

## CHAPTER II.

### INDIAN SUPERSTITIONS.

PREPARED AND READ BY REV. P. F. HYLEBOS.

Tacoma, the monarch of mountains, to the student unfolds an object lesson of nature's perfect work; to the artist it pictures a bright landscape of unsurpassed beauty; to the emigrant just arriving on the wave washed shores of Puget Sound, it portrays a mighty king robed in the ermine of perpetual snow, crowned with the golden rays of the sun, and sublimely reigning over the wealthy woods, the rich valleys and plains of Washington; to the native born son of the forest it answers the idea of a god.

On clear days it seems to be three or four miles away from the City which bears its name, but in reality the distance is sixty miles and its height being 14,528 feet, it can be seen for over one hundred miles away.

Near its base Douglas fir abounds, many of the trees growing to a height of two hundred feet, or even more, and they are interspersed with dozens of mineral springs whose temperature ranges from fifty to ninety degrees.

The weary mountaineer who climbs its rugged sides gets an occasional peep at the mountain goats and finds an abundance of wild flowers, botanists having gathered and classified over four hundred varieties, and at the same time his astonished eye is struck with the not uncommon vision of numerous glaciers between beautiful parks and valleys. At a height of seven thousand feet, timber gives way to perpetual snow, and as the glaciers descend from the snow fields, they present all the characteristics of those of the Alps or the Pyrenees, and their precipitous crevasses are as striking and as worthy of close study as those of Mount Blanc or Monta Rosa groups.

The combination of ice scenery with woodland scenery of the grandest type, is to be found nowhere in the world, unless it be in the Himalayas, and although fairly well acquainted with the many mountains of the new world, I dare say the American

Continent offers nowhere such a wonderful structure of nature's grandest and most awe-inspiring accomplishments.

Last among these we must mention an immense crater in which there are steam jets still showing the heat of an extinct volcano that must have been in full eruption in the far back ages of the past. With the use of a rope one hundred feet long, this crater was recently measured. It was found to be one thousand six hundred feet from East to West and one thousand four hundred and fifty feet from North to South.

Sometimes clouds of steam spouting forth from it, can still be seen many miles away, and it is the heat of this steam that makes lichens grow at the crater's rim, whilst two different species of mosses find warm lodgment on the many surrounding volcanic rocks that serve to tell the last tale of bygone volcanic eruptions. Geologists and mountain climbers of note, after a weary day's journey, have spent a restful night in the temperate mouth of the crater, and felt perfectly safe.

As already mentioned, this beautiful Mount Tacoma, the white robed king of all the primeval attractions of the wild and unsettled Northern Pacific Coast, was once worshipped by the Indians, for they thought it was God. They often visited the mountain and marvelled much at nature's rare and varied beautiful display, through which they passed as they ascended its vast acclivities. The grandeur of all they saw was an inspiration to them. There were clusters of trees which they claimed were planted by the hands of unseen smaller gods, so orderly were they set out; the song of the water-falls here seemed sweeter to them than the music of their tamanwas, or Indian sorcerers; the lakes were calmer; the foliage was of a more delicate shape and the brightest colors; the ferns were much taller here and more graceful; the small but very numerous meadows were carpeted in the deepest green and interwoven with dainty flowers and coyly rising buds. No wonder that as they traveled toward the lofty peak they thought they walked in Paradise. Surely God had worked hard to beautify His home, such was the natural conclusion of these wild children of the forest.

Many, many snows have fallen since, but one day, the Indians say, this god grew angry and his wrath showed tongues

of fire, which ignited an immense fir forest on the Southwest side of the mountain, and nothing was left when the flames died away but a bleak strip of land where later blue grass and bunches of flowers grew, and this changed the original forest into blue prairie. This extensive prairie the natives named the land of peace, the home of quiet and of rest, where all wickedness must cease, where murder or theft must never be committed, where one must be good no matter how bad he was before entering this land, because it was cleared by the fire of this god's tongue. Even Indians deserving the greatest punishment for the worst of crimes would be sent here by their chiefs to meditate upon their sinful and evil deeds, with strict orders not to return unless they vow to their mountain god that if they ever visited this happy land again they would come back not dirty with badness but covered with deeds of the brave. The Indian custom was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but when the blood culprit took refuge in this place of peace, his soul was cleansed of crime and he was freed from the revenge of his fellow men. All contentions ceased upon entering and even the warrior laid down his arms before he crossed its border, to take them up again on his return, for none would ever dare to steal them during his absence.

Connected with this place was one of the strangest coincidences that, I guess, was ever heard of in Indian traditions. No Indian would venture beyond this plain, because he was sure that there dwelt the evil spirit, and it was claimed that he could be both felt and seen.

Beyond the place of peace, so ran an old Indian legend, was a steep perpendicular rock in which was a great crevice and from it flowed milk that was not milk, as the old Indian described it to me. You could catch it, said they, and you would not have it; again you could catch it, and you would not have it. You would always catch it and you would never have it. It would run swiftly between your fingers as it was very heavy. I am inclined to think that the liquid that flowed from the mountain crevice was most probably quicksilver, which may be found some future day, but no one has as yet explored the place. Indians dare not venture there alone, neither will they point it out to a white man, for they fear to even mention the fact

of the existence of this place, because it is the home of the devil, and great evil might befall them as a punishment for talking too much. To the questioner they close ears and mouth, quickly turn their backs, and leave him as wise as he was in the beginning.

Surely the foregoing legends indicate that our aborigines had formed a queer conception of God, and a strange picture of the evil one.

But ever by his side he felt the power of the Great Spirit, who dwelt on Mount Tacoma, watching, guiding and protecting him or leading him to destruction. He knew not how to worship him, and his dark untutored mind could only picture him in things that were either most beautiful or extremely terrifying or altogether beyond the reach of his hands or mind.

Our natives always had an enduring faith in a supreme being, fearing punishment for evil-doing and expecting reward for their bravery.

They believed that those who lived a wicked life would be transformed after death into an animal whose habits corresponded with their own mode of living. If they indulged in laziness, treachery, theft or murder, they would be transformed into such animals as a pig, a bear, or a snake. Those who fought for the defense of their hunting ground or the rights of their fellow men would be rewarded by living the after life in the shape of a small yellow bird, which was the idol of nearly all the tribes living North of the Columbia River. The braver their lives the more beautiful would be their plumage, and the sweeter their song. It was considered a great crime to kill this bird, and often when the young Indian wandered away alone for the first time with his bow and arrows to try his aim, and brought back the yellow whistler, cold in death, he was not praised for his straight shot, but severely punished, and his waywardness was the indication of a black future before him. But while the young Indians were encouraged to protect the favored yellow bird, they were as strongly impressed with the obligation of killing a species of lizards very common on this Coast. These animals were supposed to breathe jealousy and dissension wherever they happened to roam. Whilst talking on this Indian topic, allow me to relate to you a few more of their relig-

ious notions in regard to the hereafter. The souls of great chiefs were supposed to inhabit the bodies of large eagles, while the cruel head men would be seen after death prowling around the forest in the form of panthers and cougars, which, by the way, were very numerous in early days all through the virgin forests bordering on Puget Sound.

Squaws, too, suffered in the life hereafter and their whining, painful voices were heard of a cold winter night moaning in the plaintive hymns which sounded through the branches of the fir trees, as the Northern winds blew their stiffening cold breath over the forests of the Pacific slope. When a squaw was buried it was thought that she might become a man in the next life, if she had been very good at skinning the game that the warriors brought to camp, or in drying and smoking their provisions of camas roots and salmon. But woe to her if she had failed in any of her wigwam duties, for then there was nothing left for her in the next world but to be a miserable slave amongst the neighboring tribes of her Indian enemies.

I commenced by giving you a white man's idea of the grandeur of Mount Tacoma—that naturally brought to your mind the very pertinent question: What is the Indian's idea of the mountain? I have described as I could the superstitious ideas of the Indians in regard to it. This led me to give you some further insight into the superstitions of our Northern tribes which may more or less correspond with these of the tribes you yourselves are teaching, and now I will conclude by revising the superstitions of some white men in regard to this mountain. As you are teachers of the Indian schools all over the country, tell your scholars of the white man's superstition when he called this mountain Rainier instead of Tacoma, as the Indians always did. I do not think it out of place to explain here the meaning of the name, Tacoma.

Out in the West we are explorers, and the Indians were explorers before us. The word Tacoma is not a word used by French, Spanish or Portuguese explorers, but amongst the Puyallup or the Klickitat explorers, amongst the natives of this country, it is a word as common as "Pa" and "Ma" amongst the whites. Rainier is a white man's foreign superstition, which some of our neighbors have welcomed in their jealous

bosoms. The natives of this country give the name of Tacoma to that immense pile of snow that towers over the balance of the Cascade Range. Let me explain this more fully: "Ta" in their mother tongue is somewhat of a prefix and when placed before an adjective it makes the superlative degree of that adjective. When the Indians speak of beings or objects which they want to compare and wish to point out the largest, the highest or the best of the objects they are comparing, they will put the prefix, "ta," before its name. When a Puyallup Indian sees a band of ki-uten (that is, of horses) he points out the largest one of the group by saying "ta-kiuten." In the Puyallup language the word "co" means water; and the word "ma" means frozen. The two words joined together mean frozen water, and as the Indian vocabulary is not always rich, they also mean ice, snow, because these, after all, are nothing but frozen water. And so, when the Puyallup looks at the Cascade Range, he hails each one of these piles of snow that compose it "homa," pronouncing the "h" with a guttural sound, or with a hawk, simply with the assistance of a little throat pressure. We cannot do it, we say "coma." Pointing his finger to the highest heap of snow, which he considers the home of the deity, he calls it "Tahoma;" and hence naturally enough the beautiful name of Mount Tacoma. You may press our throats, but we will never say Mount Rainier.