, kings, princesses, castles. A very few tales of possible negro origin occur, and are as easily spotted. Central Algonkin folk-lore is wholly Indian, with rare exceptions, which are always obvious.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY,
NEW YORK CITY.

¹ Lowie, "The Assiniboin" (Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, vol. iv); Skinner, Plains Cree MSS. (obtained in Saskatchewan, 1913). "Notes on the Eastern Cree and Northern Saulteaux" (Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, vol. ix).