



Long ago, before there were any people or animals on this earth, there were two Great Spirits in the Kootenay country. Once when these two Great Spirits were at Kootenay Lake they saw a great animal in the water. One followed this animal down around the Columbia River until they came to what is now known as the Salmon River, near Brisco. The animal went up the Salmon River and here the Great Spirit got his first shot at it. He wounded it badly in the foot so that its blood turned the river red and that stream has been known ever since as the Red River by the Indians. It escaped, however, and returned to Columbia River and continued its course up through Lake Windermere and the upper lake. During this time the other Great Spirit was making his way around the Kootenay River from Kootenay Lake, naming the places as he went. Seeing the great animal, a sea cow, coming up the Columbia he determined to dam the head of the lake, for until that time one could get from the Columbia to the Kootenay by water, and taking hold of a mountain east of Canal Flats with one hand and another near the mouth of Findlay Creek with the other he pulled them down and dammed the head of the lake for a distance of more than a mile. All this time the sea cow was coming rapidly up the lake, so fast, in fact, that it couldn't stop in time and its two horns plowed channels in the grounds when it ran into the dam. These channels can still be seen. Then the Great Spirit killed the sea cow and threw pieces of the meat in all directions, naming the people who would spring from that piece of meat as he did so. These were thrown to the four corners of the earth, and from that time on there has been any number of people in all parts of the land. When all the meat had been thrown the Great Spirits hands were covered with blood, and stooping he pulled handfuls of dried grass, wiped his hands on it and threw it on the ground. As he did so he said, "This will be the Kootenay people; they will never be a big tribe but they will be powerful." As he said this the grass started talking, and from it sprung the Kootenay people to take possession of the land that had been given to them.

Until fairly recent years it was believed by those who had studied these Indians that they had not lived in this part prior to about 1750, but ancient tribal stories I have heard from the older men disprove this theory. The stories show the the Kootenays were here long before horses were known in the North-western States or in Alberta and B.C. Even the Kootenay word for horse would tend to prove this, for although their language is very complete, they had no word incorporated in it to describe a horse. The word for Elk is Khil-Kuhla, the word for dog is kahalchan, and for horse is kuhla - kahalchan, the prefix khil having been dropped. So the horse in Kootenay is described as an Elk-Dog.

The Kootenays have always been known as exceptionally good fighters, perhaps because they were nearly always fighting against stronger tribes and were actually fighting for an existance, When going into battle they stripped to a loin cloth, took advantage of all natural cover, such as trees and rocks, and used the bow and arrows long after the surrounding tribes had been equipped with flint rocks. No doubt this fact played a prominent part in the defeat of their enemies. The principal weapon of the Kootenays was a bow made from the straightened horns of a mountain sheep, ram. This was very powerful and was used only when hunting buffalo and fighting. Their principal enemies were the Blackfeet, Stonies, Sarcees and Crows.

Even after the coming of the white men to these parts the Kootenays were nomads, wandering about the country at will, although they had their favorite camping spots, in most cases near their present Reserves. They were then in two large bands, the Upper Kootenays who lived in this district, and the Lower Kootenays who were canoe Indians and who lived along the lower reaches of the Kootenay river and Kootenay Lake. Ususally the Upper Kootenays went to the foothills of Alberta in the spring to meet the buffalo on their way back north for the summer. A number of animals would be killed, the meat dried and the robes tanned, and the Indians would then return, either by way of the White River Lakes or to their camping ground on Elk River near Natal. When they returned by the White River Lakes country it was usually because they were chased by the Blackfeet or other hostile tribes, for the pass was a difficult one and their enemies were apparently never able to follow them there. They always speak of their camping ground near White Swan Lake as their hideout.

After the spring buffalo hunt the Indians congregated at the mouth of Lake Windermere at what is still known as the spawning beds and speared or netted hundreds of salmon as they came up stream to spawn. From there they usually scattered in small parties to their favorite berry patches, and picked and dried huckleberries and saskatoons for winter use. In the fall there was always another trek to the Alberta foothills to hunt buffalo. Pemmican was made by drying the meat and grinding it fine with stones, the back fat was then rendered out and poured on the dried pulverized meat, which was thoroughly mixed and solidly packed in bags made of raw hide. Sometimes dried huckleberries were mixed with the meat and this was known as the Chiefs Pemmican, because it was eaten by the Chiefs and only by the ordinary members of the band on very special occasions. Dried saskatoons were mixed with the meat for the ordinary members of when huckleberries were not to be had for making the Chiefs Pemmican.

When hunting buffalo the Indians used small, quick horses, very much like polo ponies. These horses were wintered around the Tobacco Plains district, between Flagstone and Eureka, Montana. The late Indian Agent, R.L.T. Galbraith, has told me of seeing as many as five thousand such horses in one band near Tobacco Plains Reserve. The name Tobacco Plains had its origin in the fact that in the old days the Indians raised a variety of wild tobacco there famous among the Kootenays and other tribes. Once, and sometimes twice in each year, the Indians from all over the district met at Tobacco Plains or in the Elk River valley, and sports, such as horse racing, wrestling, running, jumping and competitions with the bow and arrow were held. In almost every case the prize awarded was this dried tobacco, so much prized by the Indians.

Popular opinion among the white people seems to be that the Indians are rapidly dying out, but this is far from fact, for the Indians in Canada are actually increasing, and fairly rapidly too. Certainly until recent years the Indian had had a hard time of it since the coming of the white man, but when one gives the matter careful thought it is not to be wondered at. Until about 75 years ago the Indian was still living in the Stone Age, using knives, hammers, spears, arrow heads and other stone instruments. Apart from roots which were dug in spring and fall and used as food, and the berries that were picked and dried, he subsisted entirely on a diet of meat. For hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, the Indian had been a meat eater. When the white man came, bread, vegetables, grains, and other soft foods were introduced. The Indian liked the white man's food but his system was not accustomed to it. He had always lived in skin teepees, but from the white man he learned to build houses of logs and lumber. These buildings were poorly ventilated and had perhaps one small window, a decided change from the clean teepee with its fresh air, and this, together with the change in diet, apparently weakened the resistance of the Native and he fell an easy prey to the diseases of the white races.

Again, until the coming of the white man, such diseases as tuberculosis, measles and small-pox were unknown to the Indians, and, consequently, they had not built up a resistance to those diseases. As an illustration I may mention that a number of years ago an epidemic of measles swept Lower Kootenay Reserve near Creston, and in a tribe of less than two hundred members, sixty-four died. Proper medical treatment has done much for the Indians in recent years, and tests conducted by Dr. Lamb, Travelling Health Specialist, show that our Kootenay Indians are actually building up a resistance to the dread white plague, and he believes that eventually they will not be any more likely to suffer from the disease than white people. On the other hand, trachoma is a terribly painful eye disease which white people who have suffered from it say almost drives them insane, yet it does not appear to bother the Indians a great deal except that it interferes with their vision and, if not properly treated, may result in blindness. It is largely due to this fact, and that very often one or more members of a family may have the disease and the other members be free from it, although, they have been wide open to infection many times, that Dr. Wall, Trachoma Expert, believes that trachoma is a new disease to the white but that it has been among the Indians for hundreds of years, and they have, consequently, built up a resistance to it.

I'm sure that everyone present has heard and read stories of the Indian medicine men, for many stories have been written although very few of the authors have had any real knowledge of the facts. The medicine man has, in the past, played such an important part in the lives of the members of his tribe that no one who has been among them any length of time or who has any knowledge of the Indians will ever dream of treating the real medicine man as a joke, they realize that it is a serious matter, one that must be dealt with carefully and diplomatically. This applies also to the African and other primitive people who practice forms of what actually is "Black Magic". I speak of the medicine man's rites as "Black Magic" because he invariably endeavors to use his power for evil purposes, such as placing a curse on his enemy and trying to bring about his death or disability, either out of pure spite or to strengthen his own position in the tribe. A word here as to some of the practices of the medicine man may be of interest!

One of the ceremonies, and one that is well known in many countries, is the heating of stones until they are red hot and then walking over them in their bare feet. Mutilation of the body was also one of their rites in the old days, but this has been stopped by the white man. Another performance put on by the medicine man is to strip off all of his clothing and go out in the snow and remain there for an hour or more in sub zero weather. On special occasions he will heat a small stone until it is red hot, place it under his arm and then go out in the snow, and Indians of the more intelligent sort have told me in all seriousness that they have seen him return after being out in sub zero weather entirely naked for one or two hours and they swore that the stone was still so hot that they could not hold it in their hands. One outstanding instance which happened but a few years ago was that of a medicine man on St. Mary's Reserve. One of the younger, and perhaps the most intelligent Indian on the Reserve, happened to call at his home while he was making medicine and stayed out of curiosity to watch what he considered a foolish performance. During the ceremony the medicine man fell in a fit and lay for more than ten minutes with his body on a bed and his feet on a red hot stove, and this young Indian said that what really puzzled him was that when he later examined the man's feet there wasn't even a sign of them having been scorched.

It is easy for us to say that these things cannot happen, but they actually have happened in the past and, in many tribes, are still happening today. That the other members of the tribe fear the medicine man goes without saying, but the Church has done a great deal towards stamping out these evil practices and the power of the medicine man is fast passing away, although even in very recent months I have had Indians come to me in fear and trembling, begging me to advise them as to what to do to offset this evil influence, this when they believed someone was making medicine against them. Apart from the Church perhaps the greatest influence working against the medicine man is that the younger

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and more intelligent Indians realize that he is, in practically every case, the poorest man in the tribe, that he is never really prosperous and is generally in actual want. They appear to realize that although he has certain powers, more or less mysterious to them, that those powers can be used only for evil purposes, never for good, and that their rites are strictly against the teachings of the Church, which is exercising more and more influence over them as time goes on.