

OLD INDIAN TRAILS

BY
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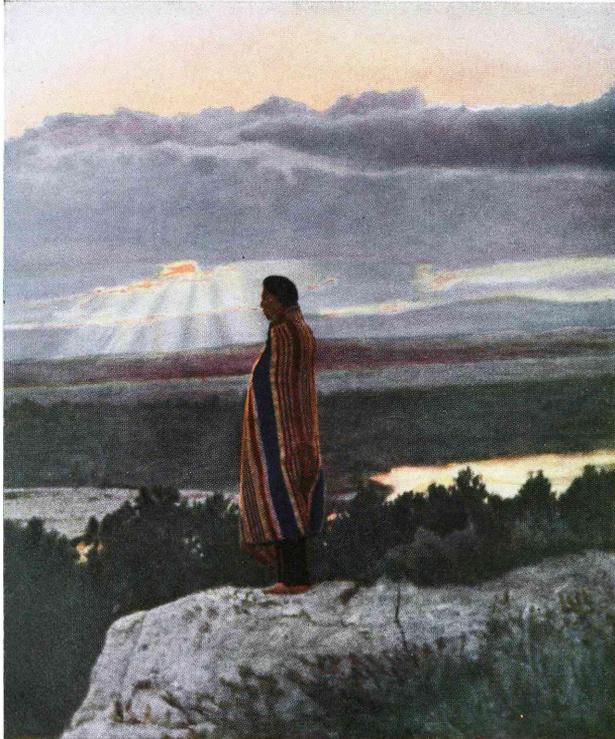
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MY INDIAN FATHER

OLD INDIAN TRAILS



SUNSET FROM LOOKOUT BUTTE (*PAGE 197*)

PREFACE

In the spring of 1896 I went into northwestern Montana as a member of a Government expedition which was appointed by President Cleveland to recommend a national policy for the United States Forest Reserves and to advise the Secretary of the Interior as to the reserving of certain other forests.

Our expedition, which went in advance of the main Commission, was composed of Gifford Pinchot, Chief of the Forest Service (now Governor of Pennsylvania), and Henry S. Graves, later Chief Forester and Dean of the Yale School of Forestry; I went as photographer and to help in the forest surveys. We had two guides, William Jackson, an Indian scout of the Blackfoot tribe, and Jack Munroe, a white man who was married into that tribe.

We examined the forests in northwestern Montana, both on the eastern and western slopes of the Rocky Mountains. We came into contact with the natives of the region, both white men and Indians. We made surveys in the country where the Flathead Forest Reserve was later established, and in the region now known as Glacier National Park. Then it was a paradise for hunting and fishing, a wild and unfrequented country, visited only by Indians, trappers, and a few hunters of big game.

We made our last survey in the heavy forest on the western side of the Rocky Mountains. Then Graves set out for Kalispell and civilization; Pinchot, with Jack Munroe and our bear dogs,

started south for Fort Missoula; I was left alone with the Indian scout.

We crossed the mountains together and joined the tribal camp of the Blackfoot Indians on the plains. There I met many of their leading men; among them Chief Mad Wolf, who adopted me as his son, in ceremonies lasting through two days, and made me a member of his tribe.

I maintained intimate associations with my Indian father and his tribe through many years, keeping records of everything that I saw and heard—their customs and legends and religious beliefs, our hunting trips, and the flora and wild life of their country.

But into the region where we wandered civilization came with its automobile highways and great modern hotels. The old generation of Indians have died and their children are civilized. The Blackfoot are no longer nomads and hunters, following the great herds of buffalo and other game; they till the soil and live in houses like white men. Their ancient customs and tribal life have passed away forever.

My purpose, therefore, in writing this book, is to record the results of fifteen years' close association with the old Blackfoot chiefs, medicine men, and common people. I have retained the narrative form of my original notes, in order to give as faithful a record as possible of their character, environment, and family life.

W. McC.

OLD INDIAN TRAILS

CHAPTER I

MY INDIAN GUIDE

It was an evening in early summer. The stars shone bright and our Indian tepee glowed with light from its inside fire. My guide, a famous scout of the Blackfoot tribe, smoked in silence; while I lay on my comfortable bed of robes and blankets, listening to the sounds from the forest—chirping of crickets, last songs of the thrushes and vibrating chant of an ovenbird.

That night by our lodge-fire I said to the scout: "Tell me about your home." And he replied:

"On the prairie beyond the Rockies, I have a ranch with many horses and cattle. The mountains are near, the hunting good; our streams and rivers are full of fish. Come with me to my country, to my tribe, the Blackfoot Indians. In our valley the head men of the tribe live; you will meet there our leading chiefs."

For a moment I was silent. The plan of the scout accorded with my own desire. All my life I wanted to live away from the city, among the mountains and wilds. I was weary of the turmoil of the city, the dreary grind and slavery of business, from early morn until night in an office-prison; away from the sunlight and from birds and flowers in the spring-time. I wanted to shake off the shackles of social convention, to leave the worry and stress of the modern city, where business and the making of money are the chief end of man.

I thought to myself: "If I go with my guide, I can live out-of-doors all day and all night. I shall become strong in body and mind and be happy. And, instead of striving for money, I will go on a quest. I will stay with the scout and visit his tribe, to find whether they are more happy and contented in their primitive life, than civilized people in great modern cities."

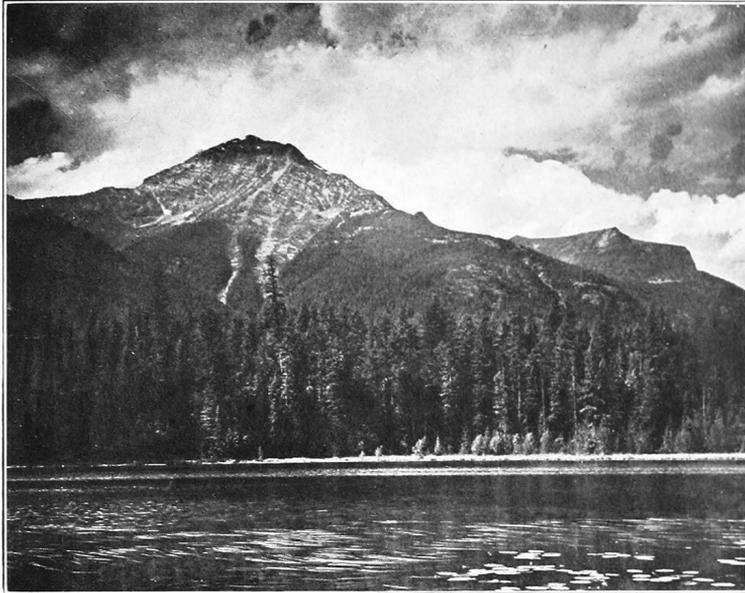
Now Indians have a way of masking their feelings; they never show enthusiasm. So I said quietly to the scout: "I want to go to your home and your Indian tribe." This ended our talk for that night; but I had a keen desire to go.

My guide was near middle age. He had the swarthy complexion, black hair and high cheek bones of an Indian; but he did not look like a full-blood. He was tall and slender, with an impressive manner; fluent of speech and polite and suave. His father was a white man named Jackson, an early pioneer, a Rocky Mountain hunter and trapper, his mother an Indian woman. The son was called Billy Jackson by white men and Siksikaí-koan (Blackfoot Man) by the Indians.

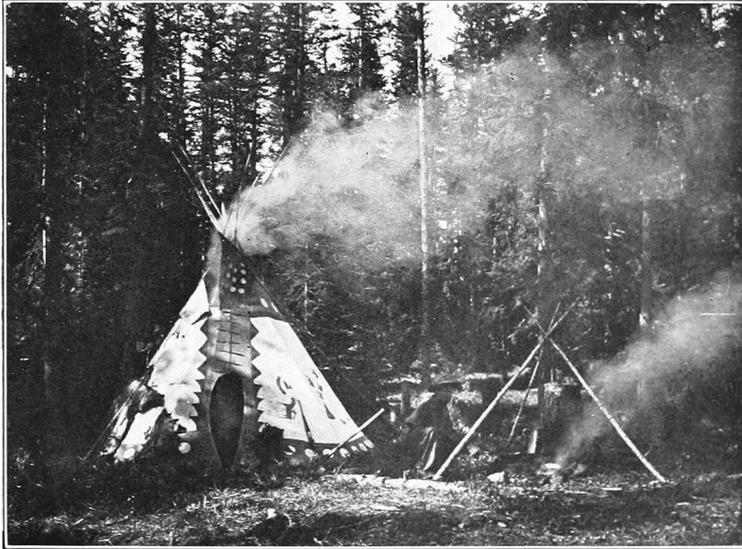
But Siksikaí-koan was an unusual half-breed. He raised himself above the popular prejudice against half-breeds. He was liked and respected by both white men and Indians. Honest and industrious, generous and kind, he was always ready to help any who came to his ranch. He stood high in the councils of the Blackfoot tribe; and served honorably as scout for Generals Custer, Miles, and Reno in the Indian wars.

The scout was a good guide in the wilderness; on him I could depend. He knew the trails of the plains and mountains and handled with skill the wild Indian horses. Self-reliant in time of

danger, he had the quiet manliness and courage that knew no fear; a keen sense of humor and a wonderful knowledge of nature—information not gained from books.



A SMALL LAKE ON THE WESTERN SLOPE OF THE ROCKIES



OUR INDIAN TEPEE

He knew woodcraft; that moss generally grows on the north side of trees, more on evergreens than on those which shed their leaves in winter; that pines are more frequently struck by lightning than birch or cottonwood; that the toughest side of a tree is to the north, because the winter winds and cold come from that direction.

He knew Indian legends and traditions and stories of war and adventure. He told me about a family of lost children who went to the sky and became the constellation of the Pleiades, and the woman who left home and children to live with the Man-in-the-Moon. He spoke English fluently, also the Blackfoot, Cree, and Sioux tongues; and was familiar with the ancient customs and traditions of his Indian tribe.

Our camp was on a small lake on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains, in the region now known as the Flathead Forest Reserve. We had a good "pack outfit," a herd of fifteen horses, a comfortable Indian tepee and plenty of food. Our government work was finished and we were free to wander.

Next morning the mists were heavy over the lake, which lay like a mirror beneath the surrounding mountains and forests. The sun came up red and flashed bright shafts of light through the big trees; the shadows from their branches made odd patterns on their smooth trunks. Grass and undergrowth were wet with heavy dew and hanging cobwebs shone like diamonds in the sunlight. By the time we broke camp and had our horses packed, the sun's rays were hot on our backs.

The scout led the way through the forest, while I followed and drove the pack horses. How different they were from the horses of civilization! They had learned to think for themselves and to rustle their own food. On the trail they were always scheming; I had to watch them and be on the alert. Their leader was a crafty mare with a bell fastened to her neck. All the herd were devotedly attached to her. She was a good baggage carrier and careful of her pack. She never let it scrape or bump trees. But she knew how to make things easy for herself. No matter how poor the feed, she was always fat and in good condition. She took the lead and kept the other horses in order. If one of them tried to pass, she met him with bite or kick and put him back in his place.

All of our pack were gregarious by nature. My saddle horse was uneasy whenever I dropped behind. He pawed the ground, whinnied and danced until I started; then ran with delight to

join the others. This feeling held all of our horses together on the trail, and kept them from wandering at night.

It was the beginning of summer—just the time for birds and wild flowers. I saw fields of Indian basket grass with tall stalks and dense caps of cream white flowers; along the trail were beds of yellow adder's-tongues, pink twin flowers, white lilies and flowering dogwood. I heard the wild cry of a loon from a lonely lake and olive-backed thrushes along the shores. In the deep forest were winter wrens, golden-crown kinglets and myrtle warblers. Then, for the first time, I heard the flight song of a Macgillivray warbler; and found his nest in some blackberry bushes close to a lake.

Finally we entered the valley of the Flathead and camped in a grove of larch and yellow pine. In that broad and fertile valley with plenty of free sunshine, the yellow pine is a noble tree with symmetrical spire, straight round trunk and slender shaft. The needles are long and yellow green, the bark smooth with deep fissures and arranged in massive plates.

There was plenty of good grass, a godsend to our horses after their long stay in the forest. We removed packs and saddles, attended to sore backs and picketed the bell-mare. It was our custom to keep her near camp at night, that it might be easy to catch the rest of the herd in the morning.

I slept outside under the stars, making my bed close to a thicket of fragrant pines and masses of wild roses. It was one of those days that come only with early summer. A crescent moon hung over the forest; from a bank of clouds the first star shone. In the east, beyond an outer range of forest-covered mountains,

I saw a line of white, glittering peaks, remote and ethereal, glowing in the soft tints of the sunset, like the realm of another world.

Then the lure of the wild stirred my blood strangely. Again I told the scout I wanted to stay with him. I had a new sense of freedom, as though a load had been rolled from my back. I felt like a boy just freed from school and longed to explore that mountain world, to discover what lay beyond.

That night we sat by our camp-fire through the long northern twilight. The scout smoked in silence, while I dreamed of mountain trails and Indian camps and bright days ahead.

CHAPTER II

CROSSING THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

We left the Flathead Valley and came to the South Fork of Flathead River, entering a gorge, narrow and precipitous, where the river roared and thundered against huge rocks. The current was swift, swollen by the melting of mountain snows under a hot sun. On both sides of the gorge were sheer cliffs, and, because of the rocks, it was hard and dangerous going. We followed the river, seeking a place to ford, until we came upon open flats, where the channel was wider; then with shouting and shooting of guns, we drove the frightened horses across.

We camped near a band of Kutenai Indians. Their smoke-colored tepees stood on rising ground. Near by was a grove of trees where a woman was chopping, and a stream with groups of children swimming and playing in the water. In a broad meadow many horses were grazing, men driving picket pins and looking after their horses for the night.

The Kutenai were famed for their good horses. In former days they brought them across the mountains to run buffalo on the plains and to race with the Blackfoot. Whenever the scout visited their country, he traded for horses and took them back across the Rockies to his ranch on the prairies.

That evening I went with the scout to the Kutenai camp and saw the men gathered in a gambling game. They sat in a circle, the players in the center, surrounded by a throng of women spectators. It was a guessing game, played with marked sticks

of bone, with horses and blankets for stakes. The players sang gambling songs; they joked and taunted each other; they beat with sticks and drummed. The game came to an end, when one of the sides which was led by the chief of the Kutenai lost all their counting-sticks; and then the scout began to trade.

In the meantime, I was on the lookout for a good saddle horse. Near the circle of gamblers I saw a fine bay tethered. He was a stocky horse, built from the ground up, a four-year-old with a white star on his forehead. He had a sleek and glossy coat, slender legs, and a beautiful pair of brown eyes. He belonged to the chief of the Kutenai, the Indian who lost the gambling game. He saw me looking at his horse and came near. He wore a suit of deerskin decorated with colored beads, a beaded necklace of many strands, white shell earrings, and his hair in long braids over his shoulders.

We bargained in the sign language, and our trading was short. I asked him "how much," by holding out my closed right hand and opening the fingers, one after the other. He sold me his horse for nine dollars. And with the money he opened again the gambling game. This time he won all the counting-sticks and the game was his, while I was the owner of a fine saddle horse. I named him "Kutenai," after his Indian tribe.

Then we entered a broad timber belt, where the forest was dense and the trees large, for the most part giant cedar, hemlock, larch, white pine, great silver fir and canoe birch. The forest floor was covered with a thick carpet of moss and ground pine. Sun and wind did not penetrate. Along the trail the light was dim and the air still. But overhead, through the tops of the big trees, I heard the rushing of the wind.

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