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DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE

PROVERBIAL EXPRESSIONS AMONG THE CROW INDIANS

THE dearth, if not complete lack, of proverbs as a distinct literary category among the American Indians has been repeatedly stressed. This, however, does not imply a complete absence of proverbial sayings. As Professor Boas has pointed out in his *Primitive Art*, such traditional phrasings are found on the Northwest coast, though their number and significance in aboriginal life do not remotely approach those characteristic of, say, African Negroes.

Some fifteen years ago I recorded two comparable sayings among the Crow Indians, which, however, I never published. During a visit in the summer of 1931 I corroborated the earlier information and secured some additional statements. It seems to be not altogether unusual for a Crow to refer to some well-known traditional or mythological episode and to make a personal application. So far I have been able to record four expressions of this type, all obviously conforming to the same pattern. The first two are those recorded in identical form on an earlier field trip.

(a)

a · c dut'u · 'rək' hira' k'ara'k'uci · 'riky.

His scalp when they had taken then he ran, that he is like.

(Free translation: He is like the man who did not run away until after he had been scalped.)

This is, of course, applied to any one who is belated in his undertakings. It is said that the Crow once scalped an enemy and, on looking back after a while, saw him scurrying off.

(b)

ak'birikyuxci' dahi''kyuci'riky.

The helper poor he is like.

(He is like the poor helper.)

This is applied to one who proffers his assistance but turns out to be a bungler. I could get no light on the origin of this saying.

(c)

apa · 'ri du'tsi'k'uci'riky.

Porcupine-taker he is like.

(He is like the one who wanted to catch the porcupine.)

This applies to persons who persist in a hopeless enterprise. The reference is to an incident in the *Old-Woman's-Grandchild* myth, one of the most popular of Crow hero tales: a girl is lured up a tree in pursuit of a porcupine, whose master (the Sun) causes the tree to grow miraculously until it reaches the sky.

(d)

basa'dək bire ·'citu'k'uci'riky.

The turtle into the water thrown he is like

(He is like the turtle that was thrown into the water, i.e., while pretending to be afraid of it.)

This is applied to a person feigning not to like what he really craves.

This suggests that the Crow may have some knowledge of the fairly wide-spread story of Turtle's Warparty, though I never recorded it among them.

In this context may be quoted two phrases used in order to characterize an impossibility:

(a)

isa ·cpi'te tsi ·'sua ha'tskitu ·rək or kuruxa'ruorək.

Cottontails their tails when they are long or when they are dragged.

(When cottontails have long tails; or drag their tails on the ground.)

(b)

ba' ·tsiə a ·'pə de ·'əxdək'.

Pine leaves when they are yellow.

(When pine needles turn yellow.)

ROBERT H. LOWIE

NOTE FROM NEW GUINEA

Aliatua, Wiwiak District, New Guinea.

April 21, 1932.

We are just completing a culture of a mountain group here in the lower Torres Chelles. They have no name and we haven't decided what to call them yet. They are a very revealing people in spots, providing a final basic concept from which all the mother's brothers' curses and father's sisters' curses, etc. derive, and having articulate the attitude towards incest which Reo outlined as fundamental in his Encyclopedia article. They have taken the therapeutic measures which we recommended for Dobu and Manus—having a devil in addition to the neighbor sorcerer, and having got their dead out of the village and localized. But in other ways they are annoying: they have bits and snatches of all the rag tag and bob tail of magical and ghostly belief from the Pacific, they are somewhat like the Plains in their receptivity to strange ideas. A picture of a local native reading the Index to the Golden Bough just to see if they had missed anything, would be appropriate. They are very difficult to work, living all over the place with half a dozen garden houses, and never staying put for a week at a time. Of course this offered a new challenge in method which was interesting. The difficulties incident upon being two days over impossible mountains have been time consuming and we are going to do a coastal people next.

Sincerely yours,

MARGARET MEAD