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THE KOBUK

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

THE Kobuk villages of former times lay scattered along Kobuk river, while their actual hunting territory included a much vaster range, as is the case with other river people herein described. Their territory extended, on the river proper, to points on each side midway between the Noatak and Kobuk, and Selawik and Kobuk rivers, respectively. None of the three river peoples, it is claimed, hunted farther southward than Kuyuguk river. The Kobuk, as did others, also extended their hunting along the Endicott mountain range and the Arctic flats thereunto.

In the winter, moose and caribou were hunted, the usual method being for large numbers of people to stampede the animals into deep snow, where they were easily killed with arrows and knives. The skins of moose, it is said, were not used. The arrows used had willow shafts tipped with caribou-horn or flint; the knives were of flint.

Rabbit and ptarmigan, both snared in winter, were staple foods; but other animals furnished skins for home use and for trade, and the meat also was eaten. Skunk and wolverene were caught in dead-falls; the arctic hare, porcupine, and weasel were snared; muskrats were speared or shot in the spring from canoes or kaiaks.

The many varieties of ducks, geese, and loons, in season, were caught chiefly with snares of sinew set on the mud flats when the birds were not nesting, and at other times near the nests. Another method was to catch the birds between the prongs of spears, or with arrows to which long sinew lines were fastened. Also, when waterfowl were moulting and could not fly, they were driven into the shallows and clubbed by men in canoes of bark sewn with roots.

While some of the fishing was done with hand-lines of willow with willow floats and horn sinkers, and today many fish-traps are used (the art of which was taught the Kobuk by people from Unalakleet), most fishing was by means of seines. Some of these were as large as a hundred feet long and three feet deep. With careful use the life of the net would be about three years. One end was made fast to the shore, while the other was taken out in the stream and then hauled back with hand-lines until the whole net, with its flopping burden, was on shore.

The construction was of willow, of which long strips were cut with flint knives from the inner part of the bark. These were moistened in the mouth and twisted into lines in the manner that sinew is twisted. The lines were then ready to be woven into nets. At the present time all the nets are of cord obtained from the trading posts. The fish commonly caught were pickerel, salmon, smelt, trout, whitefish, and a few cod and flounder.

The cooking of meat and fish, whether fresh or dried, was generally by boiling in birch-bark vessels, which the Kobuk are adept at making, or in wooden containers. The water is brought to a boil by dropping in hot stones. The informants claim that in ancient times bear stomachs, supported by sticks and filled with water, served as cooking-pots.

In the summer season the Alaskan potato, blackberries, blueberries, cranberries, and salmonberries, all of which grow in profusion in that flat country, are gathered in great number. The excess is laid away, for later use, in bark baskets or sealskin pokes obtained from the coast peoples. In winter a mixture of berries, dried fish, birds' eggs, and seal-oil is greatly relished. The potatoes, crushed and stored away in pokes, are eaten in much the same manner as butter is used by white people.

Meat, fish, and berries are stored away in caches, which are erected wherever convenient to the hunter and fisherman. Many of these are found build at random along the river. They are merely platforms supported by poles, on which the food is placed and overlaid with moss and wood, the whole weighted down with stones. Food soon to be used might be kept in a frozen condition outside the houses.

In building the winter house, a hole about three feet deep and fourteen feet square was first dug. Posts, about six feet high, were planted at each corner and connected by poles. Willow hoops, ends thrust in the ground, encompassed the framework, over which were laid grass mats woven by women. The structure was then covered with earth and sod. A smoke-hole, covered with a grass mat, was left in the roof. The entranceway was a long tunnel, of which the door was covered with a skin. The usual sleeping bench was built against the inner walls at a height of about two feet above floor-level.

In the summer fishing camps the Kobuk used to erect square habitations with a framework of willow withes covered with bark. The seams were sewn with roots and were well pitched. The smoke-hole

in the roof was covered with a grass mat. Such a structure could house two families. Lone hunters sometimes built a small, circular shelter, with a frame of willow hoops, the whole covered with moss.

Caribou- and muskrat-skins were commonly used for making clothing in former days. Clothes for the dance or for ceremonial wear were ornamented with, or made of, beaver, fox, and wolverene. The leg of the waterproof boot was the seamless skin of moose- or caribou-leg stretched while raw; the sole was of muskrat-skin.

Soon after birth, a name of a relative, a friend, or perhaps one of the parents, is conferred on the child. It is believed that, if the mother continually carries the child on her back throughout the day until of an age at least when it can walk, the child will excel in everything it undertakes, especially in hunting, if it be a male.

As soon as a youth has caught his first animal or bird, a feast is given to his friends, and he himself receives clothing of the finest skins which his parents possess. When the youth has brought in his first fox, a feast is held for the entire village. The first wolf or wolverene necessitates a still larger feast, to include all people within easy access. On these occasions the meat of the kill is divided equally among those present. The meat may be given to some medicine-man, who in turn divides it among those who for any reason at all are not able to hunt for themselves. At the feasts, any medicine-men present offer food to their spirit-powers. The skins of the first catches are presented to a medicine-man. When a youth is old enough to take care of himself, his game is always distributed in the village, as is the case when maidens gather berries. The purpose of this practice is to show, first, that the parents are not greedy and need not rely on their children for food; second, that the youth, or maiden, is able to take care of himself or herself; and by this distribution the aged and helpless are assured of provisions. If they fail to follow these customs, the medicine-men will cause them to be unsuccessful in hunting or in berry-gathering.

Marriage is effected in two ways. A mother arranges the betrothal of a marriageable daughter with the parents of some suitable young man, preferably a good hunter and provider. Again, the young couple may marry through mutual choice. When all is satisfactory, the parents of the young woman hold a feast for both families, after which the couple live with the girl's parents. The young man then must provide meat and skins for the family. Divorce is merely a separation by mutual

consent. In event of adultery, the innocent one leaves the other, taking the household belongings.

As soon as death occurs, the body is removed outside at once, just as it is. It is not allowed to remain in the house. A close relative then pays some medicine-man to conduct the interment. The body is dressed in its best finery, and a knife, a man's or a woman's according to the sex of the deceased — and in the latter case needles and a piece of hide are also included — is laid by the side. The corpse is then lashed tightly in a skin and carried to a selected spot, where it is laid on the ground, head to the east, with a sod under the head. The personal belongings of the deceased are placed around and close to the body for the use of the spirit. The corpse is next covered with a skin and overlaid with sod, packed especially tight along the sides. A conical framework of poles, covered with sod, is erected, and two long cross-poles are set up over the whole to serve as a marker and to show that the burial has been conducted properly. Those who have handled the body must discard and burn their clothing. These, and other relatives and friends, must perform no work for a period of four days. At the end of this time a spear of green willow is cast toward the sun, that the spirit, which has remained in the village, may depart and never return. During the time of mourning, the medicine-man who conducted the rites stays away from the village, inducing his spirit-powers to cause the spirit of the deceased to leave. If all has not been carried out properly, the spirit may remain in the village and do mischief. After a year has passed, the relative who paid the medicine-man for officiating, gives a feast at which he invokes his own supernatural power by throwing two pieces of meat to the ground, along with a hair from each of his parkas. When a child or some other person without supernatural power dies, the body is left within the house, which is then abandoned. It is believed that some spirits fly toward the sunrise, but that most go somewhere in the earth.

The supernatural powers of medicine-men were obtained chiefly through inheritance. When aged, medicine-men taught the use of their supernatural powers to sons or other relatives, or to friends; or the beneficiary might become a medicine-man after the death of his benefactor without previous instruction, as in the instance where an old medicine-man instructed his son to blacken his face with charcoal after he had died, in order that the son should recognize his father's spirit.

Furthermore, the son was instructed to charcoal his own face that his father's spirit might recognize him. The son was to eat a piece of the flesh of his father, and by this means obtain the father's supernatural power. Then when the son in his turn was about to die, he should pass on the power in a similar manner.

Again, whenever a person is receiving instructions in the use of supernatural power, he must obey the commands of the spirit, as is the case also after such power has been obtained. Disobedience would result in insanity or death, as is illustrated in the following tale:

It was the custom of those about to become medicine-men to absent themselves from the village until they had received complete instructions in making use of their supernatural power. The son of an aged couple disappeared for two years, to the great bewilderment of his family, who believed him lost or drowned. Meanwhile he was receiving his instructions on the top of a mountain, where his spirit-power fed him. One day the son returned, and was acclaimed with great joy by his family. In celebration, his mother prepared a feast, but the son refused all food. He requested his parents to refrain from sewing and story-telling for a period of four days. The mother, at the end of two days, was saddened to see the hungry appearance of her son, and pleaded so hard that he should eat that he took a few mouthfuls of fish to appease her. His mother also sewed before the four days expired. The son then asked his father to bring in a few heads of snowbirds, because he wished to eat some. As soon as the son had finished eating, he declared: "During the time I was away, I was on top of a high mountain receiving supernatural powers given me by my cousin's father. There I was fed and instructed by a Snowbird. It was he who allowed me to come home, and he who forbade my eating for four days, and sewing or story-telling within that time. I have disobeyed those commands. Now I must leave the village. You, my parents, will never see me. I shall become insane."

With these words he rushed from the house. For a long time afterward many villagers heard, but never saw, this young man singing and wailing whenever they made trips to the mountain. Then, at last, a fisherman found the body of the young man frozen upright in the ice of a lake, where he had apparently broken through. The body was recognized by the headband-it wore.

It was believed that strong medicine-men were able to take away

the power of the lesser, either by means of their own superior knowledge or by killing or causing to be killed the weaker medicine-men. The ability to cause death, even after the death of the medicine-man himself, and the ability to assume the supernatural powers of other medicine-men, are together illustrated by the following:

A man (the grandfather of the informant) once killed a medicine-man. The spirit remained in the village, and all recognized it as that of the deceased shaman. It continually flew about the man's home, emitting a long train of sparks as it went. The harassed man soon died, whereupon the spirit disappeared. The man, however, on his death-bed, told his wife that there were too many medicine-men in the village for the good of the people; that she was to tie a sharp knife to her wrist, kill them, and assume their supernatural powers. This the woman did, and became herself a powerful medicine-woman.

It sometimes happened that men desired supernatural power in order to become great in the village. Since they were not able or desirous of purchasing it with skins from recognized medicine-men, nor had they received such powers from friend or relative, they would endeavor to secure it by questionable methods. Such a man would play mischievous and harmful tricks upon his fellow villagers, thus causing evil spirits to recognize him and to give him certain powers. In the process of reception the person would be betrayed by the appearance of blood about the mouth and forehead. When these evident marks of evil intent became noted, the "legitimate" medicine-men immediately killed the impostor.

Medicine-men not only performed rites of healing, receiving payment in skins,[1] but also advised the people in all their actions, and rigidly enforced customs and taboos. For example, when the first salmon of a season was caught, a day must elapse before consuming it, and then only in a freshly made wooden dish. Again, when a beluga had been killed, it must be cut up with women's knives only, and these must never be used except for that purpose. No berries or roots might be picked during the time from the first cutting-up of the beluga until it had been consumed entirely; nor could other foods be eaten. The

1 Five hides were called a "half-skin," and ten a "whole-skin," the count, no doubt, receiving its appellation from the total number of manual digits.

people were requested to go without sleep for four days after the beluga had been caught, and during this time they were not allowed to eat its flesh. These customs are now in vogue only when the people are at Sheshalik, where belugas are chased into shallow water and are easily killed when they run ashore. The origin of the beluga taboos is given in the following tale:

Once when the people had returned to Sheshalik after a day's beluga hunt, it was discovered that a young man was missing. The distracted parents implored a medicine-man to find their son. After much incantation, the medicine-man asserted that it was useless to hunt for the young man; that he had gone with the belugas. The parents, after the season had passed, went to Kotzebue with all the people for the usual feasting and trading, before returning to their own village. In the meantime the young man had returned to the fishing camp, after having been a long while with the belugas. There he mourned, because he had been left behind. The Belugas said: "Do not mourn. Leave your kaiak and become one of us." Since the time the young man became lost, one of the mortuary taboos — that no one may work or use a sharp instrument for four days — has been observed after killing a beluga.

The most common form of talisman is a bead, usually blue in color. The owner, who carries it on a string, puts it in his mouth in times of trouble and receives special aid. Such beads are obtained from medicine-men for the asking. When such a talisman is requested, the medicine-man puts any convenient small object in his mouth and immediately expectorates a bead. Talismans of greater power are given by medicine-men only to those whom they especially favor. When these are requested, he again, by some feat of legerdemain, inserts an object into his body. When it is drawn forth, it may have assumed the shape of a bird or an animal-skin, in any case being quite different from the original object. The recipient is instructed in its use, and henceforth its peculiar powers belong to him.

It would appear that ceremonial custom, which played such a large part in the lives of the Eskimo to the southward, is limited among the Kobuk to minor observances, such as feasting on the occasion of the taking of a first bird or animal, proper observance of burial form, and the ritual preparatory to cutting up belugas. These, directed largely by the medicine-men, who seem to be the chief power in the land, and

shamanistic performances, compose the main part of ceremonial form and procedure. A crude form of the Messenger feast was held, however, the object being the mercenary one of trading rather than ceremony, although trading, ritual, and social usage are all intermingled in Messenger feasts elsewhere. In early spring the Kobuk despatched two messengers to the inland Indians, with whom they spent some time before starting back to their village, guiding their guests. When a few miles away, the Indians made camp, while the messengers returned to the Kobuk to inform them of the Indian camp. Then the messengers were directed once more to go to the Indians and ask what food they wished to have prepared. Some who had friends among the Indians also sent messengers to inform them where they could be found.

After the Kobuk had prepared the requested food, the Indians approached the village. The Kobuk danced, sang, and drummed at the approach, to signify not only welcome but that all was peaceful in the village; that there was no warlike intent. Feasting occurred for many days within an enclosure fenced with caribou-skins. Then brisk trading began. The Kobuk traded caribou-hides, parkas, and seal-oil and blubber, obtained from coast peoples, for skins of beaver, fox, mink, mountain-sheep, weasel, and wolverene, and such articles of clothing as moccasins, decorated shirts, and beaded mittens. At the conclusion of the trading, which might last almost throughout a summer, the Indian visitors invited the Kobuk to their village for reciprocal feasting and trading. The Kobuk always visited the Indians in late winter or in spring, rather than in summer.

The Kobuk not only traded with the Indians, but many in summer went to Sheshalik on the coast for fishing and beluga-hunting. Then they visited Kotzebue for feasting and trading, receiving sealskins and seal-blubber and -oil in return for the pelts of inland animals. In late fall they returned to their own village.

Some of the Kobuk claim that originally they were Indians who lived along Kobuk river; that they spoke an Indian language, depended mainly on caribou for their support, wore shirts and moccasins, and used the Indian bow and bark canoe. These say that the withdrawal of the greater part of the Indians from upstream to places farther inland, left them isolated on the river; that yearly trading and other intercourse with coast Eskimo ultimately brought about the use of Eskimo customs, costumes, and language; that intermarriage, close association,

and the dying off of the old men and with them Indian language and traditions, made the remaining Kobuk outwardly Eskimo; and that the coast Eskimo call the Kobuk, those who come to the coast and trade, Eskimos, while those who trade with Indians and speak an Indian language are called by them Indians.

Other Kobuk maintain that they were always Eskimo, but that some of their members traded upstream with the Indians, learned the language of the latter, adopted some of their customs, such as dress, and often intermarried.

The memory of living adults, and current folklore, do not prove the former contention. It is a subject requiring closer research.

MYTHOLOGY

RAVEN BRINGS LAND

Long ago a great flood covered the earth, so that the tops of only the highest mountains remained above the water. Even now the frames of skin boats are sometimes found on mountain crests, boats used by the people to escape from drowning. Only two villages, one Kobuk and one Noatak, remained above water, on two tall peaks.

Raven often visited the Kobuk village, living among the people as a human or ascending into the air as a bird. A special friend of Raven's was a very old medicine-man whose spirit-power was a human jawbone. The old man used to sing to the jawbone, whereupon he would become an eagle, in which form he often flew with Raven. The daughter of the medicine-man had married a very powerful shaman of the Noatak village, who treated her with excessive cruelty. The old man, though fearful of the superior powers of his son-in-law, often expressed a desire to go to his daughter. Raven always said, "Do not go, old friend; you will soon be dead." The old medicine-man was puzzled on hearing these words, because he did not understand them. At that time there was no death.

Raven, seeing the village become crowded, knew that he must either kill some of the people or that they must find more land. Raven informed the people. "O, my people, some time a sod will float by our village. If any man can spear the sod, it will become solid land. Then there will be room for all."

After a long time, a piece of sod was seen floating by. The cry arose in the village: "The sod! The sod! Let us spear it and make a new land! Raven has promised it!"

The sod did not want to become land, so it sank and avoided all the spears. The people were saddened at their ill luck.

Raven, because he was not human, did not care to dwell too long among people, so set out one day in his canoe. After a long trip he discovered uninhabited land, but it was too small to be of use. On his return to the village, Raven was made headman, because he had been the first to find new land.

The old medicine-man, still wishing to find his daughter, heckled Raven for aid, but each time he received a short answer, because Raven was then busy planning to spear the floating sod, and, by providing a large and spacious land, to become famous.

Raven called the medicine-men together and instructed them: "It is now too rough to go out to spear the sod. You must use your powers and smooth the water."

In those days, because there was no land to break the seas, the slightest wind resulted in high waves. When the medicine-men had worked until exhausted, the water became smooth. Then Raven called to the people to embark and give him aid. All paddled out, and soon found the sod, gently bobbing up and down on the soft swells. All, even Raven himself, cast spears, but none could touch the sod. To those whose weapons came closest, Raven gave food and wealth. The seas soon rose high, so that the villagers were forced to return home. Raven remained alone in his canoe. He sang:

Waters, become smooth now.
Waters, become smooth now.
I am hunting for Sod.
I am hunting for Sod.
Sod, come close to me.
I must spear you to give land to my people.

The waters became smooth again, and once more the bobbing sod appeared. Raven closed his eyes and sang:

O, Sod, come closer.

O, Sod, come within reach of my spear.
O, Sod, become wide land.
O, Sod, let there be room for all.
O, my people, watch me spear Sod.

Sod came closer, and all the people paddled out again. Raven opened his eyes. He cast a spear into the very middle of Sod, who sank. The line ran out and Raven was towed fast across the waters. The people, to help, made fast to Raven's canoe, but he cast them off to fight Sod with his own powers. Raven sang as he hauled in on the line:

Come up, O Sod.
Come up! Come up, O Sod.
Come up! Come up, for the last time, O Sod.

When Sod came to the surface, Raven killed him with a second spear of willow tipped with flint. Sod then grew and expanded until the waters were turned back and the villages were once more connected by land. The people could now spread out and live as they used to live. They were not cramped in one small village on a mountain peak.

The old medicine-man, the friend of Raven, now travelled overland to rescue his daughter, but the great power of his son-in-law always forced him to turn back. His wife and sons then attempted the rescue. They set out, the wife on the jawbone talisman and the sons on each side, flying through the air to the Noatak village. Soon they circled the settlement, where the woman saw her daughter badly treated, given the dirty work of the village to perform, and her clothes covered with unspeakable filth. The young woman was constantly guarded by the people to see that she did not escape. They wished her to remain and work at all the filthy jobs. Half the villagers watched her by day and half by night.

The woman and her sons brought the flying jawbone to earth by the house of her daughter. With her power she made the villagers fall asleep, then sought her daughter, whom she commanded to prepare to leave. The daughter, hopeless from her long-abject condition, replied:

"No, I can not leave. I have tried to run away many, many times, but always they have brought me back. My husband watches me closely, and says that if I make one more attempt, he will kill me."

The mother wasted no words, but snatched up her daughter, and they departed through the air at great speed. Then the husband awoke and began his pursuit, in the form of a huge ball of water. They passed over their own village, but were unable to stop, because of the tremendous speed at which they were travelling. Instead they ran headlong into a mountain and sank deep into the earth. The irate, pursuing husband also crashed into the Mountainside, bursting into many drops of water. The woman, daughter, and two sons were changed into squirrels, which to this day bear a spot of red on their backs, indicating the filth on the daughter's parka. They were the first squirrels.

The mountain since that time has been regarded sacred and a great power to the people. In times of trouble they are saved by singing the squirrel song and thinking of the mountain. The world has since taken on the shape it holds today. The paths of huge serpents and eels on their way to the sea have made the river-beds crooked and tortuous, because of the method of progress of these creatures. In those days all trees, especially the willow, were very soft from their long immersion; but now the wood has become hard and the bark may be fashioned into nets.

RAVEN BRINGS LIGHT

In the long ago the world was in darkness; there was no sun to shed his welcome rays; no moon to shine at night, and no stars to twinkle or guide travellers. When the people left their homes, it was necessary to form a human chain, one end at the door, so that all could return safely.

In those times of darkness a raven often flew over the village, a harbinger of good news whenever he came. The people knew he was a raven, although they could not see his form. One time as he flew over, some men called, "O, Raven, bring us light, that we may see!"

Raven answered, "There is a far-distant village where dwells a rich, powerful man who owns a ball of light."

"O, Raven, secure for us this light, that it may shine over the world!"

"I can not. I do not know how. If your wisest men will instruct me, I shall do my best to bring the light."

The medicine-men assembled, discussed matters at great length, and gave out their decision that Raven should become a feather. Raven turned into a feather and the wind blew him to the village of the light-

owning wealthy man. The feather dropped into a spring of fresh water.

The daughter of the wealthy man was unapproachable. No young man, not even a medicine-man, was allowed to enter the home. The father refused all offers to betroth his daughter, nor did the maiden herself care to marry. His most prized possessions were his daughter and the ball of light. He often placed the ball of light beside his door, that the villagers might see to play their games and to do their work. When the daughter went for fresh water, she drank some while at the spring before filling the pot. She knew she had swallowed something, because she felt a tickling in her throat. It was the feather.

Soon the young woman bore a male child. Both she and her family were puzzled, because they knew no man had approached her, but they welcomed the boy. The wealthy man instructed his daughter to give the child all that he desired. The boy saw the glittering ball of light and cried for it until they let him play with it, but the family always took it away when he treated it roughly. The wealthy man not only watched the boy at play, but never allowed the ball of light out of his sight. Finally they became so accustomed to seeing the child with his new plaything, that he was allowed to pick it up whenever he desired.

The boy now began to plan to steal the light. One time, while in play, though keenly watched by the wealthy man, he rolled it to the entranceway, then jumped outside and succeeded in turning back into his raven form and escaping before the watchful wealthy man could catch him. Raven flew high in the air, and there broke the ball into tiny pieces, so that light scattered over the whole world. He then winged his way back to the Kobuk village, where he cried: "I have brought you light! You asked me for light, and I have brought it. Now you will have light to work and play in; you will have a period of darkness to rest and sleep in. I ask as a reward the daughter of your headman."

The people were so blinded by the light that they could not see what manner of creature Raven was. The young woman gladly married the bird and took him into her home; but the personal habits of Raven were so filthy that the family cast him out. He caused so strong a stench about the person of his wife that his father-in-law ejected her also from the home. Raven and his wife then lived together alone.

To the couple was born a child which had a raven's beak on its forehead. Raven was very proud that his son resembled him. His wife was very sad. Her eyes now accustomed to light, she saw that her

husband was not human and that her son bore resemblances to a bird. In despair she fled to her father. The father scolded, whipped, and banished Raven from the village. His daughter remained in her father's home, but she was never allowed to marry again, because her first husband was not human.

THE KOBUK TRAVELLER

A man, the greatest canoe-paddler on the river, lived in a willow-framed house covered with sod. His wife bore him three sons, but when they reached manhood, each went away and never returned. A fourth son was born to him. The man decided to train him in his own way, and if the son survived, he could never be killed by any human. The father heated stones red-hot and threw them at the boy, who always dodged. He shot arrows at his son, but the boy easily avoided them. The man even stalked his son like wild game, or shot at him unawares through the smoke-hole, but the boy always escaped. The father taught the youth to ride canoes. When he attained the age of manhood, he asked his father to be allowed to go hunting by himself. The father replied: "Yes, you are old enough to go out alone now. You have been well trained and nothing can kill you."

The young man paddled far downstream. Then he left his craft to climb some high mountains, but they did not please him, so he returned to the river-bank to sleep. While resting, he heard some one approach on snowshoes, although the ground was still bare. At each step the Snowshoes cried:

What has happened?
What is here?
What has happened?
What is here?

The young man listened, then climbed and ran along the bluffs overlooking the river, but he still heard the voice of some one on snowshoes in pursuit. He heard a voice asking, "How did that man go down these bluffs?"

The Snow shoes answered, "He went down that crevice." The Snow shoes still cried out at every step:

What has happened?
What is here?
What has happened?
What is here?

Then the young man heard his pursuer trip and fall. All was still. The young man slept until morning, then backtracked to get a glimpse of his pursuer, whom he knew must have been killed by falling into the crevice. He found a man with teeth, finger-nails, and snowshoes of copper. He decided to take the snowshoes, because snow was now falling and becoming deep. The Snowshoes still talked, but he could not understand their language. He decided not to go home, because he had killed a man. As he continued downstream, he came at nightfall to an uninhabited house. Here he built a fire, ate a meal, and prepared to sleep. As he sat by the fire, a stranger entered and stood in the doorway. The young man inquired, "What is happening?"

There was no response. He again spoke, "Take off your parka and sit by the fire."

For answer the stranger suddenly drew a knife, which he flung at the young man. He dodged, grasped the stranger, and cast him into the fire. At that moment the stranger turned into a swallow and flew away.

Early in the morning the young man awoke and journeyed onward. For many days he went through valleys, past lakes, and over mountains. One day he saw a wolverene attempting to gnaw through a beaver-lodge. The animal broke off a tooth and went away. The young man picked up the tooth and continued his journey. When he arrived at an abandoned house, he stopped and made preparations for the night. As he was about to lie down, he heard a person approach. The person entered the room, strode to the fire, and demanded, "Where is my adze?"

"I do not know where it is," was the answer.

"I lost it today when I was opening a beaver-lodge. You picked it up, and I have been following your trail all day."

The young man remembered the tooth which he had picked up, but would not part with it. The two fought, and just when the young man was winning, the person became a wolverene and wriggled away. Then he became a man again, and once more demanded the tooth, which was his adze. The young man gave it, and the stranger went out.

In the morning the young man set forth again, continuing over cliffs and tundra until he came to a large village. He married the daughter of the headman. The people ate little here; one rabbit would last a family a whole day. The young man became so hungry that he began to hunt for himself. He caught many rabbits, returned home, and threw them down the smoke-hole. The family were so angry that none would touch the game, so the young man was forced to skin, clean, and cook them himself by roasting on a long stick over the fire. After he had gorged, his fatherin-law ordered: "You must go and never return. Soon you will have killed all our game."

He did not wish to go, especially as his wife was soon to become a mother, but the anger of the whole village compelled his departure.

The young man walked far over the Kobuk flats and along the Kobuk river until he arrived at another large village. There he married again. The people ate nothing, but when hungry sucked the juice from meat and drank water. The young man soon discovered that these people had no stomachs or bowels; they could not digest solid foods. But his hunger became so great that at last he was forced to go hunting, and brought in rabbit, ptarmigan, and caribou. While he cooked and ate, the whole village gathered around and looked on in great astonishment. They wondered how all that food could ever leave his body; they were sure that he would swell up and die. They grew fearsome at the sight. The young, man ate all day, then lay down to sleep.

In the morning, when his bowels moved, some one saw him in the act of defecation and was so astonished that he called the entire village. They watched with great interest. They thought he must have come from the sky, because he was so different. They tasted and divided the feces. From that time these people had stomachs and bowels which could assimilate solid foods.

The young man departed, to continue his travels, soon after a son was born to him. He chose a man, who had once been a lynx, to go with him. The two built a sled, journeyed downstream, and up a branch of the Kobuk. Once the young man left Lynx-man to explore the country, and was gone so great a time that the long face of Lynx-man became round and pinched from hunger. Since then the face of the lynx has always been round.

When the streams ran high with water: bank full, the two built a canoe, covered it with bark, and pitched the seams. They paddled to

a lake, thence up the Kobuk and Kuyuguk rivers. It was now summer. The young man cast a spear at a pickerel, but one prong broke off in the fish, which escaped. As they pulled up to a house that night and went in, they found a man suffering from a piece of bone which had become lodged in his head. The wife said to the young man, "If you will remove that bone, I shall give you plenty of fish."

After the young man withdrew the bone, he found it to be the prong from his spear. The man had been accustomed to turning into a pickerel and catching fish.

Another time, while paddling along, the young man shot a double-pronged arrow at a mink. The animal broke off the missile and sank from sight. The young man then thought that the mink might also be a man, and because he did not wish to meet him, he portaged overland to another stream. At nightfall he and Lynx-man came to a house and there found a man suffering from an arrow-point lodged in his neck. The man's wife gave them many fish for removing the point.

The two men kept on downstream to a large village, where the young man went ashore, leaving Lynx-man to guard the canoe. He married and lived there until a child was born, forgetful of his companion. In midsummer he thought of Lynx-man and went to the canoe. His companion was nearly starved; he had no fire, no water but snow-water, and only a rotten fish for food. The two hunted until Lynx-man was once more well fed, then began a journey up the Kuyuguk river. Although they saw many mink and pickerel, they killed none, because the animals and fish were humans in those forms. In their wanderings the two met many people, both Indian and Eskimo, and stopped at many villages. One time, as usual, Lynx-man was left to watch the canoe while the young man went to live with the Beaver people. He did not stay long with them, because they ate only bark. They believed that wood was some kind of fish and not good to eat.

After leaving the Beavers, the two companions crossed to the Yukon river and lived for some time among the Rabbit and Muskrat people. At length they reached a village high up on the cliffs, so high that half a day was spent in reaching it. The young man married a wealthy man's daughter.

The cliff-dwellers had a novel game. They lowered a pole over the edge, far above the water. The most athletic and agile would slide down to the end, and then climb back hand-overhand, a very diffi-

cult feat. Some could even perform gymnastics at that dizzy height. The young man expressed a desire to play the game over the objections of his wife, who related that many outlanders had tried and been drowned in the waters far below. At his first attempt, he descended only halfway, then returned. Others encouraged him to try again, so he slid down to the very end. At that moment some one struck the pole such a blow that it broke off. The young man plunged down, down. . . . During the rapid fall, he thought of his spear. At once he became a spruce-hen and flew back over the heads of the people, who were rejoicing at the stranger's death and making fun of his wife. Enraged, he became human and rushed at the group, succeeding in casting several over the cliff, but the number of his opponents crowded him over again. Once more he turned into a spruce-hen, then flew down to the awaiting Lynx-man.

As they went along, they stopped at intervals with Mink, Rabbit, and Ptarmigan peoples. In these places they ate willow-bark and leaves. The animals were men while the visitors remained with them.

They arrived at the Yukon mouth, followed the coast to a big bay, crossed that to land again, staying in Mink, Muskrat, and Beaver villages. In each place the young man married and remained until a child was born. The two travellers then felt that they were becoming old and thought of returning home. They crossed tundra and mountains until they came to a clear and deep lake at the head of the Kobuk, where they stopped to hunt caribou.

As the man was following a trail around the lake, he stumbled over a white ball. His foot stuck fast. While trying to release one foot, the other also became fast. In desperation he reached down to pluck away the ball with his fingers. They, too, were stuck, so that the man remained a prisoner. Lynx-man attempted to release his partner, but to no avail. He did not become captive to the white ball, because he was not human. Night fell, and soon voices came to the man. One said: "I am glad we have some one for a good feast. We have not eaten a human for a long time."

The man pretended to be dead, and stiffened his muscles as if he were frozen. His captors came, released him, and bore him to their home. One said, "I think I shall eat his heart and liver."

Another answered: "I want his brain. The children can have the rest."

He was laid by a fire, and the wives of the captors were instructed to cook their prey when thawed out. They poked him at intervals to see if he was sufficiently thawed out, but the man kept his muscles taut. The people were becoming very hungry, and the men wished the body cut up. The wives objected, saying that the meat might spoil if cut up before thawed. At last all went to sleep hungry. The man tried to escape, but each movement caused the sleepers to stir uneasily. As a last resort he cleared the smoke-hole in one mighty bound, and ran down. the trail to the canoe, where Lynx-man was waiting. They shoved off from shore just in time, for the disappointed and enraged captors were in hot pursuit.

The two went down the river again to a large village. Here the man married and stayed until two children were born. He had never before remained so long in one place. The people were eager to kill the visitor, but he overcame all their efforts; even when the medicine-men sent spirit-weapons against him, he always escaped by becoming a spruce-hen and flying away. Once in this form he alighted in a snare and was unable to work out of it. A woman and her son visited the snare, whereat the man pretended to be dead. As they released the snare, he flew away and once more rejoined his companion, Lynx-man.

They journeyed down the Kobuk river until they reached the man's village, whence he had started. Here he lived the rest of his days, for he was now becoming old. He still retained the power to become a spruce-hen in times of trouble, and often visited the villages of animals which became human while he was with them. The man was considered to be a great medicine-man. He was the first of the people in those parts to travel widely.[2]

THE YOUTH WHO SLEW THE SERPENTS

In a village, where lived a poor young man with his aged grandmother, nearly all the young men and hunters had disappeared. They had left the village either singly or in groups. Of late even the searching parties failed to return, until there was left of the young men only the

2 This story is related amongst Kobuk, Selawik, and Kotzebue peoples. In its most extended form the tale requires many nights to be told. The rendition given is but a synopsis.

poor youth, who was too poverty-stricken to possess weapons. To him came the headman, in great despair, for his only son was now missing. "O, youth," said he, "I shall give you food, clothing, and weapons, if you will set forth after my son and the hunters of my village and bring back word of them. I shall give you my daughter in marriage, or you may become head-man in my place."

The youth eagerly accepted the proffered equipment, and departed upstream in his canoe. On the first night out, his grandmother appeared to him in a dream, saying: "O, my grandson, here are a red bead and white bead. Put one in your mouth if ever you are in trouble."

The poor young man found the bead son awaking the following day. He paddled up a small stream which branched from the river and soon saw a sandy bank where many canoes were drawn up. Some were old and rotting, while others were quite new. All had belonged to the missing hunters. The young man then followed a pathway inland, through wooded country, down a valley, and to the top of a mountain. He listened and heard a faint clamor as of dogs barking, the laughter of people playing, and the many noises of a large village, but he saw no evidences of life.

At nightfall he began the long, tortuous descent of the mountain, and at last came upon a large, lighted village, situated in a clearing. When he arrived at the nearest house, he made a noise. A woman came out and bade him enter. Inside were a man, his wife, three sons, and a daughter. After he had finished the offered food, the head of the family said: "O, youth, eat well now, for your days will be short. Our medicine-man always sends for strangers, whom he kills. When strangers fail to come to our village, he even kills our own young men."

"Has a youth in clean, new clothes arrived here recently?" inquired the poor young man.

"Yes, several days ago one such came here and was soon killed by the two serpents which eat people."

The poor young man then knew that he had discovered why all the hunters of his village had disappeared. He thought to return home and claim the reward offered by the headman, but the old man, his host, dissuaded him from travelling that night. In the morning, while eating, and pondering sadly the fate of his comrades, a messenger came to the poor young man, and said: "Follow me, young man, to the home of the medicine-man. If you do not come at once, a terrible fate awaits

you, because the serpents will be sent for you."

He set out, accompanied by the three sons of his host. He thought: "I wonder what manner of animals or serpents I shall find. I shall put this red bead in my mouth." When the group entered the large house, they found the huge medicine-man reclining. He roared at the poor young man: "Why did you not hurry? I shall teach you a lesson! You will soon be dead! I shall have one of my wives set food before you. Eat heartily; it is your last meal!"

When food was brought, the poor young man refused it. He flung the pot in the medicineman's face, crying, "You had better eat your last meal yourself!"

The medicine-man was mad with anger. He sang, and a monster serpent appeared, gliding toward the poor young man. He was not afraid, because he had the powerful bead in his mouth. As the serpent was about to strike, the young man spit the bead into the threatening, distended mouth. Flame seared and split open the slimy coils from mouth to tail.

The medicine-man began to fear his youthful opponent, and asked him what his helping spirit was. The young man refused to answer, but asked in his turn, "Did you kill that hunter with the clean, new parka?"

"No, the female serpent killed him."

The young man decided to kill this serpent to see if any bones or particles of clothing belonging to the headman's son remained in the stomach. He decided to do this after all had left the house. He addressed himself to the men in the house, " If this man has stolen any of your wives or possessions, take what belongs to you and go out."

Although the medicine-man was now frightened, these bold words enraged him anew. He knocked the young man down, and laughed, " If that is the way you fight, you will not live long."

The angry youth sprang up, seized the medicine-man, cast him to the floor, and pulled out an arm. In vain the defeated one pleaded and offered riches, clothing, weapons, and power. The youth killed his enemy, divided the spoils among the people, and returned the stolen wives.

The young man killed the remaining serpent, and found several bodies. including that of his headman's son, in the stomach. Their hair and eyebrows had already begun to rot. He put his white bead in his

mouth, blew out his breath, and immediately all the young men who had been missing were restored to life and health. They all returned home, where the young man took the headman's daughter to wife as his reward. He and his brother-in-law hunted and travelled together, and ruled the village together. After a time, however, they became cruel, taking away the possessions of others for themselves, and killing people.

THE FALSE WIFE

In a large village on the Kobuk river dwelt a wealthy man and his son, both of whom were noted hunters. The son, however, refused to marry, although many men offered to betroth their daughters to him; and his father, although eager to have a daughter-in-law, never tried to force his son to take a wife.

In the same village lived an old woman with her stepdaughter. These were so poor that they had to gather weeds to eat, and to pick up cast-off caribou-skins for clothing. One day the maiden joined a group of girls at play. The young hunter, son of the wealthy man, as he was passing by, stopped to watch. He gazed hard at the poor girl, unable to remove his eyes from her. Feeling the intensity of his stare, she turned and looked. The young man smiled, whereat the maiden, though pleased at his attentions, tightened her hands over her breasts so that the flimsy costume gave way. In embarrassment she ran home.

The stepmother questioned her on the condition of her parka, and the girl lyingly answered, "In a game, that wealthy young hunter tore my clothes."

The stepmother was glad to have the man pay attention to her daughter, and willingly mended the rents. On the following day the same thing happened, and the stepmother again repaired the parka, thinking that the hunter might marry the maiden.

The young man soon took the girl to his home as his wife. They lived for a long time happily, and always had plenty, even in times of famine, because the husband was a great hunter. One time, when the wife was gathering berries down the stream far from the village, a strange woman accosted her. This woman with her power took on the form and features of the wife.

Then she rendered her victim dumb and paralyzed, and brought her back to the stepmother, who nursed and cared for her, but never

revealed the identity of her changed stepdaughter to any one, because she was displeased at the wealthy man and his son.

Meanwhile the strange woman entered the young man's home and performed all wifely functions just as the true wife had done. The hunter, when they slept together, however, always noticed a strong, peculiar odor about his false wife. She always explained this by saying, " I smell from the things I have been working with today."

One day, when the false wife was away from the village, an eagle snatched her and bore her to his eyrie on a craggy mountaintop. The husband was saddened by the disappearance of his supposed wife, and went to the old woman, his mother-in-law. There he saw his real wife, but did not recognize her, for she was still unable to talk, and her form was different, although she now was well in body. The old woman kept the truth from him, but sent for an old man, noted for his powers, and his son, to consult about the missing woman.

After much incantation and discussion, they announced that the woman had been stolen by an eagle, a powerful bird, which assumed human form at night. The old woman instructed the wealthy hunter to return home. Then she told the young man, son of the old man with powers, the whereabouts of the eagle, giving him a fish to aid him in recovering the woman. The fish had the power, when wet, of travelling where requested.

The young man followed the flopping fish, arrived at the mountain, and climbed to the nest of the eagle. It was daytime, and the bird had flown. The woman was there in the house, the floor of which was strewn with horns and bones. The woman was glad to see her rescuer, but informed him that now neither could escape; that the bird would catch and bring them back each time, and that probably it would kill and devour the young man. Soon they heard a great whirring of wings, and in alarm the woman hid her presumptuous rescuer under a pile of skins.

The Eagle changed to human form outside; then entered, his boots bespattered with caribou blood. Immediately he sensed something wrong, and sniffed the air. He cried: "I smell something! With my keen nose I scent something! Some human is near here!"

The woman calmed him by saying, "Oh, no! No human is near here. That smell must be from some rotten meat I threw out today."

The Eagle believed her, and began his meal, which occupied the

remainder of the day. The woman suggested to the Bird-man that he go out to fetch some wood. Then she instructed the hidden man that as soon as the Eagle was asleep, they would attempt to escape. The woman and Eagle went to bed as soon as he brought in wood. After much laughing and talking, the Bird-man slept. Then the woman and the young man slipped outside. They entered the fish-power and soon arrived in their village.

The false wife returned to her unsuspecting husband, and the two lived happily for a long time. The rescuer received great wealth as his reward. The true wife, still unable to talk, often crawled to the door of her husband's home, where she sat all day, returning to the stepmother at night. The false wife paid no attention to her, and the husband thought she was only a poor girl. He often flung her pieces of caribou when returning from a hunt. The true wife cried in rage and jealousy, but was unable to change matters. She wished continually that some one would take pity on her, return her to her own form, and restore the power of speech. In despair she put a medicine-bead in her mouth, then threw it out the smoke-hole, hoping at the same time for the power to talk.

The wish and hope came in a dream to the old man with supernatural power, whose son had rescued the false wife. In the dream her story and the mischief wrought by the false wife were revealed to him.

The old man, on awaking, told the dream to his son, whom he sent to relate the tale to the wealthy man, father of the hunter, and to the husband of the dumb girl. The old man then went to the true wife, completely restored her, in spite of the opposition of the stepmother, and led her to the wealthy man. He denounced the false wife before the true wife and husband, telling the whole story and saying that the woman was only a poor stranger, jealous of the true wife and stealing her voice and figure through her supernatural powers.

The husband rejoiced at once more having his real wife. He now knew that he had long disliked the other woman, because of her peculiar odor. The two lived happily together, while the false woman in disgrace went to the old woman, stepmother of the real wife. She now became unable to move or to talk, and the people carried her and the old woman far away and forbade them ever to return.

The old woman made the evil woman well, and by their powers they returned to the village, flying through the air. After this demon-

stration of what they could do, the villagers let them alone.

The true wife pitied them, and with tearful entreaty persuaded husband and father-in-law to send for the two outcasts and forgive them. When they arrived, no one could tell the true wife from the false, even the old man of the supernatural powers who was present. However, the young man who had rescued the evil one declared that only the true wife would weep tears of pity over the other woman.

The evil woman cast aside her ways and married her rescuer. True wife and husband lived in plenty, and had a son and two daughters. The four ruled the village, and all lived in peace and plenty.

If the young hunter had obeyed his father's wishes and had listened to the old men and their offers of betrothal to their daughters, he would not have undergone nor suffered all the trials and troubles which came to him.

THE YOUTH WHO LEARNED TO LAUGH

A wealthy, childless couple lived in a village situated on a grassy plain. There were born to them many children, all of whom died in childbirth. The parents' hearts were sad, and they despaired of ever having sons or daughters, because they were growing old.

One day, while the woman was out gathering firewood, she saw a finely carved piece of wood, which she concealed beneath her parka. While walking homeward, she felt something moving in her body, and knew that she was with child. Delivery came as soon as she reached home, and the pleased husband gave his best furs for wife and newborn son to lie upon. The boy could not smile or laugh. In four days the baby grew to the stature of manhood; then went hunting and brought in much game.

One night the youth joined the young people of the village in their games at the playing place. For a long time they amused themselves trying to make him laugh, uttering witticisms and performing strange antics. At length the young man smiled, and flame blew out of his mouth. He declared, " I have smiled; now I shall laugh."

As he laughed, great flames belched from his mouth, burning all the grass, and consuming the young people playing until only skeletons were left. The old people mourned the loss of their sons and daughters. The youth felt very sad when he heard the singing for the dead. Soon it occurred to him how to bring back his fellow playmates to life. He

walked about the playing ground, singing, and as he went the burnt grass became green again. Then flesh appeared on the skeletons. The young people opened their eyes, leaped to their feet, and resumed playing as if unaware that they had been dead. The youth joined them, playing and laughing, though flame no more came from his mouth. The people rejoiced, and respected the youth, though they feared his powers. He became the greatest medicine-man in the village.

One spring a group of hunters failed to return from a caribou-hunt. A searching party also became lost. In a short time all the young men had disappeared from the village, except the youth of flame-breathing powers. He determined to find his lost comrades, setting forth with no weapons. He walked a long distance, passing through a forest, crossing a lake, and climbing a range of high mountains on his journey. When he came to a trail, he followed it until he reached a house of flint, with no doors or windows. A wooden crane was perched on a tall pole before the house, and this strange bird began an outcry when the youth appeared. With a wave of his hand the young man silenced the bird. He climbed to the smoke-hole, peered within, and there saw the youths and hunters of his village, all headless, standing in a row.

He descended from the roof, and finding no entrance or doorway, he drew the outlines of a door with his finger on the house walls. At once a door opened to him. Inside he came upon a man and a woman fast asleep. Their skins and clothing were of flint. At his approach, they awoke, and the man immediately said: "You are the first man to enter here of his own accord. Wife, it is very strange for a human to come to us."

As they rose to their feet, they were so huge that the young man had to crane his neck to look up at them. The Flint-man informed him: "You are a medicine-man, but you must die! No

one may enter our house without yielding his life!"

The young man pleaded, "Let me sing and dance first; then you may kill me."

"No, you must die now!"

The youth alternately laughed and pleaded for a long time, until Flint-man, exasperated, cried, "Dance quickly, then, for you will soon die!"

In his dance the young man moved his arms to the left. The Flint couple were impelled by some power to follow his movements. Following his lead, the Flint people then waved their arms to the right.

When the young man threw back his head and closed his eyes, they did likewise. The young man opened his eyes and saw that the Flint couple were dead, still standing in the last position.

The young man then kicked each one of his comrades in turn. At the kicks, the heads returned to the bodies, and they became alive and well once more. The entire party returned to the village, where great feasting and rejoicing took place. The villagers were happy once more. The young man went back to the flint house. He carried it alone to his village and lived in it. All feared him, but liked him. He became the greatest medicine-man of the village.

HOW SQUIRRELS CAME TO MAKE MANY HOLES

The braggart Crow, always hungry, one day saw Squirrel picking berries. Crow's cunning thoughts told him to wait by Squirrel' s hole. Soon Squirrel darted in great haste to his hole, for he knew that a fox had caught his scent. Squirrel stopped short when he saw Crow, knowing that the hungry bird would snatch him. He thought rapidly, then said, "O, Crow, with your beautiful glossy feathers, if you will sing and dance for me 1 shall give you the fat from my right side."

Crow, his vanity tickled, began to prance about, but always between Squirrel and the hole. Squirrel cried: "Dance harder, O, Crow, and shut your eyes! That is a fine dance!"

Crow obeyed, because he liked to show off to any one who would watch him. Squirrel applauded: "O, Crow, how well you dance! If you would only spread out your beautiful wings!"

The pleased Crow stretched and stiffened his wings till they rasped the ground. Squirrel then seized his opportunity and scuttled under the wings into his hole. The tricked and chagrined Crow, with anger in his heart at being so cozened, choked down his rage and called in honeyed tones to Squirrel: "Come out again, little partner. The sun is high, and it is time to dance and play!"

Squirrel, in safety, merely laughed to himself. All summer Crow lay in wait, and Squirrel refused to come out. He grew very hungry, but took the edge from his appetite by eating his nest. One morning frost came, so Squirrel stuffed the entrance to his hole and went fast asleep. Crow, though ravenous, would not give up, and decided to wait all winter, if necessary, through storm and calm.

Winter passed, and the trickling of melting snow awakened Squir-

rel. He knew that spring had come once more. Hunger seizing him, he determined to go out. He tore down the stuffing that blocked his hole and peered out very cautiously. There he was reminded of his enemy. He saw the bones of Crow picked clean by the foxes. All summer Squirrel thought of the hunger he was made to suffer through Crow, and dared not go far from the safety of his retreat. The idea came to Squirrel to make many holes to run to in case of danger. Then he could increase his range and obtain more food. Today all squirrels dig many holes to which they can scuttle whenever Crow, Fox, or other enemies approach.

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