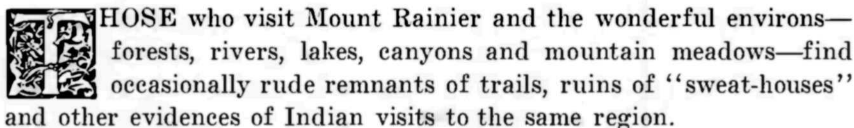
MOUNT RAINIER IN INDIAN LEGENDS

EDMOND S. MEANY



HOSE who visit Mount Rainier and the wonderful environs—forests, rivers, lakes, canyons and mountain meadows—find occasionally rude remnants of trails, ruins of "sweat-houses" and other evidences of Indian visits to the same region.

"What did those primitive people think of these wonders?"

Such instant questioning by present-day visitors is perfectly natural. It is but a mind-step back from our intense interest in the experiences of the first white explorers who ventured to the snow and ice above the forests. It was an important and useful achievement to put into permanent record, even though in brief form, the impressions of the earliest pioneers to visit the mountain. These messages were published in THE MOUNTAINEER for December, 1915, pages 45 to 53. Two of the visitors were General Hazard Stevens and P. B. Van Trump, who in 1870 made the first successful ascent. Another was Professor Bailey Willis, who made explorations in 1883 and for whom Willis Wall was named. Ben Longmire wrote about his grandfather, James Longmire, who discovered Longmire Springs. Major E. S. Ingraham wrote about his many visits to the glaciers and the summit. H. M. Sarvant, whose name is attached to a glacier near Summerland, tells of a camping experience on Tolmie Peak. Professor J. B. Flett records his first trip to the mountain and Professor Charles V. Piper tells of a narrow escape. In the fifteen years since those messages were gleaned, four of those eight pioneers have passed away. There are probably not now living any of the Indians who visited the mountain in the pristine days before the white pioneers ventured there.

Evidence is abundant that to the Indian the mountain was a place of awe and mystery. Sluiskin was the Indian guide for General Hazard Stevens and P. B. Van Trump when they made the first successful ascent. His hunting had made him familiar with the lower slopes, but he would not accompany his two white friends any higher than the first wall of snow and ice. They camped where the Paradise Glacier was then pouring its newly-made river over a cliff to the valley below. There the Indian in a passionate speech in the Chinook jargon tried to persuade his friends not to risk their lives by going up to the summit where a demon chief made his home in a lake of fire. That speech was later committed to memory by Oregon's former congressman, M. C. George. In 1915, General Hazard Stevens made an English translation and both were published in my *Mount Rainier—A Record of Explorations*, pages 132-134. It is pleasing to add that the two

white climbers, when they had safely returned to the frightened Indian at camp, game Sluiskin's name to the beautiful waterfalls.

In more recent times a confusion arose in newspapers to the effect that the old Chief Sluskin (name slightly different) of the Yakimas was the same who had guided Stevens and Van Trump. This was an error. His true story was recorded by Lucullus V. McWhorter in the *Washington Historical Quarterly,* Volume VIII, pages 95-101. This old Indian had guided other white men to the mountain, but he denied any fear of the demons there.

Another bit of evidence of the Indians' reverence for the mountain is the title, *The Mountain That Was God,* chosen by John H. Williams for his book published in Tacoma in 1910.

There are undoubtedly many Indian legends relating to Mount Rainier. Three will be considered here, two of which will be cited in well-known publications, and the third, a brief one, will be added as I got it from the Indians.

The first and greatest of these legends to be recorded is that of Hamitchou, a sort of Rip Van Winkle, who found on the summit a fabulous wealth of hiaqua, Indian shell money. In making the original record Theodore Winthrop wrote: "Hamitchou, a frowzy ancient of the Squallyamish [Nisqually people], told to Dr. Tolmie and me at Nisqually, a legend of Tamanous and Tacoma, which, being interpreted, runs as follows." He then gives the legend in full in his justly famous book, *The Canoe and the Saddle.* That book has appeared in many editions. The one I have used was published by the John W. Lovell Company of New York and carried a copyright notice by Ticknor and Fields, 1862. Winthrop's book is the first one to declare that the Indian name for the mountain was Tacoma. His Chapter VII is headed "Tacoma," and in that chapter he gives the Legend of Hamitchou. The entire legend reappears, of course, in the beautifully illustrated and extended edition of the book published by John H. Williams in Tacoma, 1913. From Winthrop's own edition I reproduced his chapter containing the Hamitchou legend in my book, ***Mount Rainier—A Record of Explorations,*** pages 34-72.

The second of these legends is entitled "The Origin of Mounts Baker and Rainier, the Indian legend," by Dr. Charles M. Buchanan, and is published in THE MOUNTAINEER, December, 1916, pages 32-35. This relates that Kulshan (Mount Baker) had two wives, Duh-hwahk and Whaht-kway. The first of these wives became jealous and thought to regain affection by leaving home. She traveled far and stretched high into the air to catch the expected signal to return. That signal never came and Duh-hwahk developed into Mount Rainier at her distant station.

The third legend I obtained from a small Indian school girl. She

was sitting on the porch of her cabin home on the Skokomish Indian reservation. She couldn't remember the long and difficult names to make the legend complete, but when I persuaded her to tell me one of the stories her mother had told her, she responded with charming diffidence:

"Mount Rainier was not always in the place now occupied. Long, long ago that great mountain was on this western shore of Hood Canal, not far from Quilcene, and standing by the side of Mount Constance. The two mountains, side by side, were the wives of one man. Jealousy came into that home. Mount Rainier, becoming very angry, gathered up a lot of food and started on a long journey, to leave her home. As she passed the Skokomish River, she dropped some of her food. It was a piece of salmon and fell into the river. That is the reason that ever since that time the salmon run up the Skokomish River. As the mountain went on further she dropped some more of her food on a prairie near Olympia. It was a camass root, and since then those bulbs have always been found there. Becoming tired of traveling, the mountain settled down, where she has always remained since that time. She has not forgotten her anger. Whenever there is thunder and lightning it is because these two wives are quarreling. Once fire came down the side of Constance and burned the trees. That fire was thrown on to her head by Rainier."

I was certanly grateful to that little girl for reciting to me from her memory that quaint legend of her people. Four years later, in 1909, I enjoyed a visit from Henry Allen, whose mother was a Twana, of Skokomish, the same tribe to which the little girl belonged. He told me the same legend, saying that Docewollops was the husband of the two wives. When the jealous or angry wife left there remained a great hole in the Olympics, which can be seen now near Quilcene. On leaving, the angry one tore the breasts from her rival and threw them to the ground. These are now identified as two rounded points that jut into the water at Jackson Cove, near Quilcene. Mr. Allen related that the other Olympic hills are the children of Docewollops' two wives. He also said that the angry one who became Mount Rainier dropped in her flight from home squaw-grass on the hills, fish in the rivers and camass on the prairies.