

Teton Folk-lore Notes

by J. Owen Dorsey (1848-1895)

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FRANZ BOAS
T. FREDERICK CRANE J. OWEN DORSEY
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TETON FOLK-LORE NOTES.¹

THE cockle-burr is called *wi nawizi*, or jealous woman, because it takes hold of a man. When a Teton covered with these burrs enters a lodge, the other inmates ridicule him, saying, "Oho! you have a jealous wife." The thistle (*Carduus*) is called the *toka hu* or enemy plant. The Tetons attack it just as they would an enemy, beating it down, and giving the cry of triumph, "A^a-he!"

They believe that an elk can sing, and that he has a flute-like voice.

Wolf-Lore.—The man who met the ghost woman after fleeing from the two ghost men encountered a wolf, who pitied him and showed him the way to a camp, where he was received and adopted into the tribe. This man always remembered the wolf as a kind animal, and when he killed any game, he threw a portion outside of the camp, as an offering to the wolf.

There was once a handsome young Teton, whose wife's father disliked him and plotted against him. He dug a pit within his lodge, covering it with skins. Then he invited his son-in-law to a feast. The son-in-law met a wolf, whom he saluted, asking him the way to the village. The young man was persuaded to recline on the skins, which gave way, precipitating him into the pit. The father-in-law and his two single daughters covered the skins with earth, and removed their tent elsewhere on the morrow, when all the people started on a journey. After some days, the wolf who had met the man went to the deserted camping-place in search of food. On reaching the place where the accident (?) had happened, he heard a human cry. So he dug away the earth, removed the skins, and found the man, whom he recognized. The wolf pitied him, and said, "As you did not kill me when we met, you shall now be saved." So he howled, and very soon many wolves appeared. They found a lariat, which they lowered into the pit, and by grasping the other end with their teeth, they pulled the man up. He was very grateful, promising never to harm a wolf. Just then a weeping woman appeared, gazing in surprise at the man, as he was very thin, looking like a ghost. She was his wife, and her heart was soon made glad when he told her of his rescue.

Once upon a time a man found a wolf den, into which he dug to get the cubs. The mother came, barking, and she finally said to him,

¹ Extracts from a paper read before the Anthropological Society of Washington, in November, 1888, entitled *Teton Folk-Lore*. Translated from the Teton MSS. of George Bushotter by J. Owen Dorsey. Part of this paper appeared in the *American Anthropologist*, vol. ii., No. 2, and another part in *Science*.

"Pity my children;" but he paid no attention to her. So she ran for her husband, who soon appeared. Still the man persevered. Then the wolf sang a beautiful song, "O man, pity my children, and I will instruct you in one of my arts." He ended with a howl, causing a fog. When the wolf howled again the fog disappeared. Then the man thought, "These animals have mysterious gifts," and he tore up his red blanket into small pieces, which he put as necklaces on the cubs, whom he painted with Indian red, restoring them to their place in the den. Then the grateful father exclaimed, "When you go to war hereafter, I will accompany you, and bring to pass whatever you wish." So they parted as friends. In the course of time the man went on the war-path. As he came in sight of a village of the foe, a large wolf met him, saying, "By and by I will sing, and you shall steal their horses when they least suspect danger." So they stopped on a hill close to the village, and the wolf sang, after which he howled, making a high wind arise. The horses fled to the forest, many stopping on the hillside. When the wolf howled again the wind died away, and a mist arose; so the man took as many horses as he pleased.

All the wolf stories belong to the Wolf Society, called Dog Society by the white people. That society has many beautiful songs, and its membership is confined to the young men.

Spider-Lore. — The Tetons pray to gray spiders, and to those with yellow legs. When a person goes on a journey, and a spider passes, one does not kill it in silence. For should one let it go, or kill it without prayer, bad consequences must ensue. In the latter case, another spider would avenge the death of his relation. When the spider is met the person must say to it, "Ikto'mi Tun-kan'-shi-la, Wa-kin'-yan ni'-kte-pe lo', O Grandfather Spider, the Thunderers kill you!" The spider is crushed at once, and his spirit believes what has been told him. His spirit probably tells this to the other spiders, but they cannot harm the Thunderers. If one prays thus to a spider as he kills it, he will never be bitten by other spiders.

Ikto or Iktomi (in Teton) and Unktomi (in Santee) are the names now given to the spider by the Dakotas, but the name belonged to a mythical hero, the Ictinike of the Omahas and Ponkas, and the Ictciñke of the Iowas and Otos. Ikto, say the Tetons, was the first being who attained maturity in this world. He is more cunning than human beings. He named all people and animals, and he was the first to use human speech. Some call him the "Mocker" or "Monkey" (with which compare an African belief about monkeys having the gift of human speech). If we see any peculiar animals at any place, we know that Ikto made them so. All the animals are his kindred, and they are obliged to act just as he commanded them at the

they make lightning, and they have wings. They can kill various mysterious beings, as well as human beings. Their ancient foes were the giant rattlesnakes, and the Un-kche-ghi-la, or water monsters, whose bones are now found in the bluffs of Nebraska and Dakota. Long ago, the Tetons encamped by a deep lake, whose shore was inclosed by very high cliffs. They noticed that at night, even when there was no breeze, the water in the middle of the lake was constantly roaring. When one gazed in that direction he saw a huge eye as bright as the sun, which caused him to vomit something resembling black earth moistened with water, and death soon followed. That very night the Thunderers came, and the crashing sounds were so terrible that many people fainted. The next morning the shore was covered with the bodies of all kinds of fish, some of which were larger than men, and there were also some huge serpents. The water monster which the Thunderers fought resembled a rattlesnake, but he had short legs and rusty-yellow fur.

Kan-ghi-ta-me, stones resembling coal, are found in the Bad Lands, and they are said to be the missiles of the Thunderers. When a person dreams of the Thunderers it is a sign that he and they must fight. The Thunderers are said to have beautiful songs.

When it stops raining, lizards, frogs, and toads drop from the clouds.

In the olden times there were many large and venomous flying serpents. So the people had to wear garments of thick skins sewed on them, as the mere touch of one of these serpents caused sudden death. Many people were thus killed.

Once upon a time some people camped by a large, deep lake. Everything there was of abnormal size; *e. g.*, the turnips were as large as our pumpkins, and the serpents' bodies seemed like the frunks of large trees; the frogs were as large as men of the human race; and under the water were giant people as well as huge turtles. An Indian who leaped on one of the turtles when it was on a hill thought it could not harm him, but it carried him into the lake, and, to his horror, he could not jump off in time, as his feet seemed glued to its back. From that time every one has refused to swim in that lake, or to fish therein.

Astronomical-Lore. — Ho-ke-win-la is a man who stands in the moon with outstretched arms. His name is said to mean "Turtle Man." When the Tetons see a short man with a large body and legs, they generally call him "Ho-ke-la," after the man in the moon.

The Tetons do not like to gaze at the moon, because at some past time a woman, who was carrying a child on her back, gazed a long time at the moon, till she became very weak, and fell senseless.

No Teton dare look at the stars and count even "one" mentally. For one is sure to die if he begin to count the stars and desist before

shape. A small grizzly bear used to come out of his mouth and pass around the circle. Sometimes it was a serpent that came out, instead of the small bear. When either (or both?) came out the man fell to the ground, as if almost dying, so they soon returned into his mouth, when he recovered.

The Flying Santee.— A certain father, who had just buried his beloved son, had been warned about one thing. It was said that a Santee usually went flying about the country, and he managed to steal the tongue of every dead person, whether the bodies were buried or placed on scaffolds, and that he mixed the tongues with medicine or else strung them together, when he had dried them, wearing them ("chu-ti-ch'in") over his right shoulder, across the breast, and under the left arm.

So when night came, the father thought, "Well, I will take my gun and lie by the grave of my son, and if the Santee comes I will kill him, have his body boiled, and invite some of the Santees to a feast. Then he was weeping again. Night came, and he lay under the scaffold. It was dark. He heard an owl hoot, making the woods resound, and then the father ceased weeping and was lying in silence. At length some large object flew to the scaffold and sat down by the bodies. He had just taken hold of the head of the dead youth, and would have pulled it to pieces, when the father shot at him and brought him to the ground. He dragged the corpse to his lodge, and that very night he commanded the women to boil part of it and hide the other part. The head was cut off with a knife and put in a bowl. The fingers and feet were tied to the medicine pack, with the string of tongues.

After daybreak the father sent invitations to some Santees to come to his lodge and bring their bowls. When they had eaten what he had given them, he said: "This is part of what you have eaten," and he pushed toward them a human head and a hand that were in a bowl. Then all were excited, saying, "Wa'-ho-ho-ho'!" From that time the Tetons have been feared by the Santees both by day and night, and the former do not respect the latter.

The Double Woman.— In the olden times there was what they called "Win-yan nun-papi-ka," or The Double Woman, consisting of two very tall females, who were probably connected by a membrane. They dwelt in a lodge on a very high black cliff. They were always laughing immoderately, as if they were strangers to sorrow. On pleasant evenings they stood on a hill, where they amused themselves by swinging. Should any Indian see them, when he reached home he vomited something resembling black earth, and died suddenly. These women were skilful dancers, and they used to reflect rays of light by means of their mirror, just as the young Indian men do in sport. They jumped many times and sang this song: —



Che'-pan-shi ku - wa' - ni - to' Tu'-wa le'-chi shi'-na mi'-cho-ze'.

“Cousin, please come over here! Some one waves a robe over in this direction at me. Ha! ha! ha!” Then they walked about. No one knew from what quarter the Double Woman was coming, and how the two lived was a mystery. There are many tall women found now among different Indian tribes who imitate the behavior of the Double Woman.¹

Bushotter's 72d story is about a man who could lengthen his arm or body, making them extend as far as he desired. His 81st story is about this earth. The Tetons believe that the hills were made to be the braces or supports of this earth when it is to be turned upside down. Then the Indians will dwell in darkness in the valleys beneath the hills. When the earth turns over it will do so slowly at first, then there will be a great noise. The people will catch hold of something between the earth and the sky, but they will fall down, down. On account of the apprehended disaster men say, “As it must be so, I will engage in war, so that I may smell of weapons when I am dead.”

Deer women of the Tetons resemble the Wolf women of the Pawnees. Both tempt unwary youths whom they encounter away from the camp in solitary places. Should a youth yield to the woman's solicitations the result will be a sad one. As soon as he leaves her she will resume her natural shape. The youth will appear as if drunk or insane, and he will reach home with difficulty. His health will become impaired, and he will soon die. So now the hunters avoid any female that they see on the way. They hate the Deer women. The Deer women never speak, but in all other respects they resemble Indian women.

F. Owen Dorsey.

¹ John Bruyier and other Tetons at Hampton, Va., regard this story of the Double Woman as manufactured by Bushotter. But this character figures in two Santee myths in Rev. S. R. Riggs's collection, about to be published by the Bureau of Ethnology. — J. O. D.