Canadian Indians Live By Hunting

Anthropology

By JOHN M. COOPER

Dr. Cooper is professor of anthropology at the Catholic University of America.

When the white man first came to what is now the eastern United States, the Indians he met east of the Mississippi and south of the Great Lakes lived mostly the life of primitive farmers, their chief staple being corn or maize as ours is wheat. North, however, of a line formed roughly by the St. Lawrence, the Ottawa, and Lakes Huron and Superior, the forest Indians were and are of markedly simpler culture, being among the lowliest on the whole American continent.

These far northern tribes were strangers to the hoe and digging stick. They grew no maize or beans or squash as did their neighbors to the south, but lived, as they live today, chiefly upon the flesh of moose and caribou, of deer and bear, and of the smaller furred and finned and feathered denizens of the woods and waters. A few wild berries and roots helped vary their diet just a little. They were nomad hunters then. They are nomad hunters still, without trace of agriculture of any kind. In so far, they are living today on about the same lowly culture level on which lived many thousand years ago our own early prehistoric European ancestors of the caves and river drifts.

They have no villages, no roads, no domestic animals, except the dog. Travel is by canvas or birch bark canoe in summer, by snowshoes and toboggan in winter. Until recent years the toboggan, now drawn by dogs, used to be drawn by manpower. Many families or whole bands still live winter as well as summer in primitive conical or loaf-of-bread shaped bark wigwams. These flimsy shelters are made of a framework of poles covered with overlapping rolls of birchbark, an opening being left at the top to let out the smoke. In these wretchedly draughty lodges the natives live through the bitter cold of winter, when the mercury often goes down to forty or fifty or sixty degrees below zero. Heavy blankets and coats of woven strips of rabbit skin help a little, but not enough. And inured as the northern Indian is to exposure and hardship, he suffers keenly from the piercing winter cold.

His whole culture is marked by extreme simplicity. Simplicity of culture is, however, one thing. Stupidity and savageness are quite another. The northern Indian is neither stupid nor savage. Far from it.

In his life work, his trade of hunting and trapping, he is an expert whom few white men can equal. He has an intimate knowledge of the surrounding animal and plant life. In addition he has well established social institutions built upon his hunting life.

During the winter, which is not yet ended in northern Canada, the Indians are scattered all over the wilderness in little isolated family groups. They are not, however, scattered at random, nor do they hunt and wander at will. Each tribe has its own well defined tribal territory, and each family has its own equally well defined family hunting ground within the tribal territory. The tribal territory may cover an area of many thousands of square miles, while the family hunting ground will ordinarily cover from a hundred to five hundred square miles. The northern woods look like no-man's land to us, for there are no fences or other artificial boundary marks, but in reality the land is as rigidly divided into tribal and family sections as are our own rural districts into townships and farms. And no Indian may trap or hunt, without leave, on another Indian's hunting ground.

The northern Indian can, when he wishes, show foresight. Nor is he lacking in resourcefulness. An illustration may bring home the point.

An Indian of the region north of Lake Superior accidentally dropped an ice chisel through a hole he was cutting in the ice on a lake. The water at the point was about thirty feet deep. The Indian needed that ice chisel and he needed it badly, and he had to think. He did. He knew that it had gone to the bottom and was resting upright, for it was a long pole with a heavy iron-pointed spike at the end. So he took a long piece of fish line and tied a sinker to one end of it. Then he tied another cross line to the fish line a couple of feet from the sinker, and on the free end of this cross line he tied a live fish. He then lowered the whole contraption into the water at the precise point where he had dropped the ice chisel, and left it there for a day. The tied live fish had to swim, and naturally swam in circles and so wound the cross line around the fish line and shaft of the ice chisel. The next day the Indian returned and pulled up fish line, sinker, cross line, fish, and ice chisel, —the cross line being beautifully wound round the shaft of the ice chisel. And this is no fish story. It is an ice chisel story, from real life.

The northern Indians are not saints, it is true, but they are very far indeed from being savage. In the olden times they used to abandon the aged and infirm who could not keep up with the band on the hard winter's trek. Their morals left much to be desired, and in most places do still. But taking these primitive tribes as they stand, they compare quite favorably with their white brethren, if that is not damning them with faint praise.

They are scrupulously honest, except where contact with the white man has spoiled them. You can leave anything you possess anywhere you please for any length of time, and though a hundred Indians pass that way and see your property, they will never think of touching it. In many years among them I have never lost a single article, however insignificant, and I have never taken any special pains to hide or protect my belongings. They just do not steal. It is not their custom. A couple of years ago, in inquiring about their system of child training, I asked an old squaw at Fort Albany on James Bay what would be said to a boy six years old by his parents if they detected him stealing a fish from another family's wigwam. She thought for a brief moment and replied: "A boy six years old would not steal."

They are a kindly and peaceful people, not given to violence. I have never heard of a murder among them. And only once have I ever observed a fight, when they were sober. Even the boys do not fight. For days and weeks we have traveled together, through rain and storm, wind bound and tide bound, poling up rushing rapids, tracking along rocky shores, portaging over swampy trails with packs and canoes grinding on our shoulders, and never yet have I heard a word of impatience nor noted any visible sign of anger or chagrin. Losing one's temper is against their code. It is not done.

Among those they know they are given to much (*Turn to next page*)

Mexico's Race Problems Foreseen

Ethnology

The problems of race and color which have arisen in parts of the United States from the presence of Mexican immigrants are of greater importance than the economic aspects of the situation, in the opinion of Dr. Manuel Gamio, Mexican anthropologist, because they may profoundly influence the destinies of the peoples bordering on the Pacific.

As Dr. Gamio explains, these Pacific peoples fall into three main groups, the White, the Yellow and the Yellow-Brown. To the White group belong the racial majorities of Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Chile, in addition to the racial minorities of the countries from Lower California to southern Peru and Chile. The Yellow people inhabit China, Japan, Manchuria, Indo-China, and the adjacent islands, while the Yellow-Brown make up the racial majorities in Mexico, Central America, Columbia, Ecuador and Peru.

Because the Asiatic and the native American Indian races are anthropologically very close, spontaneous crossing takes place wherever these groups are in contact, as on the Latin-American coasts where unions of Indians with Chinese and Japanese are frequent. The White race on the other hand, especially the Anglo-Saxon White, is less prone to cross with the Yellow or Yellow-Brown.

Because the White and Yellow groups of the Pacific countries are increasing very rapidly in numbers and strength, while at the same time means of communication are improving, Dr. Gamio believes that sooner or later boundaries must fade and aggressive or peaceful contacts result.

The Indo-Iberic countries which occupy the now sparsely settled regions of Latin America must either become White under intense European immigration, or else form a new Yellow-Brown complex in case of sufficient Asiatic influx.

In case of great future immigration into Mexico of southern Europeans, Mexico would become progressively more White and racial prejudices would become relatively insignificant.

On the other hand, if such European immigration does not invade Mexico wholesale and the native element prevails, racial prejudices will continue and the Americanization of the country will proceed more slowly, that very racial prejudice serving as a barrier in the future as it has in the past.

European immigration never has turned serious eyes to Mexico as it has to the United States and Argentina, primarily because, Dr. Gamio says, Mexico is not a country of great agricultural possibilities, as is indicated by the fact that only from seven to eight per cent. of the land may be readily cultivated. The dry mesetas and deserts of the north have little or no rainfall, and another large portion of the country is mountainous and hard to till, while the fertile tropical coasts are unhealthy and infested with insect pests.

Though rich in raw materials, Mexico is insignificant industrially, offering few opportunities to European artisans and laborers, while these furthermore find it hard to compete with the low standards of living of the native. Nevertheless existing immigration restrictions of the United States and Argentina must eventually divert part of the European immigration streams to Mexico and similar countries, Dr. Gamio believes, although this has not yet made itself felt. The incoming balance of Mexico now amounts to only a few thousand individuals a year.

Science News-Letter, November 9, 1929

Canadian Indians—*Continued*

talk and good-natured banter, and an accident to some one in the party who slips in the water up to his waist will furnish amusement for an hour and a day. Home life is admirable. Between husband and wife there is a very equitable division of labor and a very democratic relationship of equality. Both parents are extremely fond of and affectionate towards their children, and as among most other American Indians, children are rarely or never struck or whipped.

The northern Indians are neither mental prodigies nor moral paragons, but taking them all in all, these gentle, kindly, low-voiced hunters of the Canadian forests are men whom one can be proud to have as friends. To live among them is to both like and respect them. They go to show that simple living can go hand in hand with high thinking, that a very low level of material culture may go hand in hand with a relatively high level of mental capacity and of social and spiritual attainment.

We have no means of knowing directly much about the higher social and spiritual life of our own ancestors of the caves and river drifts. But if we can judge at all from the primitive nomad hunters that still live the material life they lived, the chances are our forebears of the caves and river drifts were fairly decent and intelligent members of the human family.

Science News-Letter, November 9, 1929

It has been found that in Iowa 200 boys and girls in each county are leaving the country for the city every year.

Two-thirds of the young doctors graduated from medical schools in the United States this year held college degrees as well as medical.

The first attempted flight across the Atlantic was undertaken in 1873, in a balloon named the Graphic, which started from Brooklyn and landed in a storm at New Canaan, Connecticut.

Blind Good Listeners

Psychology

Blind persons do not hear better, they simply seem to because they listen harder, Mrs. Winifred Hathaway of the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness told members of the Michigan Educational Institute. The popular belief that blind people have more acuity of other senses, such as hearing and touch, is not exactly correct. The special senses of blind people, aside from sight, are no better in the beginning than those of other people, sometimes not as good. But experience and specialization on the part of the blind persons enable them to make their other senses take the place of sight, so that their senses are better developed than those of normal people. The same thing applies to deaf persons who appear to have much keener vision than normal.

Science News-Letter, November 9, 1929

Although American farmers aer milking 4,000,000 fewer cows than they did ten years ago, the volume of milk production is maintained by use of better cows.