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“Of the Crow Nation”

By EDWIN THOMPSON DENIG

Edited

With biographical sketch and footnotes

By JOHN C. EWERS

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INTRODUCTION

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF EDWIN THOMPSON DENIG

In North America the white man's application of knowledge of Indian cultures to the solution of practical problems long antedated the development of ethnology as a profession. The first white men to seek knowledge of the Indian tribes of the Northern Great Plains were the fur traders. In order to gain a precarious foothold in that region, to establish and expand their business, it was imperative that they obtain not only a working knowledge of the Indian languages but also a fund of reliable, useful information on the locations and numbers of the several tribes and of their major subdivisions, their seasonal movements, their basic economies, forms of government, intertribal relations, methods of making war, and social customs. A few of the more intelligent traders recognized that the information they had gathered on these subjects would be of interest to others, even to people far removed from the Indian country. Much of our present knowledge of the cultures of the Northern Plains Indians prior to 1850 has been derived from the writings of these men. The names of several trader-writers readily come to mind—Pierre La Verendrye, Jean-Baptiste Trudeau, Pierre-Antoine Tabeau, François Larocque, Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson, and the two Alexander Henrys. Each of these French or Canadian writers has made a substantial contribution to ethnology. The United States has produced a single trader whose contributions to the ethnology of the Indian tribes of the Northern Plains are deserving of rank with those of the individuals mentioned. He was Edwin Thompson Denig.

Edwin Thompson Denig was born in McConnellstown, Huntingdon County, Pa., March 10, 1812. He was the son of Dr. George Denig, a physician. The Denig family traced its descent from Herald Ericksen, a chieftain of the Danish island of Manoe in the North Sea. Although Denig's writings show clearly that he was a man of better than average education for his time, nothing is known of his activities prior to his entrance into the fur trade at the age of 21. It is most probable that Alexander Culbertson, a native of nearby Chambersburg, encouraged Denig to seek a career in the fur trade. Culbertson, 3 years Denig's senior, had gained some experience in the trade on St. Peter's River prior to visiting his family in Pennsylvania in the

summer of 1832. Denig joined Culbertson in the service of the American Fur Co. the following year. Records of that company, in the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, dated April 10, 1833, credit Edwin T. Denig with \$400 for "Services ending 1 year from date."

It is noteworthy that Denig first traveled up the Missouri River in the same year, and possibly on the same steamboat, as did the noted German scientist-explorer, Maximilian, Prince of Wied-Neuwied, and Karl Bodmer, author and illustrator respectively of *Travels in the Interior of North America*, a work which for more than a century has been regarded as a basic source on the Indians of the Upper Missouri. For the German prince and his talented artist companion the trip offered an opportunity for a year's adventure and observation in a strange and exciting environment. For Denig it marked the beginning of 23 years' residence among the Indians of the Upper Missouri as a fur trader. Denig became one of many subordinates in the employ of the American Fur Co. (which became Pratte, Chouteau & Co. in 1834, and continued under the firm name of Pierre Chouteau, Jr., & Co. after 1838). This was the principal firm engaged in the fur trade of the Upper Missouri. Its network of posts ranged upriver to the country of the Blackfoot near the Rockies and that of the Crow on the Yellowstone.

Denig's early years in the fur trade were spent in the country of the powerful Teton Dakota. On June 3, 1833, he wrote from Fort Pierre, the principal trading post in Teton country, "I will remain here this year" (Denig-Sarpy letter, Missouri Hist. Soc.). Four letters from William Laidlaw, bourgeois of Fort Pierre, to Denig (in the same collections) indicate that Denig was in charge of a small winter trading house subordinate to Fort Pierre during the winter of 1834-35. This house seems to have been located on Cherry River, a tributary of the Cheyenne, some sixty or more miles northwest of Fort Pierre.

In the spring of 1837, Denig held the position of post bookkeeper at Fort Union on the Missouri near the mouth of the Yellowstone (Larpenteur, 1898, vol. 1, p. 122). In a letter to Jacob Halsey at Fort Pierre, dated March 25, 1837 (in Missouri Hist. Soc.), Denig stated that he was well satisfied with his position and much preferred Union to Pierre. This letter also revealed that he had followed the custom of many white traders in that region in taking an Indian wife, and that he was the father of a boy. When smallpox reached Fort Union that summer Denig became infected but recovered "favorably" (Larpenteur, 1898, vol. 1, p. 132). Years later he wrote two accounts of the terrible ravages of that plague among the Assiniboin, based upon his first-hand knowledge of the circumstances (Denig, 1930, pp. 399-400; Denig Mss., Missouri Hist. Soc., pp. 99-100).

When John James Audubon, the noted artist-naturalist, visited Fort Union in the summer of 1843, Denig cheerfully assisted him in collecting bird and mammal specimens and helped him to obtain the head of an Indian chief from a tree burial near the fort. Denig enlivened Audubon's stay with stories of Indians and animals of the region. At the naturalist's request he wrote a description of Fort Union which has been published in Audubon and His Journals, volume 2, pages 180-188. Dated July 30, 1843, this is the earliest known example of Denig's descriptive writing. It is also the most detailed description of the construction and use of that most important Indian trading post on the Upper Missouri to be found in the literature. Denig stated that he was then in charge of the office of the fur company at Fort Union, a position comparable to that of chief clerk. His old friend Alexander Culbertson was Fort Union's bourgeois at that time.

Charles Larpenteur, a fellow subordinate in the service of the company, criticized Denig severely for his love of liquor, mentioning an occasion in January 1844, when Denig was unable to make a trip to Woody Mountain to trade for robes with the Cree and Chippewa because he had imbibed too freely (Larpenteur, 1898, vol. 1, pp. 162, 184-186). Drinking was common among field employees of the company, forced to spend long, monotonous winters at isolated posts in the cold north country. Denig was no teetotaler. In a letter to Alexander Culbertson, dated December 1, 1849, he wrote, "I would also request as a great favor if you will bring me up a keg say 5 galls of good old Rye, to have the pleasure of drinking your health occasionally. I can hardly look upon myself as the infernal drunkard represented and presume as no accident happened to the 2 g^l. keg of last spring, the 5 g^l. keg will be equally safe." In the same letter Denig reported, "Next year after the post has been thoroughly purged of all superfluities In a trade of 400 packs, I shall clear 6000\$ if 500 packs are traded 9000\$ will be the profit . . . you can assure yourself of my showing a neat Balance to our credit" (Letter in Missouri Hist. Soc.). This was the kind of report on Denig's activities that the company preferred to take seriously.

In the spring of 1847, Larpenteur (1898, vol. 1, p. 250) had referred to Denig as "the clerk at Fort Union." Denig's letter to Culbertson, quoted above, indicates that he was promoted to the position of bourgeois in charge of Fort Union before the winter of 1849-50. Fort Union not only was "the principal and handsomest trading post on the Missouri River," as Denig himself termed it; it was also the company's key point in its control of the Indian trade of the Upper Missouri. There the Assiniboin, Plains Cree, some Crow, and Chip-

pewa Indians traded. From Fort Union employees, trade goods and supplies were dispatched to the upriver Blackfoot and Crow posts, and to it came their returns of furs and skins in the spring for reshipment downriver to St. Louis. No field employee of the company then held a more responsible position than did Denig, except for his friend Alexander Culbertson, who had been promoted to general supervisor of all the company's posts on the Upper Missouri.

Denig again rendered valuable services to naturalists during the winter of 1849-50. At the request of Alexander Culbertson, and with the assistance of Ferdinand Culbertson, Denig prepared skins and skulls of birds and mammals of the Upper Missouri for use in scientific study. On December 1, 1849, he wrote A. Culbertson: "I am progressing with my specimens of animals for you as I have said I would & have already prepared the White Wolf, the Beavers, the War Eagle, the Caputi Argali or Antelopes head, and sundry other smaller matters which will be in order to put into every museum you think proper" (Letter in Missouri Hist. Soc.). The following June Thaddeus Culbertson, Alexander's brother, visited Fort Union. His Journal, under date of June 17, comments: "We were received very kindly by the gentlemen of the post, Mr. E. T. Denig and Ferdinand Culbertson. They showed me quite a good collection of stuffed skins made by them for Professor Baird, at the request of my brother. This must have cost them a great deal of labor and considerable expense, and they deserve many thanks from the students of natural history for whose benefit this collection was made" (Culbertson, 1851, p. 121). Thaddeus Culbertson brought back many, if not all, of these specimens for the collections of the Smithsonian Institution, which was then only in the fourth year of its existence. The earliest accession book of the division of mammals of the United States National Museum records specimens from Fort Union received from "E. T. Denig and A. Culbertson." A few of them are specifically indicated as "Prepared by Denig." Several other specimens, listed as collected by Thaddeus Culbertson at Fort Union, may have been prepared by Denig also. In toto these specimens include skins of the wolverine, plains wolf, lynx, beaver, mountain sheep, antelope, white-tailed jack rabbit, and grizzly bear; the head of a bison; and skulls of elk, mule deer, and bison. Thus in 1850 the Smithsonian Institution acquired an extensive representation of the mammals of the Upper Missouri as a direct result of the interest and labors of Denig and the Culbertsons.

Father Pierre Jean De Smet, noted missionary to the Indians of the Northwest, spent more than 2 weeks at Fort Union in the summer of 1851. He found in Denig a man who knew the Upper Missouri tribes well and who was sympathetic toward them. Between the famous

Catholic priest and Denig, who was Swedenborgian in his beliefs, a firm friendship developed that endured for the remainder of Denig's life. It is likely that during this visit to Fort Union De Smet encouraged Denig to write for him a number of sketches of the manners and customs of the Assiniboin and neighboring tribes. Apparently Denig lost little time in initiating the project, for in September of the same year Kurz observed that Denig was recording "stories" of "Indian legends and usages" for "Père De Smet" (Kurz, 1937, p. 133).

We may never know the full extent of Denig's writings for Father De Smet. However, it is possible to trace some of them with precision through the published correspondence of the priest. De Smet expressed his "gratitude for the manuscript you have had the kindness to prepare for me, and which I shall be most glad to receive and peruse," in a letter to Denig written in May 1852. By the next fall the priest had received the manuscript. On September 30 he wrote thanking Denig profusely for "your very interesting series of narratives . . . I have read the present series with absorbing attention and growing interest. My imagination has often carried me back to scenes long familiar to my experience and to others of a general and kindred nature which your pen has so well portrayed, in your valuable descriptions of their religious opinion, of their great buffalo hunt, their war expeditions, and in the histories of old Gauche and of the family of Gros François" (Chittenden and Richardson, 1905, vol. 4, pp. 1215-1216, 1482).

Father De Smet incorporated much of Denig's information in a series of letters to Father Terwecoren, editor of the *Précis Historiques*, Brussels, Belgium. These letters were reprinted in English in the book "Western Missions and Missionaries: A Series of Letters by Rev. P. J. De Smet," published in New York City in 1863. Letters X through XIII, comprising pages 134-205 of that volume, deal in turn with "Religious Opinions of the Assiniboins," "Indian Hunts," "Indian Warfare," and "Tchatka" (a biographical sketch of old Gauche). In the thirteenth letter, Father De Smet acknowledged his debt to Denig. "I cite the authority of Mr. Denig, an intimate friend, and a man of high probity, from whom I have received all the information that I have offered you concerning the Assiniboins, and who resided among them during twenty-two years." Denig's account of the family of Le Gros François (acknowledged in the priest's letter of September 30, 1852, quoted above) was not published in De Smet's lifetime. Father De Smet recorded the story in longhand in the Linton Album, from which source it was obtained for publication in Chittenden and Richardson's *Life, Letters, and Travels of Father Pierre Jean De Smet* (1905, vol. 3, pp. 118-124).

Rudolph Kurz, a young Swiss artist, possessed of a burning desire

to sketch and paint wild Indians in their home environment, spent 7 months at Fort Union, from September 4, 1851, to April 11, 1852. The *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz*, published by the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1937, contains a vivid account of life at Fort Union during that period. Frequent references to Denig in this journal provide an insight into his character that cannot be found in Denig's own, very impersonal writings.

Before his arrival at Fort Union, Denig had been represented to Kurz by a former, dissatisfied employee as a "hard man, liked by nobody . . . keeps two Indian wives . . . squanders all he has on them; begrudges anything paid the employees, oppresses the engagees with too much work, is never satisfied, etc." (Kurz, 1937, p. 101).

On first meeting Denig, Kurz described him as—

a small, hard featured man wearing a straw hat, the brim of which was turned back . . . He impressed me as a very prosy fellow. He stopped Bellange [Kurz' traveling companion from Fort Berthold to Union] short, just as the latter was beginning a long story he wished to tell; on the other hand, he ordered supper delayed on our account that we might have a better and more plentiful meal. A bell summoned me to the first table with Mr. Denig and the clerks. My eyes almost ran over with tears! There was chocolate, milk, butter, omelet, fresh meat, hot bread—what a magnificent spread! I changed my opinion at once concerning this new chief; a hard, niggardly person could not have reconciled himself to such a hospitable reception in behalf of a subordinate who was a total stranger to him. [Kurz, 1937, p. 120.]

It is apparent, however, from Kurz' later observations, that Denig exercised an authority over his men that would have been the admiration of his seafaring Danish ancestors. Denig's crew of some 50 men included workmen of a score of nationalities, many of whom were neither skilled nor ambitious. He kept them "strictly under his thumb." When they worked satisfactorily he offered some diversion for all of them. If they shirked, he limited their victuals. He expected his clerks, as good petty officers, to give him moral and, if need be, physical support in handling his men. He insisted on economy and efficiency on the part of his clerks to keep the overhead at a minimum.

Kurz observed that Denig had risen to his position of command as a result of "his commercial knowledge, his shrewdness, and his courage at the posts where he was earlier employed" (Kurz, 1937, p. 123). As a successful trader he also had to gain and hold the friendship of the Indians. Kurz learned that Denig had "made a thorough study of Indian life—a distinct advantage to him in trade" (Kurz, 1937, p. 126). But it was not enough for him to know the Indian languages, their manners, and customs. He must conduct himself in such a way as to win their respect. Denig believed most Indians esteemed white men for those talents they did not possess themselves; that though he

had a keen eye and was a sure shot, the Indians would never admire him for his hunting ability. He thought white men who adopted Indian dress and tried to follow Indian customs only succeeded in degrading themselves in the eyes of the Indians. Although Denig had two Indian wives, he encouraged them to live as much like white women as was possible in the Indian country. Records of Denig's purchases from the company (in the Missouri Hist. Soc.) tell of his importation of fine clothes for his wives and children, fancy foods for his table, candy and toys for his children. He kept up with the news and thought of the day by reading newspapers and books on philosophy and religion brought upriver from St. Louis. Edwin T. Denig was far removed from the crude hunter-trapper-trader stereotype of fiction. His way of life undoubtedly helped him to maintain the high degree of objectivity toward Indian cultures evidenced in his writings.

In his long conversations with Kurz, recorded in the latter's Journal, Denig revealed a very limited appreciation of art, but a lively interest in religion and morals, about which he expressed very definite opinions. One evening Denig came round to the subject of love. "Love—damn the word!—is a madness in the brain; a contagious disease, like small-pox or measles. I would rather have a dose of epsom salts than to recall the folly of first love—pure love. If it is not stopped, that lunacy makes one ridiculous, childish, ashamed of himself." Kurz, a confirmed romanticist, probably swallowed hard before adding the following sentence to his diary. "There is always something true and worth while in what he says, only he expresses himself in strong language" (Kurz, 1937, p. 180).

Much of their conversation concerned the Indians in whom both men were interested. Denig enjoyed telling the young artist stories of his experiences among the Indians, of Indian customs and personalities. Denig also read to Kurz from the manuscript he was preparing for Father De Smet and told him of his concern for the future of the Indians. Denig went out of his way to give Kurz opportunities to meet Indian chiefs and outstanding warriors who visited the fort, to attend councils he held with these Indian leaders, to obtain Indian artifacts and animal specimens for his collections, and to study the wildlife of the plains in the field. Denig seemed to have been as eager to help this unknown Swiss artist as he had been to aid the famous Audubon and Father De Smet.

In the middle of the century Henry R. Schoolcraft, of the Office of Indian Affairs in Washington, was busy collecting information on the Indians of the United States for historical, anthropological, and administrative purposes. To students of the Indians and to individuals who had traveled extensively or lived in the Indian country

he sent copies of a printed circular of "Inquiries Respecting the History, Present Condition, and Future Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States." One of these circulars reached Denig at Fort Union. Cooperative, as he had always been in furnishing information about Indians to earnest inquirers, Denig systematically set about assembling data for Schoolcraft. He submitted an Assiniboin vocabulary of more than 400 words which Schoolcraft published (1854) in the fourth volume (pp. 416-422) of his imposing six-volume compilation, "Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States." Eight years later F. V. Hayden referred to this as "the most important vocabulary of the language" of the Assiniboin "prepared by Mr. E. T. Denig, an intelligent trader" (Hayden, 1862, p. 381).

Denig also painstakingly prepared answers to the 348 questions regarding Indian cultures asked in Schoolcraft's circular. His reply was made in the form of a "Report to Hon. Isaac I. Stevens, Governor of Washington Territory, on the Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri, by Edwin Thompson Denig." This was a manuscript of 451 pages. In his letter of transmittal Denig gave an indication of his research methods. He had not been content merely to draw upon his knowledge of the Indians obtained through long association with and observation of them. He had pursued "the different subjects . . . in company with the Indians for an entire year, until satisfactory answers had been obtained and their motives of speech or action well understood before placing the same as a guide and instruction to others." Internal evidence in the manuscript itself and a statement in the letter of transmittal to Governor Stevens referring to the author's "constant residence of 21 years among the prairie tribes" attest that the manuscript was completed in 1854. This report remained in manuscript form for 76 years. It was published in the Forty-sixth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1930. Although, as its published title (Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri) implies, the work was intended to cover all the tribes of the region from the Dakota to the Crow and Blackfoot, the wealth of detailed information presented refers primarily to the Assiniboin. Much of the material on the other tribes takes the form of brief comparative statements. As it stands, Denig's Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri certainly is the most detailed and important description of Assiniboin Indian culture in midnineteenth-century buffalo days known to ethnology.

By 1854, Denig had resided continuously in the Indian country for 21 years, except for one brief visit to his relatives in the States in the summer of 1845. His diligence and ability had brought him success as a fur trader. He held partnership in the company, receiving one

twenty-fourth of its profits from the trade. Yet in a letter to Bishop Miege, written September 1, 1854, he revealed his intention "to leave this country in a year or two" (Letter in Archives of Missouri Province Educational Institute, St. Louis). This decision was based primarily on his consideration for the welfare of his children. There were no schools in the Upper Missouri country. Denig had sent his eldest son, Robert, to Chicago to be educated (Kurz, 1937, p. 136). But he now had three other children to be considered—Sarah (born August 10, 1844), Alexander (born May 17, 1852), and Ida (born August 22, 1854).

In the summer of 1855, Denig took his Assiniboin wife, Deer Little Woman, and his mixed-blood children to visit his brother, Augustus, in Columbus, Ohio. In St. Louis en route Denig and Deer Little Woman were formally married by Father Daemen. Their children were baptized while in that city. Denig's daughter Sarah recalled that the family found the climate in Columbus too warm for them. Otherwise they might have settled there. Instead they returned to Fort Union by a roundabout route, traveling from St. Louis to St. Paul and the Red River Settlement of present Manitoba by horse and wagon. Throughout this journey Denig was searching for a suitable future home for his family. The party reached Fort Union on November 28, 1855, after a wagon trip of nearly 3 months' duration. Much of the route passed through unsettled Indian country (Montana Hist. Soc. Contr., vol. 10, p. 151, 1940).

The Denigs spent the winter at Fort Union. In the middle of the following summer the family moved to the Red River Settlement in Canada. Denig received a payment from P. Chouteau, Jr., & Co. at Fort Union on July 13, 1856 (Company Records in Missouri Hist. Soc.). His will, dated September 12, 1856, at Red River Settlement, Red River of the North, must have been drawn up shortly after the family's arrival there. Very little is known of Denig's life in Canada during the next 4 years. He placed Sarah and Alexander in Catholic schools. He is said to have "established himself as a private trader on the White Horse Plains west of the present city of Winnipeg" (Vickers, 1948, p. 136). His friend De Smet wrote him January 13, 1858, "I rejoice greatly at your success and in the welfare of your children" (Chittenden and Richardson, 1905, vol. 4, p. 1499).

Late in the summer of 1858, Edwin T. Denig was stricken with an inflammation. His daughter Sarah believed it was appendicitis. He died on the White Horse Plains, September 4, 1858, and was buried in the Anglican cemetery near the present village of Headingly, Manitoba (Vickers, 1948, p. 136). He was only 46 years of age at the time of his death.

Edwin T. Denig's close friend and long-time colleague in the fur

trade of the Upper Missouri, Alexander Culbertson, survived Denig by 21 years. Prior to 1936, the Missouri Historical Society of St. Louis purchased from A. C. Roberts, of Spokane, Wash., a collection of manuscript materials dealing with several Indian tribes of the Upper Missouri. Mr. Roberts stated that this collection had been in the possession of his recently deceased mother, Julia Culbertson Roberts, who in turn received it from her father, Alexander Culbertson. The writings bore internal evidence of composition in 1855 and 1856, but their authorship was not known. In the archives of the Missouri Historical Society this material became known as the Culbertson manuscript.

Early in February 1949, this editor saw and read parts of the Culbertson manuscript in the Missouri Historical Society. He was impressed with its historical and ethnological significance. It appeared to him that the author's style, as well as some of the specific information in the manuscript, resembled closely that of Edwin T. Denig's published work, *Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*. Upon request, the Bureau of American Ethnology kindly furnished this editor an example of Denig's known handwriting in the form of photographs of his handwritten will, executed September 12, 1856, which he was able to compare with the writing in the Missouri Historical Society manuscript early in March of the same year. Similarities between the handwriting of the two documents appeared so marked as to justify obtaining the opinion of handwriting experts. Accordingly, photostats of pages of the manuscript together with photographs of the will were submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. On April 15, 1949, handwriting experts of the FBI Laboratory, Washington, D. C., reported their conclusion that the handwriting of the two documents was by the same individual. Thus, nearly a century after it was written, an important Denig manuscript was discovered.

This Denig manuscript comprises a portion of the text for a book of extensive proportions. The manuscript is in two parts. Although the pages of one part are numbered 1 to 153 in pencil, pages 61 to 92 are missing. Present are chapter 1 (pp. 1-10), comprising the author's introduction; chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 11-44) entitled "Of the Sioux"; chapter 4 (pp. 45-59) entitled "Of the Arickaras"; the latter and undoubtedly the greater part of chapter 6 (pp. 93-120), comprising a description of the Assiniboin; and chapters 7 and 8 (pp. 121-153) entitled "Of the Crees or Knisteneau." It is probable that the missing chapter 5 described the Mandan and/or Hidatsa. The second part entitled "Of the Crow Nation" is separately paged (pp. 1-75). However, there can be little doubt that this was intended as a later chapter in the same book.

In his opening chapter Denig clearly states the purpose of his book:

It would be well for the public if everyone who undertook to write a book was thoroughly acquainted with the subject of which he treats, but unfortunately this is not the case—authors spring up everywhere, and the community is saddled with an immense effusion of literature, the greater part of which when divested of the writer's own fancies and feelings, and submitted to the test of truth and experience, amounts to nothing. This is particularly the case in most of the works purporting to describe the actual life and intellectual capacity of the Indians of North America; much evil has been the consequence of error thus introduced, bad feelings engendered, and unwise legislation enforced, which will continue until our rulers are enlightened as to the real state of their Government, character, organization, manners and customs, and social position. Most information extant on these heads has been published by transient visitors amongst the tribes, travelers through a portion of their country, or collected from rude and half-civilized interpreters whose knowledge is but a degree in advance of their savage parents, and also impose upon their credulous hearers tales of fiction mingled with some ceremonies; which with a hastily collected and ill-digested mass of information form the basis of works by which the public are deceived as to the real state of the Indians. Even foreigners who have possibly passed a winter at some of the trading posts in the country, seen an Indian dance or two or a buffalo chase, return home, enlighten Europe if not America with regard to Indian character; which is only the product of their own brains and takes its color from the peculiar nature of that organ. Hence we find two sets of writers both equally wrong, one setting forth the Indians as a noble, generous, and chivalrous race far above the standard of Europeans, the other representing them below the level of the brute creation. People cannot form an opinion in this way—a correct knowledge of any nation, and more particularly of a savage one, must be and only is attained by being as it were raised in their camps, entering into their feelings and occupations, understanding their language, studying their minds and motives, and being thoroughly acquainted with their government, customs, and capacities.

Of the few traders who reside in the Upper Missouri territory, but a small portion have had the advantage of education, and these are so variously and constantly occupied as not to be disposed to apply their talents to writing histories, indeed it has been their policy to keep people in ignorance as to the trade and real disposition of the Indians, thereby preventing competition and discouraging visitors, both of which greatly militate against their interests. Neither do the gentlemen at the head of the Indian trade desire on all occasions to advance their opinions to persons who cannot, or will not, appreciate them.—Truth, though mighty, will not at all times prevail, although stranger than fiction, cannot be realized. The strange sights and occurrences incident to the country, be they ever so truthfully described, are rejected by previously formed opinion, and the narrator stigmatized, even in the mildest language he could expect, as a teller of strange stories. The author of these pages feels this in the commencement but cares little about it, having set out with the determination to present facts in as true a light as his powers admit, and with the experience of 22 years amongst the Indians, speaking their language, and having been placed in every possible position that men can be amongst them, presumes his opinions are entitled to respect.

Denig's first concern seems to have been with setting the record straight regarding the ethnology of the Upper Missouri tribes. He does not name those individuals who were the objects of his caustic jibes in the first paragraph quoted above. There can be little doubt,

however, that they were aimed primarily at George Catlin and Prince Maximilian, whose books, published a decade earlier, had gained wide circulation. Doubtless Denig was familiar with them. Indian-loving Catlin had spent 86 days on the Upper Missouri from Fort Pierre northward in the summer of 1832. Maximilian passed the greater part of a year on the Upper Missouri in 1833-34, wintering among the Mandan. In his criticism of those writers Denig revealed the common disdain of the old hand for the greenhorn. In the case of Maximilian, certainly, this strong criticism does not appear to be justified.

In the letter of transmittal accompanying his *Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*, Denig had expressed his dissatisfaction with his organization of that report, due to the limitations imposed upon it by the nature of the questions asked by Schoolcraft and which he attempted to answer (Denig, 1930, p. 393). In his book he sought to remedy that defect by adopting a new, carefully planned organization of his data. He explained this plan in his introductory chapter as follows:

The plan intended to be pursued in these pages, that the reader may understand the different traits of Indian character without difficulty or confusion, is, first, to give a short history of each tribe, its geographical position and other peculiarities; after which an inquiry will be instituted into their government, condition, manners, and customs as a body. Most customs and opinions are common to all the tribes, but wherever any great difference is observable, or marked traits to be noticed, they will be found in the compendiums of their separate histories. This is necessary to avoid the constant repetition that would follow if detailed accounts of each tribe were presented.

The Indians of the Upper Missouri territory may be divided into two classes, the roving and the stationary tribes—the former comprising the Sioux, Crows, Assiniboines, Crees, and Blackfeet, the latter, the Grosventres, Mandans, and Arikaras. My object is to show the state of these Indians in former times, what their present condition and what circumstances have tended toward their general advancement or decline; and after a general and minute research into all their motives, acts, religion, government, and ceremonies, conclude with a history of the American fur trade embodying many statements of various matters incident to the lives of trappers and traders.

This was an ambitious program of research and writing. Doubtless Denig was unable to complete it before his death. Certainly the manuscript in the Missouri Historical Society contains no descriptions of the Blackfoot, Grosventres (Hidatsa), or Mandan; no general description of the common factors in the cultures of the Upper Missouri tribes; and no history of the fur trade such as he promised in his introductory chapter. If Denig wrote chapters dealing with all or any of these topics those portions of his manuscript either have been destroyed or their present locations are not known.

Charles van Ravenswaay, director of the Missouri Historical Society, has kindly permitted this editor to make a typed copy of

the entire manuscript in the collections of that Society. Selected chapters have been and are being edited for publication by the Missouri Historical Society. Mr. van Ravenswaay has granted permission to the Smithsonian Institution to publish Denig's description of the Crow Indians.

"Of the Crow Nation," from internal evidence, was written in the winter of 1856. It is the last known writing by Edwin T. Denig in the field of ethnology. In accordance with the plan for his volume, Denig did not intend this as a detailed description of Crow culture. Rather it stresses those aspects of the history and culture of that tribe that were unique or more highly specialized among the Crow than among neighboring tribes. The sources of Denig's information on the Crow are not revealed in his writings. We do not know the extent to which Denig traveled in Crow country. It is certain, however, that he met fractions of that tribe repeatedly over a period of two decades when they came to trade at Fort Union. Undoubtedly he also received considerable information on the Crow from Robert Meldrum and other employees of Pierre Chouteau, Jr., & Co., who had lived many years with the Crow as traders. Denig's frequent errors in dating events suggest that he wrote from memory rather than from a journal or diary maintained over the years, and that he had a poor memory for dates. Some of the events he described may have become somewhat distorted through years of verbal retelling prior to the time he first recorded them in writing. Denig was not an infallible authority. However, he was an objective observer of the Indian tribes of his acquaintance. His long experience among the Indians enabled him to distinguish significant differences as well as basic similarities among neighboring tribes of the same culture area. He knew Indians well enough to view them as human beings rather than noble redskins or inhuman brutes. In "Of the Crow Nation" Denig has written one of the most valuable descriptions of Crow Indian culture in nineteenth-century buffalo days known to ethnology. In many respects this account substantiates and elaborates previously published descriptions of that tribe. It also contains significant data on Crow history, biography, and culture that cannot be found in any other source.

To experienced students of the Indians of the Northern Plains the opening pages of "Of the Crow Nation" should have a familiar ring. They have been published, but not under Denig's name. In 1862, the noted geologist, F. V. Hayden, published "On the Ethnography and Philology of the Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri." In the introduction to that work Hayden stated:

In all my researches in the Northwest, most important aid has been rendered to me by different members of the American Fur Company. All their stores of

knowledge of Indian life, language, and character, which they had acquired by years of intercourse with the different tribes, were freely imparted to me, only a small portion of which is given in the following pages. I am especially indebted to Mr. Alexander Culbertson, the well-known agent of the American Fur Company, who has spent thirty years of his life among the wild tribes of the Northwest, and speaks several of their languages with great ease. To Mr. Andrew Dawson, Superintendent of Fort Union, Mr. Charles E. Galpin, of Fort Pierre, and E. T. Denig, of Fort Union, I am under great obligations for assistance freely granted at all times. [Hayden, 1862, p. 234.]

Inclusion of Denig's name in this list is no true measure of Hayden's obligation to him. Page after page of Hayden's descriptions of the Sioux, Arikara, Assiniboin, Plains Cree, and Crow tribes are nearly verbatim renderings of portions of the Denig manuscript in the Missouri Historical Society. It seems most probable that Alexander Culbertson either lent Hayden this manuscript or provided him with an exact copy of it after Denig's death. This may account for Hayden's emphasis on his debt to Culbertson. In justice to Denig we should now recognize that he was the author of a very large portion of the descriptive material in Hayden's publication. Hayden's entire description of the Crow, comprising pages 391-394 of his 1862 work, is but an edited version of the early pages of Denig's "Of the Crow Nation." At the conclusion of that description Hayden wrote:

I have before me the materials for an extended sketch of the manners and customs, together with biographical sketches of the principal chiefs of this tribe, but, as they will doubtless appear in a future work now in course of preparation, I shall close with a brief notice of the different vocabularies of the Crow language which have been published from time to time. [Hayden, 1862, p. 394.]

There can be little doubt that the "materials" Hayden referred to was Denig's manuscript, "Of the Crow Nation." It is here published in full for the first time.*

The sectional subtitles have been supplied by the editor for the convenience of the reader.

JOHN C. EWERS.

*The editor is grateful to Mrs. Frances R. Biese, Archivist, Missouri Historical Society, for her kind assistance in locating pertinent data on Denig's life on the Upper Missouri, 1833-56, in the correspondence and records of the American Fur Co. and its successors in the library of that Society. He is indebted to Robert L. Denig, Brigadier General United States Marine Corps (Retired), of Virginia Beach, Va., for the opportunity to read letters from Denig's daughters regarding events of the last 3 years of his life; and to Father Louis J. Hanlon, S. J., Missouri Province Educational Institute, St. Louis, for furnishing a photostatic copy of Denig's letter to Bishop Miege in the archives of that institute. It was Chris Vickers, of Baldur, Manitoba, who furnished the Bureau of American Ethnology a photostatic copy of Denig's original will which aided the identification of the authorship of the Denig manuscript.

"OF THE CROW NATION"

By EDWIN THOMPSON DENIG

CROW RELATIONSHIP TO THE HIDATSA

These people were once a part of the Minnetarees or Gros Ventres, with whose history the reader has already been made acquainted.¹ They resided with them, they say, at different places along the banks of the Missouri, where the remains of dirt villages are still to be found. But about 80 years since a quarrel arose which divided them. The cause of the division was this. The nation was governed by two factions each headed by a separate chief, both of whom were desperate men, and nearly equal in the number of their followers. Jealous of each other and striving after supreme command, many difficulties and differences arose from time to time, 'tho they never had proceeded to extremes on these occasions, there being always a sufficient number of wise heads and good hearts to quell such disturbances. But this course of things could not possibly last. Therefore, at a hunt where both chiefs were present with their followers, and a great many buffalo had been killed, the wives of the two leaders quarreled about the manfolds or upper stomach of one of the cows. From words they came to blows, from blows to knives, in which scuffle one of the women killed the other. The relations on both sides took part. The nation armed, each headed by one of the above-named chiefs, and a sharp skirmish ensued in which several were killed on both sides. The result was that about one-half left those on the Missouri and migrated to the Rocky Mountains, through which wild and extensive region

¹ There is no chapter on the Hidatsa in the Denig manuscript in the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis. Denig's description of the Hidatsa may have appeared on some of the pages missing from the manuscript.

they continue to rove.² Why they are called Crows we cannot say. The word *Ap sar roo kai*, which is the name they give themselves in their own language, does not mean a crow more than any other kind of bird, the interpretation being simply anything that flies.³ The language of the Crows has undergone some change since their separation from the Gros Ventres, though enough resemblance remains to identify them as the same people. They have little or no difficulty in conversing with each other. This difference of dialect may arise from association with surrounding nations and incorporating some of their words into their own language.⁴

DESCRIPTION OF THE CROW COUNTRY

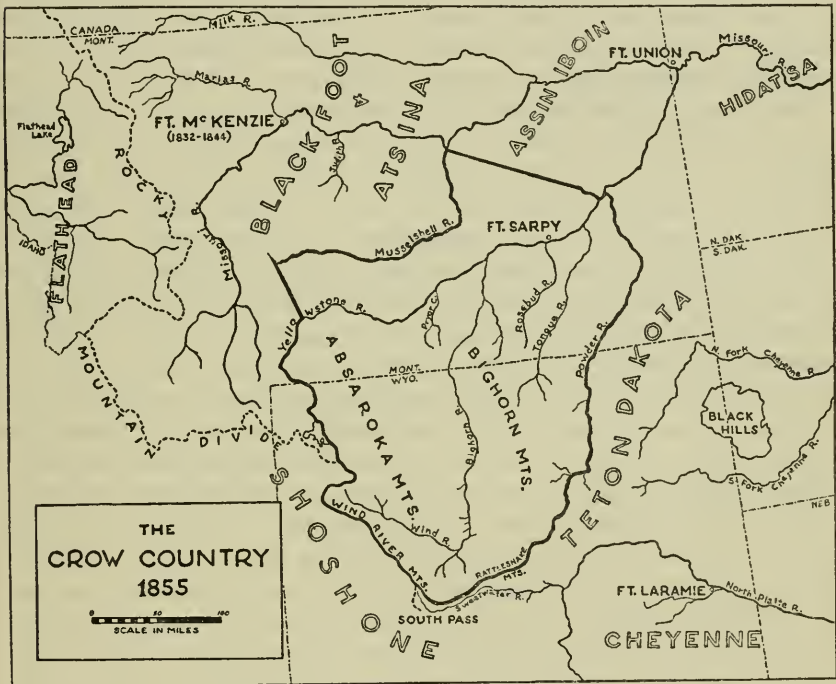
The country usually inhabited by them is through the Rocky Mountains, along the heads of Powder River, Wind River, and Big Horn, on the south side of the Yellowstone, as far as Laramie's Fork on the River Platte. They also are frequently found on the west and north side of that river as far as the head of Muscleshell River, and as

² Lowie has pointed out that "the alleged reason for the secession occurs among the traditions of other tribes and cannot be uncritically accepted as historical" (Lowie, 1912, p. 183). Denig's dating of this separation, as published by Hayden (1862, p. 391), has been credited to the latter by more recent writers. Now we know this dating originated in the writing of a man who had far greater knowledge of the ethnohistory of the Northern Plains Indians than did Hayden. Mere separation from the Hidatsa does not explain Crow abandonment of the semisedentary life typical of the Missouri River horticulturalists in favor of the nomadic-hunting existence characteristic of this tribe when first described in some detail by the fur trader François Larocque in 1805. It seems most probable that this Crow cultural transition was part of a more widespread movement that witnessed a similar change in the culture of the Arapaho and Cheyenne, and that it followed the introduction of horses into the area northeast of the Black Hills in the first half, and probably during the second quarter of the eighteenth century. If Crow separation from the Hidatsa took place after horses were introduced, Denig's dating may not be much too late. Lt. Bradley, in an independent study of the Crow in 1876, concluded that this separation "occurred not later than 1775, and possibly a few years earlier" (Bradley, 1896, vol. 2, p. 179). However, Washington Mathews, on the basis of Hidatsa tradition, estimated in 1877 that the separation occurred "doubtlessly, more than one hundred, and probably not less than two hundred years ago" (Mathews, 1877, p. 39). As one of several possible interpretations of the Hagen site, near Glendive, Mont., where scapula digging tools, pottery, and a single earth-lodge site were found, Mulloy has suggested its occupation by the Crow in process of transition from a horticultural to a hunting economy (Mulloy, 1942, pp. 99-102).

³ The earliest mention of the Crow by that name appears in the journal of the fur trader, Jean Baptiste Trudeau, among the Arikara Indians in 1795. "A war party of the Ricaras arrived on the fifth of June with the scalp of a man of the Crow Nation, a people who live near the Rocky Mountains" (Trudeau, 1912, p. 22). Trudeau also learned that "a Canadian, named Menard, who, for sixteen years has made his home with the Mandan . . . has been several times among the nation of the Crows in company with the Gros Ventres [Hidatsa]" (Trudeau, 1921, p. 175).

⁴ The affinity of the Crow and Hidatsa languages was recognized by fur traders in the first decade of the nineteenth century. In 1805 Larocque noted close resemblances between these languages and listed a comparative Hidatsa-Crow vocabulary of 21 words to illustrate the point (Larocque, 1910, pp. 68-69). In the next year Alexander Henry wrote, "The language of the Crows is nearly the same as the Big Belles" (Henry and Thompson, 1897, vol. 2, p. 399). Mathews (1877, p. 39) suggested that even in the period when the Crows lived in close proximity to the Hidatsa they may have spoken a slightly different dialect from the latter.

low down as the mouth of the Yellowstone.⁵ That portion of their country lying east of the mountains is perhaps the best game country in the world. From the base of the mountains to the mouth of the Yellowstone buffalo are always to be found in immense herds. Along that river elk may be seen in droves of several hundred at a time, also large bands of deer both of black-tailed and white-tailed species.⁷ Antelope cover the prairies, and in the badlands near the mountains are found in great plenty bighorn sheep and grizzly bear. Every creek and river teems with beaver, and good fish and fowl can be had at any stream in the proper season.



MAP 1.—The Crow country, 1855.

The once almost fabulous country of the Rocky Mountains is now so well known as scarcely to need description. The scenery of the district now under consideration does not materially differ from that in other parts of their range. The same high, stony peaks and eternal

⁵ While at the Crow camp on an island in the Yellowstone River a few miles east of present Billings, Mont., September 14, 1805, Larocque recorded the earliest known definition of Crow territory. "They told me that in winter they were always to be found at a Park by the foot of the Mountain a few miles from this or thereabouts. In the spring and fall they are upon this River and in summer upon the Tongue and Horses River" (Larocque, 1910, p. 45). "Horses River" is present Pryor Creek. Today the Crow Reservation lies within the area occupied by the Crow a century and a half ago. Figure 1 of this publication shows the Crow country at the time of Denig's writing, as defined by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, and confirmed in its northern limits by the Blackfoot Treaty of 1855.

snows are seen, intersected with fertile valleys and rich land. Most of the rivers whose sources are in these mountains are clear, rapid streams formed from springs which widen into lakes of different sizes according to the nature of the obstruction the water meets with in its descent. In their course through the valleys some of them assume a muddy appearance caused by the falling in of alluvial soil. The spaces between the spurs of the mountains are well covered with rich, grassy field flowers, shrubs, and trees, presenting many beautiful landscapes well worth the painter's pencil. The high ranges of mountains appear to consist of three different portions. From the base, one-third the distance up is well covered with tall pines, poplars, and other trees of large growth. This part of the ascent is also varied by occasional level places well clothed with verdure. The middle or second third is composed of gigantic rocks piled one on the other, often overhanging in such a manner as to present a frightful appearance to the travelers below. Through these rocks stunted cedars and pines, with other shrubs and vines, push their way, taking root where apparently there is no earth. At the end of this part vegetation ceases, and snow commences which continues to the summit. This snow is perpetual, 'tho part of it melts annually, which loss is supplied the ensuing winter. Yet it is presumed no thaw takes place on the summit, but on the sides some distance down. When the snow accumulates on the projections so as to lose its balance it is precipitated below in the form of avalanches something like those of the Alps, taking on its way large rocks and increasing in size as it goes along. Trees give way before it until it finds rest in the lower places where it aids to form the sources of rivers. Snow slides are also common by which piles of snow miles in extent are detached and force their way into the valleys or at least as far as the thickly timbered section. Many parts of these mountains along Powder River and the Big Horn appear to have undergone volcanic action. Pumice stone and different rocks in a state of fusion can be picked up. There are also large towers of melted sand 20 or 30 feet high, some of which can be met with in the valleys isolated from any rock, and surrounded by green prairie for miles every way. Other ridges of hills seem to have been entirely calcined, convulsed by some eruption, after which the rain has washed them into that grotesque appearance known as Mauvaise Terre [sic], which has already been referred to in treating of the Sioux district. Some of the springs near the head of the Yellowstone are bituminous, sending forth a substance like tar, which is inflammable. Others are sulfurous, and one or two boiling. The water in the last is hot enough to cook meat well enough to fit it to be eaten. The Indians describe others to be of a poisonous nature to animals, 'tho the same water is said not to affect the human species. Many

beautiful specimens of petrified marine shells, fish, snakes, and wood are to be found along the banks of the Yellowstone and its tributaries, even some distance in the interior. Some of these do not belong to any known living animals of the kind in this country, which would seem to prove that these mountains have at a former period been submarine. Most of the tributaries of the Yellowstone are well wooded; 'tho that river is only well timbered about one-third the distance from its conflux to the base of the mountains, where the pine growth commences, the lower part being altogether cottonwood and the points getting larger from the mouth of Powder River to its junction with the Missouri. The soil is good along the valley of the Yellowstone from the mouth to the Big Horn. Indeed most of the valleys near the mountains through which streams run are fit for tilling purposes, 'tho the want of timber in the interior would always prove a bar to the country's ever being thickly settled by an agricultural population.

The Yellowstone, like the Missouri, rises to its full every spring, owing to the melting of the snow on the lower parts of the mountains. This rise usually comes on about the middle of May and continues till the middle of June, when it commences falling unless kept up by heavy rains. During this high stage of water steamers of light draft might navigate it to the first rapids which are about 150 miles from the mouth. The ice commonly gives way about the first of April, and when broken up suddenly by pressure of water from the mountains, it forms dams quite across the valley raising the water 50 or 60 feet and inundating the neighboring country. The Crow Indians are greatly in fear of the water on these occasions, and suffer severely when taken unaware. The writer was eyewitness to one of these breakings up early in the month of February. About 130 lodges of Crows were encamped on the bank of the Yellowstone where the valley is 3 miles wide to the nearest hills. The water came down upon them in the night so suddenly that they barely escaped with their lives by running to the hills. But the land near the bluffs is lower than that on the bank of the stream, consequently in running that way they encountered water, wading and swimming through it carrying their children. They lost their whole winter's hunt, besides nearly all their arms, ammunition, and other property. When the water fell it left immense quantities of ice piled up around their lodges, which were dug out with great difficulty. Their entire loss on this occasion could not be much less than 10 or 12 thousand dollars' worth of merchandise. A few years ago the American Fur Co.'s fort at the mouth of the Big Horn was inundated in the same way, and a great deal of merchandise and peltries destroyed. This river is, when high, very rapid and dangerous to navigate on account of the rocks, snags, and other obstructions.

Mackinaw boats descend it, but every year furs are lost and men are drowned.

POPULATION AND MAJOR DIVISIONS

The Crow Indians live in skin lodges like the rest of the migratory tribes. They were formerly about 800 lodges or families, but from the usual causes of diminution, sickness, and war, are now reduced to 460 lodges. These are separated into several bands each governed by a chief, and occupying different parts of their territory.⁶ Their present range and divisions are nearly as follows. That band headed by "The Big Robber" usually make their winter hunt on the head of Powder River, and of late years take their furs and buffalo robes to the trading houses along the River Platte in the spring; from which they obtain supplies to continue their operations, and move back to winter quarters early in the fall.⁷ Another portion, led by "Two Face," is the largest band of the Crows, consisting of about 200 lodges.⁸ These generally move about through Wind River Mountains and deal with the American Fur Co.'s traders located up the Yellowstone. The next part of any consideration is that which acknowledges "The Bear's Head" as its leader and which travels along the Yellowstone from the mouth to its head, sometimes passing the winter with the Assiniboines and trading at Fort Union, but more frequently selling the proceeds of their hunt to the traders in the upper part of their country.⁹

⁶ Larocque estimated Crow population at some 300 lodges in 1805, having been reduced from 2,000 lodges by a succession of destructive smallpox epidemics. "Since the great decrease of their numbers they generally dwell all together and flit at the same time and as long as it is possible for them to live when together they seldom part . . . though at such seasons as they are not liable to be attacked they part for a short time" (Larocque, 1910, pp. 55-56). Prior to Chief Rotten Belly's death in 1834, his rivalry with Long Hair resulted in a split of the tribe into two divisions, the River and the Mountain Crow (Bradley, 1923, vol. 9, pp. 312-313; Curtis, 1909, vol. 4, p. 49). Zenas Leonard, the fur trader, found the Crow in "two divisions of an equal number in each" in the fall of 1834 (Leonard, 1904, p. 255). In the period 1833-50, Crow population was estimated at about 400 lodges (Maximilian, 1906, vol. 22, p. 351; Larpenteur, 1898, vol. 1, p. 45; Culbertson, 1851, p. 144). Curtis was told of an incipient third division of the Crow, the Whistle Water clan, who, about the year 1850, hunted apart from the other Mountain Crow on the headwaters of the Big Horn and Powder Rivers (Curtis, 1909, vol. 4, p. 43). Presumably this was Denig's "Big Robber's Band." In 1856 Indian Agent Vaughan estimated Crow population at 450 lodges (Ann. Rep. Comm. Ind. Aff., 1856, p. 80).

⁷ Kurz called this chief "Big Robert." He considered him the head chief of the Mountain Crow, and Rottentail head chief of the River Crow in 1851. Rottentail did not attend the Fort Laramie Treaty Council that summer, so that Big Robber was selected by the Government as head chief of the tribe. Kurz indicated that as a result Big Robber "will gain considerable influence through the distribution of gifts provided by the United States; many of Rottentail's adherents will move over to Big Robert's settlement. Besides, Rottentail has not more than 80 tents" (Kurz, 1937, pp. 212, 240).

⁸ Two Face's camp traded at Fort Sarpy in April 1855. The next spring a trader named Scott convinced Two Face that the Government annuities at Fort Union contained smallpox, and that he should take his trade to the Platte. Two Face's camp was en route to the Platte when Indian Agent Vaughan reached the Crow country that summer. Vaughan sent runners to turn him back. Two Face returned and agreed to receive annuities for his division of the Crow at Fort Union (McDonnell, 1940, pp. 120, 122, 176, 186-187).

⁹ Bear's Head traded at Fort Union in the fall and winter of 1851-52. Kurz referred to him as "the chief in command of the soldiers . . . a warrior of great ability and renown" (Kurz, 1937, pp. 213, 251, 260). The Fort Sarpy journal makes frequent references to Bear's Head's trade at that post in the early months of 1855, and of his trade at Fort Union in March 1856. The journalist termed Bear's Head "a good easy man & lets his people do as they please" about the fort. In 1858 the Lutheran missionaries Braueninger and Schmidt stayed in Bear's Head's camp (McDonnell, 1940, pp. 106, 107, 109, 110, 113, 115, 158-159, 176, 183, 186, 286).

INTERTRIBAL RELATIONS

The whole nation have a rendezvous every summer, when after performing several national solemnities which will be mentioned, they move across the mountains to exchange the greater part of the merchandise traded for horses. This traffic is carried on with the Flat Heads in St. Mary's Valley, or with the Snake and Nez Percé Indians on the headwaters of the Yellowstone.¹⁰ With the natives named, the Crows have been at peace for a long time. Also for the last few years, since 1850, they have been on meeting terms with the Assiniboines. But their natural and eternal enemies are the Blackfeet on the west and the Sioux on the east, with both of whom war has continued from time immemorial without being varied by even a transient peace.¹¹

RAIDING FOR HORSES

The Crows are perhaps the richest nation in horses of any residing east of the Rocky Mountains. It is not uncommon for a single family to be the owner of 100 of these animals. Most middle-aged men have from 30 to 60. An individual is said to be poor when he does not possess at least 20.¹² The Blackfeet also have plenty, and this is cause of continual war. Scarcely a week passes but large numbers are swept off by the war parties on both sides. In these depredations men are killed, which calls for revenge by the losing tribe. During a single summer or winter several hundred animals in this way change owners. A great portion of the time of each nation is occupied either in guarding their own horses or in attempts to take those of their enemies.

The Crow Indians take good care of their horses, as much at least as is practicable in their roving manner of life, and more than any other tribe in the North West territory except the Gros Ventres. They

¹⁰ The pattern of Crow horse trading was well developed as early as the first decade of the nineteenth century. They obtained horses, Spanish riding gear and blankets, and horn bows from the Flathead, Shoshone, and Nez Percé in the west in exchange for objects of European manufacture (metal knives, awls, spear and arrow heads, kettles, ornaments, and a few guns). At the Hidatsa villages they traded some of the horses and other articles obtained from the western tribes, together with dried meat, skin lodges, and clothing prepared by the Crow themselves, for corn, pumpkins, tobacco, and European trade articles. Larocque witnessed this trade in 1805, and Alexander Henry observed it in 1806 (Larocque, 1910, pp. 22, 64, 66, 71-72; Henry and Thompson, 1897, vol. 1, pp. 398-399).

¹¹ Eighteenth-century writers on the Blackfoot do not mention that tribe's warfare with the Crow. This suggests also that Crow movement westward may have been relatively late. Yet in 1811, Alexander Henry stated "the Crows are the only nation that sometimes venture northward in search of the Slaves" (Blackfoot). He told of both Piegán and Apsálonka expeditions against the Crow in that year (Henry and Thompson, 1897, vol. 2, pp. 720, 726, 732). The Blackfoot defeated a combined force of Crow and Apsálonka in their last large-scale battle with the Crow near the Cypress Hills in 1866. However, Crow and Blackfoot continued horse-raiding expeditions against each other until 1884 or 1885.

Hayden's use of Denig's "Of the Crow Nation" ends at this point. (See Hayden, 1862, pp. 391-394.)

¹² In 1805 Larocque observed, "He is reckoned a poor man who has not 10 horses in spring before the trade at the Missouri takes place and many have 30 or 40, everybody rides, men, women, & children" (Larocque, 1910, p. 64). In 1833 the Crow were "said to possess more horses than any other tribe on the Missouri" (Maximilian, 1906, vol. 2, p. 351). Indian Agent Vaughan estimated the Crow owned an average of 20 horses per lodge in 1853 (Ann. Rep. Comm. Ind. Aff., 1853, p. 355).

drive them often 10 or 12 miles from the camp, where young men are stationed to guard and water them. These horse guards are the younger portion of the families who own them, from the ages of 15 to 25 years, each family taking charge of its own horses and no more. When on the borders of an enemy's country or at any time when war parties are thought to be in the neighborhood, the best horses are brought home and tied to the doors of their lodges in readiness to follow any persons who might steal the rest in the night. These people live in the hourly expectation of losing all their horses, which is their only wealth, to the warriors of the surrounding nations, particularly the Sioux and Blackfeet.

While writing this, February 1856, a party of Blackfeet took off 70 horses from the camp of Crow Indians at the mouth of the Yellowstone. This they did early in the night so that they were not known to be stolen until about 10 o'clock the next day, when the guard went to look after them. As soon as the discovery was made about 100 Crows started in pursuit, each riding one fast horse and leading another. The Blackfeet had a whole night's start, but the horses had to break a road through deep snow, by which they lost time, while the pursuers had the advantage of a tolerable road made by their trail. For 3 days and 2 nights they kept up the chase, leaving the horses as they became tired and mounting their led animals. At the close of the second day their reserve horses gave out and they continued on foot. Both parties during all this time had neither eaten, drunk, nor slept, and were exposed to intense cold, but the chase being one of life or death, there was no time to be lost in any way. At dark on the evening of the third day the Crows came in the vicinity of the enemies, who also being worn out with fatigue and hunger, had camped, killed a buffalo, and were cooking. They had taken the precaution to drive the horses some miles farther, and being unaware of the proximity of their pursuers, were making fine preparations to pass an agreeable night around their fire. The Crows approached the camp under cover of the darkness and woods of the Yellowstone, but were obliged to make a circuit of a few miles where they found their horses, quietly grazing, which they recaptured and drove some distance below the fires of their enemies. After accomplishing this, some of them wished to charge upon them in the night. But their leader waited the breaking of day, when, as he expected, they would separate in different directions to hunt the horses, and they could kill one without danger to themselves. The result was what he anticipated. Early in the morning two men followed the tracks of the horses to near where the Crows lay in wait for them. These they charged upon. One escaped but the other did not or could not run. He endeavored to fire his gun, but was stabbed and scalped

alive, and afterwards cut up. No further attempt was made on the rest hard by. They had accomplished what they came to do—got back their horses and killed a man without losing any of their party, which is a better coup than killing several enemies with the loss of a man on their side.

Such skirmishes and chases are of daily occurrence summer and winter around both the Crow and Blackfeet camps. During a year more than 100 are killed on each side. When the parties are strong, severe battles take place and 50 to 100 are killed on each side if they are pursued and overtaken. But they often get away with the horses free of loss; particularly in the summer season when the trail cannot be followed fast, or when large war parties make a descent on small camps. Whatever losses in horses the Crows sustain, they are supplied by yearly peregrinations to the Flat Heads and Nez Percés with whom they exchange guns, blankets, etc., the produce of their robes and furs, for these animals. On their return the same scenes are enacted over again. The Blackfeet, being four times more numerous than the Crows, gain by these expeditions.¹³ The latter are gradually becoming weaker in men from this and other causes. The Assiniboines supply themselves with horses by stealing from the Blackfeet, and the Sioux in their turn take them from the Assiniboines. Thus the poor animals are run from one nation to another, frequently in this way returning to their original owner several times. This, with the chase of buffalo and travel of the camp, packing meat, etc., soon wears the beasts out. The Crows value their horses from \$60 to \$100 each, and those of the Blackfeet can be obtained for from \$20 to \$60 in merchandise.

It is thought best to be somewhat lengthy and particular about these animals in this history, as it will go far to explain one of the principal causes of perpetual warfare existing among the tribes, which is destined to lead to their entire extinction. Without horses Indians cannot support their families by a hunter's life. They must have them or starve. Tribes who have few must furnish themselves from those who have many, and smaller nations become so reduced in number by the frequency of these expeditions as to fall an easy prey to the larger ones. This is now the case with the Crows who, 'tho brave enough, can scarcely protect what animals they have, much less go in quest of others from their enemies. They do it, however, and consequently are becoming gradually thinned.

¹³ Denig probably classed the Atsina with the three Blackfoot tribes in his comparative computation of Crow-Blackfoot populations. Still his proportion seems exaggerated. Vaughan, who considered the Atsina part of the "Blackfeet Nation" estimated its total population at 1,175 lodges in 1858, roughly 2½ times Denig's Crow estimate of 1856 (Ann. Rep. Comm. Ind. Aff., 1858, p. 432).

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CROW INDIANS

This tribe has strongly marked national features, differing in some respects greatly from any other. Their general character is peaceable toward Whites. They are not ever very bloodthirsty toward their enemies, except in case of immediate revenge for the loss of some of their people. One excellent trait in their character is that, if possible, in battle they take the women and children prisoners, instead of dashing their brains out as the rest of the tribes do. They and their friends and brethren (the Gros Ventres) are the only nations we know who exhibit this mark of humanity.

About 12 years ago in a great battle with the Blackfeet in which the Crows killed all the men of 45 lodges of the former, they also took 150 women and children prisoners. These they did not even use harshly. The women were made to work like their own wives—perhaps a little more—tho not abused. The children were adopted into their own families, have grown up, and are now as much Crow as those of their own producing.¹⁴ It is also worthy of remark that the women, after a year's residence, and understanding some of the language, will not return to their people when given their liberty. This speaks volumes in favor of the Crows, proving how much better they are with strangers than with their own friends. The male children become Crow warriors, and carry the tomahawk and scalping knife against their relations, often murdering their own fathers or brothers without knowledge or remorse. The loss of a male child or a warrior is always a great misfortune with Indians. It is one less to defend the camp or to hunt. Therefore, in thus raising the children of their enemies, they in a manner supply the loss of a portion killed in war. These children are not always adopted as sons or daughters of those who capture them. This only happens when those who have taken them have recently lost by sickness some of their own children, to which the prisoner child is supposed to bear a resemblance.¹⁵ Whether or not this step is taken, they always become attached to them, who as they grow up show much affection and are instructed in the customs of war and the chase the same as others. The children knowing no other parentage except from the descriptions received from their protectors, which are always unfavorable, their feelings, of course, toward their masters are the same as though they were their own parents.

¹⁴ Denig (1930, pp. 551-552) referred to this action, stating that some 200 women and children were captured, but the Fur Co.'s agent among the Crow was able to return about 50 women to their own people. This doubtless was the battle between the Crow and the Small Robes band of the Piegan in 1845. That severe defeat reduced the Small Robes from a prominent Piegan band to one of minor importance. (See Ewers, 1946.)

¹⁵ Gray-bull, one of Lowie's Crow informants, stated that he had "raised a boy because he looked like one of his own sons, who had died" (Lowie, 1912, p. 219).

The Crows are cunning, active, and very intelligent in everything appertaining to the chase, war, or their own individual bargaining. In all other respects they are in a primitive state of ignorance. They are the most superstitious of all the tribes, and can be made to believe almost any story however improbable if the same is of a superhuman nature. Thus they ascribe powers to Whites, and to their own conjurers, far beyond those admitted by any other nation. Residing as they have and still do in the isolated regions of the Rocky Mountains, they have not had the opportunity to improve themselves in any branch of knowledge, even in the most simple things, that those who reside on the Missouri have. They seldom see any white persons in their own country except the fur traders, who are with them part of the winter and who only attract their attention to matters relating to the trade. Surrounded by hostile and powerful tribes, they have not until late years had the advantage of associating with other nations, and from that source gleaned some information concerning the world around them. They may be said to be yet in a state of nature, and but little elevated above the brute creation.

Some of their habits are of so filthy and disgusting a nature as not to admit of being published. In other respects they may be reckoned good. For instance, scarcely an incident has happened during the last 40 years in which they have killed a white man. Even the Rocky Mountain trappers, that desperate set of men who imposed upon and ill-treated them on all occasions, were suffered to trap their country of beaver without molestation. Not that they feared them, for these trappers were scattered through their district in small parties, which could at any time be cut off without loss, but by some natural formation of their disposition, they would not kill them and seldom robbed them. This is the more singular when we reflect that inveterate war was kept up between these trappers and all other nations, in which many were killed on all sides, and which resulted in the Whites abandoning that dangerous business. While the Assiniboines, Sioux, Blackfeet, Crees, and all have murdered Whites at different times, the Crow Nation can step forward and declare themselves unpolluted by their blood.

Another thing equally strange is that such a savage nation, living without any law and but little domestic regulation of any kind, should be able to settle all their individual quarrels with each other without bloodshed, while yearly brawls and murders take place among the rest of the tribes. In the space of 12 years but one Crow Indian has been killed by his own people. The cause of this was: An Indian struck another's wife across the face with his whip, upon which the husband stabbed him on the spot. The relations of the deceased armed to kill the other. But his friends protected him till dark,

when he fled to the Snake Indians, with whom he resided 12 years. Then, thinking the affair blown over, he returned to his own people. But the old grudge was renewed, and he was obliged to leave the second time, with the intimation that should he again return he would be killed. Since that time he has not been heard from. Though this is the case, and they do not kill or strike each other, yet we must not infer therefrom that no quarrels take place. On the contrary, differences arise more frequently among them than among others who carry quarrels to extremes, because, where the penalty of offense is death, persons are more circumspect in their behavior. But the Crows settle all disputes by abuse and taking each other's horses. Thus, if an Indian elopes with another's wife, the unfortunate husband will seize upon the whole of the offender's horses. Should he have none, then he takes those of his relations. In this he has the support not only of his own relations, but of the greater part of the camp. Now an action of this kind would be death to the offender with all other nations, besides taking a good deal of his property.

When retaliation is made by taking horses, the person who has committed the offense keeps the woman, and in the course of time his relations buy back his horses from the other. Any crime or misdemeanor can be paid for among the Crows except murder. Even should this happen, we feel convinced that their fondness for horses would overrule their disposition to revenge, and that a reasonable number of these animals given to the friends of the deceased would settle the affair. Any large thefts, and all disputes concerning women, are arranged on this system.¹⁶

Smaller pilferings and discord are decided by heartily abusing each other. At this game both men and women are equally adept, and their language affords a fine variety of beautiful epithets, which they bestow upon each other in great profusion. Most of these expressions consist of comparing the visage and person thus abused to the most disgusting objects in nature, even to things not known in the natural world. Or they likewise cast in each other's teeth the poverty of themselves or their relatives.¹⁷ The men are as bad as the women on these occasions, though men when angry usually commence relating their brave actions, count each coup distinctly on their fingers, calling on their antagonist to do the same and show which is the bravest man. In the course of a dispute of this kind the lie is given many times,

¹⁶ A half-century earlier Larocque noted that quarrels among the Crow generally were settled through gifts of horses or guns to the offended persons, "but there happen few quarrels, and they are generally occasioned by their wives and jealousy" (Larocque, 1910, pp. 58, 61).

¹⁷ Lowie found that songs "composed in derision of someone that had transgressed the rules of propriety, or in revenge for some personal or group affront, seem to have figured prominently in Crow society . . . Similar punishment was meted out by jilted lovers, and by one of the three local groups, when affronted by one of the others" (Lowie, 1912, p. 245).

which attracts no further notice than sending the like back with the addition of coward, thief, etc. In this way also whole bands abuse each other. The band of the Platte sometimes takes offense at the band along the Yellowstone. Every traveler that comes from one to the other during 1, or sometimes 2 years, brings threats, abuse, and defiance. One who did not know them would think that in case the bands met a desperate struggle would take place. Nevertheless when they meet, after all this parade of threats, they are the most peaceable people in existence. They will remain together for months on good terms. But when they separate, and have a river between them, so that no harm can be done, their war commences and terrible is the abuse shouted across the stream, accompanied by throwing stones that do not reach halfway, or shooting in the air with powder. This kind of conflict is often kept up for a day or two. Then they go different directions, swearing vengeance at their next meeting.

These people also are remarkable for never being the first to break a peace between them and other nations. They have at several periods been on friendly terms with the Assiniboines, Flatheads, Arikaras, Arappahoes, Cheyennes, Snakes, and other tribes. Whenever these transient peaces were interrupted, it was done by the others.

Having now enumerated some of their good qualities it is time we should refer to other traits not so amiable. In the first place they are beggarly and troublesome, particularly the young men, women, and children. When camped around a fort or wintering houses they fill up every place, torment all the domestic animals, and steal everything they can lay their hands on. The men are bold and impudent, particularly the warrior class. The women are noisy, thievish. Neither have the least idea of decency or decorum. The bucks make it their whole business night and day to run after the women, who, whether married or not, appear to be perfectly unaware that virtue or chastity has any existence even in the imagination. Their conduct in these matters is carried on in broad daylight without any regard to bystanders or lookers on. Indeed it would appear that they are as destitute of the ideas of decency or modesty as any part of the brute creation, for they prefer to be seen rather than to conceal any and all transactions between the sexes. No disgrace or penalty being attached to deceiving young women, contrary to the customs of other tribes, the ruining of a woman's character appears to be lightly if at all considered; it must follow that virtue is at a very low ebb among them. The consequence of this promiscuous and illicit intercourse is that disease more or less runs through the whole nation. Another effect is that a superfluous number of unmarried women are to be found, and those who are married are neglected by their husbands who run after the rest. The married women are not a whit better than the others

as they usually have had more or less connection before they were taken as wives by any one man. Before marriage a woman is not thought imprudent if she has but one lover; more, however, stamps her character as a courtesan. Consequently if such a thing as an honest woman can be found in this tribe it is one who has been raised under the husband's own care from a child, and taken for a wife at the age of 10 to 13 years.¹⁸

The old men, chiefs, and councilors are more decorous in their behavior as regards certain matters in which women are concerned. Neither are they so impudent and forward as the young men. But they make it up in begging any and everything they think likely to be had. In their camp this system of begging is changed to borrowing articles which they invariably forget to return. The stealing of property is mostly confined to the old women who are capital hands at it. Sometimes small things such as knives, ornaments, and utensils are abstracted. But in a large camp where all are compelled to leave their buffalo hides outside their lodges for want of room, several hundred of these and other skins are stolen from each other during a winter. About a fort they find good picking—tin cups, knives, spoons, articles of clothing, tools, etc., disappear with remarkable rapidity. They are so adroitly taken even before the eyes of the owner as always to escape detection. Larger items such as guns and horses they do not steal, either from the Whites or from each other. Frauds of this kind could not be concealed and the owner would take his property. Among kindred, however, these Indians show some liberality. If a man has all his horses stolen or killed, he can generally find friends to give him others, 'tho the giver expects payment when the receiver shall have retrieved his losses, or to be paid in some other way. Situated as they are in the constant fear of enemies, and liable at any time to lose their whole stock of animals, custom has pointed out the above plan to secure to them as far as may be the means to obtain a living. However much they may like their horses, or dislike to part with them, yet each man feels he depends on his neighbor for support when they are taken off. This happens so often as to render an understanding of this kind not only desirable, but absolutely necessary to their national existence; so that what appears at first sight to be a liberal and kind action is only one of interested principle.

The men and women are troublesome enough in many things, but the greatest nuisance in creation is Crow children, boys from the ages of 9 to 14 years. These are left to do just as they please. They torment their parents and everyone else, do all kinds of mischief

¹⁸ In 1833 Maximilian noted, "Of the female sex, it is said of the Crows, that they, with the women of the Arikkaras, are the most dissolute of all the tribes of the Missouri" (Maximilian, 1906, vol. 22, p. 354). Lowie found Crow "mythology, the reminiscences of informants, and ancient songs are all surcharged with evidence of the tendency to apparently unlimited philandering" (Lowie, 1917, p. 78).

without either correction or reprimand. In other nations these small fry are kept out of sight where men are, but the parents of this nation place them before themselves in every crowd or assembly, or in their own families. Thus they become intolerable, and a few years after ripen into the bold, forward, impudent young men before mentioned.

The male grown portion of the Crows are decidedly prepossessing in their appearance. The warrior class is perhaps the handsomest body of Indians in North America.¹⁹ They are all tall, straight, well formed, with bold, fierce eyes, and as usual good teeth. These also dress elegantly and expensively. A single dress often brings the value of two, three, or four horses. The men of this age are neat and clean in their persons, fond of dress and decoration, wear a profusion of ornaments and have different dresses suitable for different occasions. They wear their hair long, that is, it is separated into plaits to which other hair is attached with gum, and hangs down their backs to several feet in length in a broad flat mass which is tied at the end and spotted over with white clay. A small portion in front is cut short and made to stand upright. On each side of the head hang frontlets made of beads or shells, and alongside each ear is suspended several inches of wampum. Their faces on ordinary occasions are painted red, varied with a tinge of yellow on the eyelids. In large slits through the ears are tied sea shells cut into angular shapes, which are of a changeable blue and green color. These shells find their way from the coast of California through the different nations until handed to the Crows in exchange for other property.

As we do not wish to lose sight of the order of our history and are obliged in this place to confine ourselves to general description, the different dresses worn by these people on the occasions of their various ceremonies will be described when we come to treat of their manners and customs. It is sufficient here to state that the Crow men, as far as outward appearance goes, are much the finest looking of all the tribes.

It would seem that nature on this occasion has done so much in favor of the Crow men that she entirely neglected the women. Of all the horrid looking objects in the shape of human beings these women are the most so. Bad features and worse shapes, filthy habits, dresses and persons smeared with dirt and grease, hair cut short and full of vermin, faces daubed over with their own blood in mourning for dead relations, and fingers cut off so that scarcely a whole hand is to be found among them, are the principal things that

¹⁹ George Catlin, the artist, considered Crow men "really a handsome and well formed set of men as can be seen in any part of the world." He described the faces of "the greater part of the men" as "strongly marked with a bold and prominent antiangular nose, with a clear and rounded arch, and a low receding forehead" (Catlin, 1841, vol. 1, pp. 49, 193). Catlin's portrait of the Crow chief, Two Crows, painted at Fort Union in 1832, illustrates this facial profile. (See pl. 3.)

attract the attention of the observer. The young women are hard, coarse-featured, sneaky looking, with sharp, small noses, thick lips, red eyelids caused by the venereal disease, and bare arms clothed with a coat of black dirt so ground in as to form a portion of the skin. The old hags can be compared to nothing but witches or demons. Some of them are of monstrous size, weighing 250 to 300 pounds, with naked breasts hanging halfway down to their knees. Being always in mourning for some dead relations, they are usually seen in old skin dresses, barelegged, hair cut short, and their faces smeared over with white clay and blood. Notwithstanding all this, some of them have very handsome dresses which they wear on several occasions and which will be referred to, though they pay but little attention to dress of any kind in their ordinary everyday life. It would appear singular that such handsome men would be satisfied with such ugly women, but they do not seem to have the same idea of female beauty as we have. If a woman be young and not absolutely deformed, one appears to be as desirable for them as another.²⁰

About one-half the nation have a plurality of wives, the rest only one each.²¹ The property of husband and wife is separate. Each has a share of horses, merchandise, and ornaments. Not being accustomed to depend much on each other's fidelity they wisely prepare for immediate separation in the event of any great domestic quarrel. When from certain causes they decide on parting, the husband takes charge of all male children unless they are too small to leave the mother; the female part go with the wife. Guns, bows, ammunition, and all implements of war and the chase belong to the man; while kettles, pans, hides, and other baggage of the like nature fall to the woman's share. The lodge is hers, and the horses and other property having been divided perhaps years before in anticipation of this event, each has no difficulty in selecting their own. From this state of things it must follow that differences often arise as to what kind of merchandise shall be bought with the proceeds of their winter's hunt. She maneuvers to get such articles as would finally become hers, and he works for his advantage. In these differences, where considerable affection exists between the parties, the woman usually gains the point. At other times the skins are divided previous to selling and either trades what they like best. They exhibit great fondness for their children. Whatever they cry for they must have.

²⁰ The artists Catlin and Kurz shared Denig's opinion of the appearance of Crow women. Catlin (1841, vol. 1, p. 50) wrote, "The Crow women . . . are not handsome." Kurz (1937, p. 184) stated, "women of the Crow tribe are known rather more for their industry and skilled work than for beauty of face and form." Catlin's painting, reproduced as plate 4, is the earliest known portrait of a Crow Indian woman.

²¹ Of Crow polygamy Larocque observed, "some of them [men] have 8 or 11 and 12 [wives], but in such cases they do not all live with him, some are young girls that are only entrusted. But by far the greatest part have only 2 or 3 wives; some have only one, and those reason upon the folly of those that take many wives" (Larocque, 1910, p. 57).

When sick, no expense is spared for the services of the medicine men, and in death they evince every feeling of deep-felt grief. When anyone dies the immediate relatives each cut off a joint of a finger. This is done by placing an ax or butcher knife on the joint, and striking the same with a good-sized stick. Occasionally, in a high state of excitement, they lay their finger on a block and chop it off with a knife held in the other hand. The blow often misses the joint and the finger is divided between joints, which takes a long time to heal and leaves a portion of the bone protruding which presents a very disagreeable appearance. Both men and women mutilate their hands in this manner, so that at the present day there is scarcely an entire hand among them. The men, however, reserve entire the thumb and forefinger of the left hand, and thumb and two fingers of the right, so that they can hold a gun or draw a bow. But even these fingers often want a joint or so when all the others are cut off to the stump. They never tie up these sores, but after daubing over their faces with the blood, hold a bunch of wild sage on the stump until it stops bleeding. The blood is never washed off their faces, but let dry there and wear off, and when it is no more to be seen they cut their legs to obtain it and renew the application.²² The hair is also sacrificed on these occasions, either cut short or torn away by handfuls. In this state the mourner goes about on the hills howling dismally every day or so for a year or more, clothed with an old skin, bare feet and legs, wading through snow or mud, and crying until they are so hoarse as not to be heard.

When the camp is on the move in the summer, this tribe presents a gay and lively appearance, more so perhaps than any other. On these occasions both men and women dress in their best clothes. Their numerous horses are decked out with highly ornamented saddles and bridles of their own making, scarlet collars and housings with feathers on their horse's heads and tails. The warriors wear their richly garnished shirts, fringed with human hair and ermine, leggings of the same, and headdresses of various kinds, strange, gay, and costly. Any and all kinds of bright-colored blankets, loaded with beads worked curiously and elegantly across them, with scarlet leggings, form the principal portion of the dresses of the young men or those whose feats at war have not yet entitled them to the distinguished privilege of wearing hair. These bucks are fancifully painted on the face, their hair arranged as has been described, with heavy and costly appendages of shells, beads, and wampum, to the

²² Zenas Leonard (1904, pp. 271-272) witnessed self-mutilation by scarification and amputation of portions of fingers by relatives of Crow Indians killed in a battle with the Blackfoot, November 21, 1834. He saw that males preserved "the first two fingers of the right hand . . . for the purpose of bending the bow and many of the aged females may be seen with the end off each of their fingers, and some have even taken off the second crop." Denig (1930, pp. 427-428) has another description of Crow self-mutilation.

ears and around the neck. The women have scarlet or blue cloth dresses, others white cotillions made of the dressed skins of the big-horn sheep, which are covered across the breast and back with rows of elk teeth and sea shells. These frocks are fringed along the side and round the bottom. The fringes are wrought with porcupine quills and feathers of many colors. The price of the elk teeth alone is 100 for a good horse or in money the value of \$50. A frock is not complete unless it has 300 elk teeth, which, with the other shells, skin, etc., could not be bought for less than \$200. When traveling, the women carry to the horn of the saddle the warrior's medicine bag, and shield. His sword, if he has one, is tied along the side and hangs down. The man takes charge of his gun and accoutrements in readiness for any attack however sudden. The baggage is all packed on the horses, at which they are very expert. Kettles, pots, pans, etc., have each their sack with cords attached. These are on the sides of the animal, and on top of the saddle is either one large child fit to guide the horse, or two or three small children so enveloped and well tied as to be in no danger of falling.²³ Often the heads of children are seen popping up alongside of pup dogs or cub bears on the same horse. The lodge occupies one horse and the poles another. The meat and other provisions are put up in bales well secured. They are so expeditious in packing that after their horses are caught they are saddled, the tents struck, everything put on the horses and on the march in less than 20 minutes. The great number and good quality of their horses make a showy appearance. Both men and women are capital riders. The young men take this occasion to show off their persons and horsemanship to the women. A good deal in the way of courting is also done when traveling. The train is several miles in length, wives are separated from their husbands, daughters at some distance from their mothers, which opportunities are not lost by these young and enterprising courtiers. They ride up alongside, make love, false promises, in short use any and all means to obtain their end.

When on the march they move rapidly and when pressed for meat to eat, still more so. On these occasions they go on a fast trot, sometimes at a gallop, making from 20 to 40 miles a day. Generally,

²³ Larocque (1910, p. 64) noticed that Crow children too young to ride alone were tied in the saddle when camp was moved. About two decades later Gordon wrote of Crow children, "At four or five years of age they will ride alone and guide the horse" (Gordon in Chardon, 1932, appendix E).

however, their encampments are from 10 to 15 miles.²⁴ It is often a strange and barbarous sight to see small children but a few days old tied to a piece of bark or wood and hung to the saddle bow which flies up at each jump of the horse when on the gallop, their heads exposed to hot sun or cold. This does not appear to hurt them in the least. At sunset the cavalcade stops. The spot for each lodge is cleaned away and in the space of a few minutes the lodges are set up, the horses turned out to graze, and each family has a kettle of meat on the fire.

Owing to their having good animals and plenty of them the Crows seldom suffer for want of meat as is the case with some tribes who are not so well furnished with horses. They can move camp at any time and go in quest of buffalo, should there be none in the neighborhood. They have little else to eat but meat. Their country produces a few wild cherries, plums, and service berries, together with some esculent roots. But none of these are collected in sufficient quantities to form a resource in time of need, and as they do not cultivate, they depend entirely on the chase for subsistence.

They are good buffalo hunters on horseback with the bow and arrow, seldom using the gun for hunting except on foot when the snow is too deep for horses to catch the buffalo. They are not so good on foot as the Crees and Assiniboines, who, having few horses, have more practice in this manner of hunting.²⁵ They can kill elk and bighorn with their shot guns but are far behind the other nations named in this respect. They do not manage their hunts as the other tribes do. They have no soldiers' lodge to regulate the hunts.²⁶ Each man goes out with whoever chooses to follow. Sometimes nearly the

²⁴ Probably the best description of daily movements of any nomadic tribe of the Northern Plains in buffalo days appears in Larocque's journal of his trip with the Crow from the Hidatsa villages on the Missouri to the Yellowstone River near present Billings, Mont., via the eastern base of the Big Horn Mountains, from June to September 1805. Analysis of his data (Larocque, 1910) shows that camp was moved on 47 of 76 days en route. Daily movements ranged from 3 to 24 miles. The median distance traveled on the days camp was moved was $9\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Generally they followed stream courses. There was no mention of any dry overnight camp. On several days rain caused a late start or early stop. Delays of a day or more were caused by inclement weather (rain), serious illness in camp, halts to hunt (although hunting parties generally were out while camp moved), to dry meat and dress hides following a concentrated hunt and to dry bison tongues for the forthcoming late summer ceremonial, to cut ash whips, to hold a council to determine the route to be followed following a disagreement among the leaders, to wait in readiness while scouts reconnoitered for signs of enemies feared to be in the vicinity. They also stopped for a day when good pasture was reached to permit their horses to feed and rest after 2 days of long marches across barren country.

²⁵ In 1805 Larocque found the Crow to be "excellent marks men with the bows & arrows but poor shots with the gun." He also reported "They say that no equal number of other Indians can beat them on horseback, but that on foot they are not capable to cope with those nations who have no horses" (Larocque, 1910, pp. 65, 66).

²⁶ This statement is contrary to the observations of Larocque. "The hunting matches are regulated by a band of Young men who have much authority causing them to encamp or flit at their pleasure tell them where there are Buffaloes & to go hunting. They prevent them from setting out after one another and make those that are first ready wait for the others so that they may all go together and have an equal chance. Those that behave refractory to their orders are punished by a beating or their arms are broken or their tents cut to pieces" (Larocque, 1910, p. 60). Leonard also witnessed strict regulation of the hunt by Crow police in 1834 (Leonard, 1904, p. 257).

whole camp turns out to one surround, and again but few. When many hunt together several hundred buffalo are killed, the meat and hides divided, and all return packing the same on their horses. There are no poor people among this nation. That is, there are none so destitute of means that they cannot go or send to the hunt and get a supply of meat. In this respect they are much better off than some of the neighboring tribes. Another remarkably good trait in their character is, they do not suffer the aged and infirm to be left behind and perish as is the custom with some other nations, but this can be accounted for from the fact of their having the means to transport them while the others have not.²⁷ Neither is meat ever so rare with the Crows as with the Assiniboines.

BIOGRAPHY OF CHIEF ROTTEN BELLY

Some warriors have arisen among the Crows who displayed much generalship in conducting different expeditions against their enemies. Among the foremost of these can be classed Rotten Belly, who flourished about 20 years since, 'tho he is now dead. Had this man had the same opportunities of action he would undoubtedly have ranked with Tecumseh or Pontiac, but as his operations were confined to petty attacks on the hostile nations on their borders, and as he had but a small number to command, his friends must be contented with this small tribute to his memory.

When a very young man he commenced his career of war in going out at the head of small parties and bringing home horses from the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Panacks, Sioux, and Blackfeet. In these expeditions he was generally successful, taking large herds of horses and bringing his own party safe to camp. This is the principal aim of a leader, for if in stealing the horses he had had some of his people killed no credit would follow the feat. On many occasions, however, he was followed and overtaken by his enemies. These were the times in which he proved himself able to command. He had taken all precautionary measures, picked his men, had them well armed, the weapons in good order, and always retreated with his booty in a direction where timber was near in which to take shelter in case of attack. When escape was impossible he fought with wood and stones and gave battle. Frequent were the skirmishes he had with his foes in this way. But fortune favored him. At every sally he either brought home their scalps or

²⁷ "I saw more cripples and decrepid old men among them than among any other nation except the Big Bellies and the Mandans. It is said the Sauteurs and Kinistenaux tribes send their enfirm and old to Kingdome Come to ease themselves of the trouble of attending the care of them. These Nations, however, do it not, their old and infirm are of very little trouble to them. The Mandans and Big Bellies are sedentary and the Rocky Mountain Indians (Crows) have so many horses, that they can transport their sick without trouble. Whether they did it not before they had horses I do not know" (Larocque, 1910, p. 57).

horses and always without losing any of his party. At the age of 30 he was chief of the Crow Nation.

Other things aided this man on his road to the chieftainship. He had large and rich connections, was considered a prophet or medicine man, one who could obtain supernatural aid in his operations. He made no show of his medicine, no parade of sacrifices, or smokings, no songs or ceremonies, but silently and alone he prayed to the thunder for assistance. In his general conduct he was not an agreeable man, but rather of a quiet, surly disposition. He spoke but little, but that in a tone of command. His great superiority over others consisted in decision, action, and an utter disregard for the safety of his own person.

When acknowledged as the only chief of the whole nation he enacted many good laws and rules for their preservation, led the camp with judgment, choosing places where game was plentiful, and the country suitable for their animals and defense. He caused them to trade more guns and ammunition, established regular camp sentinels night and day, and used such vigilance that during his life the hostile neighbors could make no headway either against his people or their animals. Whoever approached the camp was killed. Warriors were on the alert and well prepared.

When arrived at the sole command he left off heading small parties and carried war into their enemies' country on a large scale. The first grand battle was with about 80 lodges of the Blackfeet on Muscleshell River. Rotten Belly had his spies out watching movements of this camp for months beforehand, and having collected the whole Crow Nation maneuvered them in such a way as not to raise the suspicion of their enemies. He appeared to be marching out of their country when in reality he was encircling them. His wish was to come upon them on some plain, and take them unprepared.

When by his runners he knew that the time and situation were favorable to his views, he, by forced marches, placed his camp near them without being discovered. Under cover of the night about 400 warriors placed themselves still closer. Early in the day when their enemy's camp was on the move, scattered over a level plain of some miles in extent, he gave the word to charge. Terrible was the storm that swept over the Blackfeet. The Crows were well armed, mounted, and prepared, the others embarrassed with their women, children, and baggage. Their long and weak line of march was literally, "rubbed out" by their savage foes. Whoever endeavored to defend was killed, the women and children taken prisoners. Most of the men of the Blackfeet were in front of the traveling van. They soon rallied and returned the charge but were outnumbered. Although they fought bravely for some time they soon were obliged to leave their families

and seek safety in flight. Others died defending their children. In the end, after a severe battle of a few hours, 100 and upwards of the Blackfeet lay dead on the field. Two hundred and thirty women and children were taken prisoners and more than 500 head of horses fell to the share of the Crows, besides all the lodges, camp equipment, provisions, etc. The Crows lost 22 men in this battle, besides others badly wounded. But upon the whole it was a great victory for these wild tribes who seldom have an opportunity to do half that much. They did not scalp half their enemies, there were too many and they tired of the employment. But few men of this small camp of Blackfeet escaped. The male children taken were brought up to be Crow warriors, and the females to be the wives of their captors with the view of repairing the former losses of these people in their constant wars with neighboring tribes.

Although others besides Rotten Belly distinguished themselves on this occasion, yet he being the leader received the greater share of applause. Others counted individual coups, he the aggregate. His name was sung through all the camps for months. His lodge was painted with rude drawings of the fight, he being the principal figure. The scalps, after having been danced, were suspended from his lodge poles. His shirt, leggings, even his buffalo robe were fringed with the hair of his enemies—the last being the most distinguished mark that can be borne on the dress of a warrior, and one never used but by him who has killed as many enemies as to make a robe with their scalps.

It seldom happens in human affairs but that when the height of prosperity is reached some reverse follows. Too confident in their own powers and elated with their victory, contrary to the advice of their leader, the nation divided into several camps. They again, having once lost sight of their general and acknowledged head, divided into smaller parties, each moving in a different direction for hunting purposes. It had also been the custom of these Indians every year or two to visit other nations in and across the mountains for the purposes of trade and barter as has been mentioned. Sometimes they pushed their way as far as the Kiowas and Comanches and occasionally near the Spanish settlements of Taos and Santa Fe. In these travels they encountered some tribes with whom they were at peace but always rendered themselves liable to be cut off by larger nations considered enemies. At all events the profit ensuing from these adventures in horses, ornaments, etc., either bought of the one or stolen from the other, was sufficient inducement to make the attempt. They are a bold and active people and do not calculate much the danger when the expedition is likely to prove advantageous.

At the time above mentioned, when the Crows had separated into

small parties for the purposes mentioned, a portion consisting of 30 lodges or upward placed their camp on the headwaters of the river Cheyenne beyond the first spurs of the Rocky Mountains called the Black Hills. The Cheyennes, a hostile nation from whom the river takes its name, had in a great measure abandoned that part of the country for several years before and moved on the South Fork of Platte River. Here, after remaining some time they suffered considerably from war parties of Comanches and were obliged to move back to their old district a little before the time the small body of Crows undertook their journey through it. The Cheyennes numbered at that time about 300 lodges, were rich in horses, good warriors, and perhaps the best horsemen in the world. Perceiving the approach of their enemies they lay in ambush for them, attacked them in the night, and massacred nearly the whole. Some few men escaped in the darkness to carry the sad intelligence to their people, but the rest, men, women, and children, were indiscriminately put to death. The few captives taken, whether male or female, young or old, were reserved for torture which was inflicted upon them in every possible way their savage natures could suggest.

In the course of a week or two those who fled reached some of the camps of their own people, who sent others in quest of the different portions of the nation scattered far and wide. Their principal aim now was to hunt up their chief, Rotten Belly, and request him once more to be their leader to revenge. He was then with the Flatheads, but these people travel fast and such was their haste to collect their forces that in a month's time they had all rendezvoused in their own country with their chief at their head ready to start on the war path.

The Crow camp on this occasion presented a grand and imposing appearance. They were all ordered to parade with their arms and accoutrements ready for the inspection of their chief. As at these times distinctions of rank are observed, each warrior wore those decorations which indicated his standing among his people. The general command of the whole devolved upon Rotten Belly, but other chiefs also are deserving of notice, such as Long Hair, the Little White Bear, Yellow Belly, Two Face, etc., each of whom had under his immediate command a large band of followers. These minor chiefs composed the Council of Rotten Belly, all being well versed in the art of Indian warfare besides having given proofs of their skill and bravery on many occasions under the eye of their head chief. The whole number of warriors thus assembled was about 600, or about one-fourth of the whole nation able to bear arms. They were also picked men, not young beginners but persons who had struck enemies, headed war parties, and given other evidences of their willingness and ability in the hour of danger. All these were mounted on fast-running horses

with splendid trappings. Their dresses were of the most gay and costly description, their arms in the very best order, and their faces painted in the usual manner when starting on hazardous excursions. Clan after clan passed in review before the chief, whose keen eyes were directed to their arms and animals, occasionally finding some fault with one or detecting some defect in another which was directed to be remedied. The chief on parades of this description, or indeed on all public ceremonies, wore his whole insignia on different parts of his person and his horse. His war eagle bonnet reached from his head to the ground even when he was mounted on his tall and powerful war horse. His robe and dress were everywhere fringed with the scalp hair of his enemies. Where this was wanting the beholder was reminded of his rank by rude drawings explanatory of some of his bravest achievements at war. Very little noise accompanied this display of his troops. The cry of mourners for their lately killed relatives rang strange and wildly through the valley, and a gloomy, stern resolve was depicted on the faces of all the warriors. One sole idea, one mind, and one intent reigned, which was that of speedy and terrible revenge.

After all had been thoroughly examined, approved, and enlisted, the chief called the head men in council, where, in a few words, he explained to them his decision and plan of action. This was to leave the camp where it then was, take the force he had aroused and pursue the Cheyennes until he found them, even into the heart of New Mexico. He took a solemn oath, in which he was joined by the whole council, never to return until they had taken full revenge for the loss of their friends. The substance of this decision was harangued through the camp, 2 days given for preparation, and on the third the whole party above described were moving rapidly toward the country of the Cheyennes.

It is not our design to follow this party by describing each day's march. It will be sufficient to state that they proceeded with great caution, which, with a correct knowledge of the country, enabled them to proceed without discovery. When near the place where their enemies were supposed to be, most traveling was done during the night, the party resting themselves and their animals in the daytime. Scouts were thrown several miles who inspected the foreground and conveyed intelligence to the main body behind to move forward. Not a foot of land was traveled over that had not undergone the scrutiny of the discoverers for hours from the neighboring hills. Much time was wasted in this way in order to take their enemies unprepared, for after arriving at the place where the battle had been fought they found the Cheyennes had fled with their camp some days previous. The trail made by a tolerably large camp is not

difficult to follow. The chief therefore could calculate with some degree of certainty how far they might be in advance and the time required to overtake them. Having with this view examined their late encampment and pointed out to his followers the different signs indicating the above intelligence, they proceeded to collect the human skulls and bones, which they judged very correctly to have once belonged to living persons of their own nation, being those that had been massacred. After crying over them, cutting themselves, and making promises to their spirits to take ample revenge, they dug large holes and interred them. This is contrary to their usual custom. Dead bodies are usually enveloped and placed in trees. But as these were but the bones and no other way of disposing of them presented itself, they used this method to secure even these poor remains from further insult by passing enemies.

A grand speech was made over these ceremonies in which the chief artfully stirred up the spirit of his followers to a pitch of revenge bordering on desperation. Their vows were renewed, arms examined and at once the march was resumed more rapidly.

In about 10 days after this occurrence they found themselves in the valley watered by the Arkansas where they saw such fresh indications of the Cheyennes being at hand as induced Rotten Belly to proceed with great caution, having his best spies out in all directions. These soon brought certain information of their enemies' camp, having approached it in the night and made a correct examination of its locality. The next night they were stationed along two creeks between which the Cheyennes had placed their lodges. The Crows were concealed in the valley of the creeks among the wood and timber and at the distance of a mile from the camp, presenting an extended line on each side of men ranged from 10 to 20 paces apart. One detachment was headed by Rotten Belly and the other by the Little White Bear. Early in the morning, or as soon as day broke, seven Crows were sent down each creek who, running between the Cheyennes' horses and their lodges, drove all the animals slowly in the direction of the main body of their people who lay in ambush. The Cheyennes perceiving but few persons taking away all their horses gave chase on foot at different distances as they could arm and run. Thus some 60 to 80 persons, the principal warriors of the camp, were led between the files who simultaneously raised the war whoop and encircled them. Of these not one escaped. There was but one rush, one discharge of arms and arrows, and the whole lay dead. Others now sallied out from the camp and were likewise cut off in detail. But few remained in the lodges. These were charged upon—some absconded but all males met with were put to death. The result of the whole was a complete victory on the part of the Crows. Upward

of 200 enemies were killed, 270 women and children were taken prisoners. More than 1,000 horses, besides all the camp baggage, merchandise, and ornaments, were divided among the Crows. Their loss on this occasion was but 5 men killed and some 10 or 15 wounded. The object of the expedition having been accomplished, the party traveled back to their own people elated with victory and satisfied with revenge.²³

The above circumstance brings up the life of the Crow chief to the year 1833, at which time the whole Crow Nation might number 800 lodges, which, averaging 8 persons to each tent would make about 6,400 souls. At this period emigration was fast flowing toward Arkansas and each year the trains of movers became more numerous over the fertile plains watered by that river. It so happened that this Crow party on their way home rejoicing came suddenly upon a caravan of emigrants, or rather the advanced guards of the Indians met with some stragglers belonging to the expedition. By the sign of waving their arms imitating the flying of a crow the Whites judged they belonged to that nation and, being aware of their friendly disposition, gave them warning not to approach the wagons as some of the Whites were then lying sick with smallpox. It was with great difficulty they were made to understand the nature of the danger attending their visit to the wagons, and either not believing the tale or not realizing the consequences they soon gathered round the emigrants bargaining for horses and trafficking for other articles. It is but justice to these people to say that on this occasion they used their utmost endeavors to prevent the Indians from receiving the infection. They tried to deal with them at a distance from the sick, but all to no purpose. Before they parted numbers had caught the pestilence. Before they reached their homes the disease commenced making its appearance and when they arrived in camp more than half the party were taken down by it. It is needless to dwell upon the misery, distress, and death that followed. The well-known fatality of the smallpox among savages has been often described. In this case it was the same as with other tribes—about one in six or seven recovered. As soon as possible after the arrival of the warriors the camp broke up into small bands each taking different directions. They scattered through the mountains in the hope of running away

²³ We have found no contemporary account of this battle. However, nearly a century after the event Lowie collected what he termed a "quasi-historical text" that certainly referred to it. This text told of a small Crow party under Dangling-foot wiped out by the Cheyenne; of Rotten Belly's leadership of the revenge party; of their ambush of the enemy at the junction of a river and killing of more than 100 Cheyenne, with the loss of but 1 Crow Indian. The Crow casualty, it was claimed, was the younger brother of a Crow woman who had disobeyed Rotten Belly's warning not to kill birds and had destroyed a meadow lark en route to the battleground (Lowie, 1935, pp. 230-236). Little Face told Bradley in 1876 of a great Crow victory on the Arkansas under Rotten Belly's leadership, emphasizing also the episode of the killing of a bird by a Crow woman whose relative was killed in the battle (Bradley, 1923, vol. 9, pp. 304-305).

from the pestilence. All order was lost. No one pretended to lead or advise. The sick and dead were alike left for the wolves and each family tried to save itself.

They certainly gained something by this course. At least the infection was not quite so fatal as among stationary tribes. For the rest of the fall and winter the disease continued its ravages but in the ensuing spring it had ceased. Runners were sent through their country from camp to camp and the remnant of the nation was once more assembled near the head of Big Horn River. Terrible was the mourning on this occasion. More than a thousand fingers are said to have been cut off by the relatives of the dead. Out of the 800 lodges counted the previous summer but 360 remained, even these but thinly peopled. From this time they have been slowly on the increase so as to raise about 460 lodges at the present date, 1856. Rotten Belly had escaped the infection altogether. The Little White Bear had recovered, but the ranks of his once proud force of warriors were terribly thinned.²⁹

The then-existing state of the nation called aloud for someone to restore them into some order so that they might not fall an easy prey to their old and powerful enemies, the Sioux and Blackfeet. It was at this time that this chief exhibited talents and wisdom seldom met with among savages and deserving the highest praise. He first took a census of all men, women, and children, then counted those able to bear arms, and lastly noted how many adults, both male and female, remained unmarried. These last he counceled to select wives and husbands without loss of time, but to avoid as much as possible connection with kindred. Here the women prisoners of the Cheyennes aided considerably to reorganize families. Some of them escaped during the general confusion consequent to the prevalent disease, and that nation having previously been visited by the smallpox, but few of the prisoners had died. By unremitting exertions, forced marriages, and equal distribution of arms, horses, and other property, this chief succeeded in restoring the nation to something like order. But much remained to be accomplished before they could successfully defend themselves against their powerful and warlike neighbors. He saw that something more was to be done to retrieve their hopes. Some grand attempt must be made to acquire property, arms, ammunition, and other things necessary to their national existence.

²⁹ We have found no other reference to a smallpox epidemic among the Crow in the early 1830's. Neither Maximilian, who was on the Upper Missouri in 1833-34, nor Leonard, who was among the Crow in 1834-35, mention such an epidemic. Certainly there was smallpox on the Central Plains among the Pawnee, southeast of the Crow, in 1832 (Catlin, 1841, vol. 2, p. 24). If the Crow contracted the disease at that period they must have been infected by traders or other Indians, rather than by emigrants as Denig claimed. It is known that the Crow suffered little loss during the severe smallpox epidemic on the Upper Missouri in 1837 (Halsey in Chardon, 1932, p. 395).

It has always been the custom of these ignorant savages to consider white people the cause of all diseases, even of other evils in which they have no agency or object. They evince a great disposition to lay all blame on Whites, although they deny they are the cause of any good. The difference of habits and occupations, together with the superstitious awe with which all writing, pictures, and books are viewed, suggests to their disordered minds the idea of sorcery and supernatural powers, which they suppose are made subservient to bad ends. This they know would be the case with themselves had they the power to work unseen evil. Now if this be the case in ordinary events, that white people bring on distress, how much more so it must have been in the instance of the smallpox which they could distinctly trace to its origin when they encountered the emigrant train? Indians seldom reason. They act on impulse. Although the Whites referred to had used all means to prevent the pestilence from being communicated to them, yet they only recollected the cause of their present calamity and swore to take revenge on the authors of their misery. This was the prevalent idea stored up by Rotten Belly. But, as has been stated, these Indians are not murderous in their disposition, had heretofore been on the most friendly terms with Whites, and a good many of the head men and councilors were averse to doing any damage to the traders and trappers in the upper country for suffering brought upon them by strangers.

All questions agitated in Indian councils must have unanimous approval to expect a successful result. This the Crow chief well knew. He also was aware that the aforesaid idea of the cause of their misery would fail to produce the desired effect if not supported by some other. It was a long-cherished wish of this leader, and one which his whole life tended to bring about, to rob the American Fur Co.'s fort at the Blackfeet situated near the mouth of Maria River. For this he could give many cogent arguments likely to obtain universal consent. The Blackfeet were their enemies, and that fort supplied them in guns, ammunition, knives, and other implements of war. That nation also had killed many white people, and those who dealt with them as friends after losing so many of their own color deserved no better fate than the Blackfeet. It was also urged that all war parties passing by the fort to the Crows were furnished with ammunition and that most of the Crow horses stolen by their enemies were purchased at the fort on their return. Another thing was that in their present reduced state they were unable to cope with the Blackfeet. Their arms had mostly been buried with their dead owners. They had but little ammunition. Numbers of their horses had been killed, lost, strayed, and stolen during their prostration by disease. They had in fact but little property of any kind. They were scarcely able

to support themselves, much less to defend against a powerful nation. All these views were advanced by the chief in full council and many other arguments added showing that a stroke of this kind, if successful, would retrieve their losses, ruin their enemies, and revenge themselves on the Whites—the primary cause of their present feeble condition. It was a popular measure and received the approval of the entire nation. But it was also firmly put forward by the other chiefs that, although they would help themselves to the property in the fort, yet they would not consent to killing the people therein. The result of their deliberations was that they would lay siege to the fort and compel the traders to evacuate, afterwards share the plunder, which at that time amounted to 15 or 20 thousand dollars of arms and other articles suitable for the purposes of hunting and war, besides large quantities of provisions, clothing, etc.

This being decided upon, the Little White Bear was ordered to go forward with a party of 30 men and examine the country while the rest of the nation prepared to move the whole camp to the fort. So certain were they of success that they made about 1,000 packsaddles on which to carry the great booty that was to become theirs. The discovering party had left about 10 days when the main body was put in motion, which moved slowly with their tents and families through a district well stocked with buffalo, stopping a day or two occasionally to dry meat to enable them to sustain the siege. The whole amount of men able to bear arms in these 360 lodges was about 1,100 or 1,200 but as has been observed they had but few arms and were otherwise badly furnished for war.

The detachment under the Little White Bear traveled nearly the whole country of the Blackfeet without meeting any signs of their enemies who at that season were on a visit to some of the Hudson's Bay Co.'s posts on the tributaries of the Saskatchewan, but who usually returned in the latter part of the summer to the Missouri.

The party also approached near the fort in the night and made observations during the day, noting the number of persons in the establishment who pursued their usual outdoor occupations. From the neighboring woods and hills they could see unperceived, what number of horses the Whites had, how they were guarded, and examine that part of the ground most favorable to place their camp outside the reach of the fort cannon. After having satisfied themselves in every particular without being discovered they started homeward to give a most favorable report to their leader. Everything seemed to encourage the expedition so far. Buffalo were numerous near the fort, therefore meat could be had to sustain the siege, and the absence of all enemies relieved their minds as to any difficulty in marching the camp thither.

The return party went on their way in high spirits. So anxious were they to reach their people and urge the expedition forward that they neglected the usual caution observed by savages when traveling through a strange and hostile country. In place of inspecting the district, as they had done in their advance, they scattered over the hills shooting at everything in the way of game and raising the buffalo in every direction. This course soon attracted the notice of a large party of Blackfeet then on their way to war against the Crows. The former had all the advantage. Knowing from the signs mentioned that strangers were near, they hid the main band and sent out scouts to reconnoiter, who in the course of the day brought intelligence of a small body of people whom they had seen. In the night the whole body of Blackfeet moved forward within sight of the campfires of their enemies. Here they halted and sent a few expert scouts to crawl near enough to hear them talk. In this they also succeeded, and returned stating their number together with the pleasant news that they were their old and inveterate enemies the Crows. The party of Blackfeet numbered about 160 and were headed by Spotted Elk, a tried and experienced warrior.

About the break of day, while most of the Crows were yet asleep and their arms scattered carelessly around, they made the attack and in a short time most of the Crows were killed or disabled. Some fought like men but several saved themselves by flight. The Little White Bear was killed together with all but four who made out to escape and reach their own camp. Great was the mourning for their loss, and terrible vows taken for revenge. The Little White Bear was a great favorite with his people. He was a pleasant, liberal Indian, and being closely related to Rotten Belly, was his great support. Besides, his popularity in no way interfered with that of the head chief but rather reflected credit upon it by his submission to his orders and aid on all expeditions. On this occasion, the leader harangued through the camp his firm determination either to leave his body in the Blackfoot Country or to take ample revenge. The capture of the fort now became an object of more interest than ever. With the stores and ammunition that would thus be furnished they would be better able to contend with the powerful enemy whose country they were then invading.

As soon as the first burst of mourning was over he again put the camp in motion and by rapid marches soon came near the trading establishment, though they used every possible precaution to conceal their approach. About the first of August 1835, they encamped in the pine mountain situated 20 miles east of the fort. Here they all assembled to deliberate for the last time and make arrangements for their proceedings before entering upon a course of action so different from their former operations.

It was at this place also they fell in with a white trapper named James Coats, whom they well knew. He had made his spring hunt in the Rocky Mountains and was now on his way to the Blackfoot fort to dispose of his beaver. This man had been several years living and trapping with the Crow Indians, spoke their language tolerably well, and had some friends among them. Fearing, however, that if left to proceed he would disclose their intentions to the gentleman in charge of the fort, they forced him to remain. It has been said that Coats was in league with them for the purpose of pillaging the establishment, and as his usual character was of that description of renegades it may have been so, 'tho as will appear his conduct does not merit this reproach.

The American Fur Co., after considerable difficulty, had succeeded in opening a trade with the Blackfoot Indians in the year 1829. This large and fierce nation, previous to that period, visited the upper part of the Missouri along Maria and Belly Rivers only in the winter season in quest of beaver skins and buffalo robes, which they carried to the Hudson's Bay Co.'s post on the Saskatchewan and traded for arms, etc., to continue their hunts. Owing to their constant encounters with the white trappers in the Rocky Mountains near the heads of the Missouri, they conceived a deadly hatred to all white men, which continues in a measure to this day. In these battles the trappers invariably came off victors when taken in a body, but were cut off in detail when separated into small parties for the purpose of hunting beaver. Upon the whole the amount of loss was on the side of the trappers, though on many occasions they had fought desperately and killed numbers of the Indians.

In the year above mentioned, however, a few venturous persons with an interpreter were sent by the company with the pipe of peace, and a request to obtain permission to build a fort for their trade, promising to sell everything necessary for Indians at a lower rate than the British traders, and save the Indians the trouble of taking their skins to a distant market. After a good deal of parley this was agreed to. The post was built and well furnished with everything the Indians needed.³⁰ Still, however, suspicion existed on both sides. The fort was built of logs enclosed with high and strong pickets forming a square with the houses ranging along the sides and bastions on two corners built so as to command the four sides of the picketing. These

³⁰ James Berger (or Bergier), a Canadian, who had become acquainted with the Blackfoot people and their language through earlier employment by the Hudson's Bay Co., was the agent through whom the American Fur Co. was able to establish trade with these Indians. Kenneth McKenzie sent Berger at the head of a small party to the Blackfoot in the winter of 1830-31. In the spring he returned to Fort Union with a party of 70 or more Piegan. These Indians agreed to the construction of a trading post in their country. Fort Piegan was built at the mouth of the Marias that fall (Maximilian, 1906, vol. 23, pp. 90-91; Larpenteur, 1898, vol. 1, pp. 109-115; Bradley, vol. 3, pp. 202-203).

bastions were furnished with cannon of small caliber, which, with a good number of muskets, were always kept loaded in readiness for any attack from savages. From 30 to 50 men were usually stationed here during the fall and winter; most of them, however, were sent down the Missouri with the boats containing the robes and skins early in the spring leaving some 10 to 15 persons to pass the few summer months in the fort. In the month of August or September the annual supplies were received by a keel boat sent from Fort Union, hauling the same with a cordelle manned with 30 or 40 boatmen. Thus the fort received its reinforcement of men and stores before the Blackfeet returned from the English posts in the north, whither they always went in the summer.³¹

It was during this interim the Crows (who knew all these things) expected to take the fort by surprise or reduce the small garrison to surrender by siege. The gentleman in charge of the post at the time they arrived in its vicinity was Mr. Alexander Culbertson, an experienced and determined man, who has since risen to be Chief Agent of the company for the whole Upper Missouri.³² He had been a trader years before among different Indian tribes, spoke several languages fluently, and was well versed in all things regarding the business and the character and customs of the Indians. This gentleman, 'tho unaware of the hostile intent of the Crows, or even of their approach, did not neglect the usual precautions to be observed in a country surrounded by fierce and warlike tribes. He kept up a guard in the bastions both day and night and has his people mostly employed within the fort, except the few who were detailed on horse guard. They kept the animals but a few paces from the fort gates.

From the hills on the opposite side of the Missouri the advance scouts of the Crows could see and note undiscovered all that was going forward. They were not long in perceiving that the fort was well guarded and a surprise impracticable. They therefore reverted to their alternative, to lay siege. With this view some 25 or 30 active men concealed themselves during the night under the bank of the river about 100 yards from the front gate and as soon as the horses of the fort were turned out to graze rushed between them and the guards and drove them off. The men fired but missed their aim. So this source of subsistence was taken away. Very shortly after,

³¹ Fort McKenzie, built as successor to Fort Piegan in 1832, was located "on the north side of the Missouri, about six miles above the mouth of the Maria, and about forty miles below the Great Falls of the Missouri, on a beautiful prairie . . . about 225 feet from the river" (A. Culbertson in Audubon, 1897, vol. 2, pp. 138-195). Maximilian spent a month at this fort in the late summer of 1833, and described the fort and the trade there in detail (Maximilian, 1906, vol. 23).

³² Biographical sketches of Alexander Culbertson and his Blood Indian wife, Medicine Snake Woman, appear in McDonnell, 1940, pp. 240-246.

the whole camp made their appearance and pitched their lodges in three divisions commanding the three sides of the fort but at such a distance as to be out of reach of cannon. The front of the fort was left unguarded as the inhabitants, having neither boats nor horses, could not escape with any property, 'tho it gave them an opportunity of evacuating the place without danger by fording the river.

As soon as this disposition of his people was made, Rotten Belly came to the fort with a few followers and requested permission to enter, stating if that was granted he would willingly bring back the stolen horses. He spoke very friendly, said they intended no harm to the place or people, that they were on their way to find the Black-feet, etc. The drift of this was he wished to see what force the place contained and to learn from some woman in the fort who spoke the Crow language what quantity of provisions were on hand. To all these requests and fine promises Mr. Culbertson turned a deaf ear and bade him go about his business.

On the second or third day of the siege the trapper, Coats, came to the fort and told Mr. Culbertson for the first time the real purpose of the Crows, advising him by no means to admit any of them. This certainly showed well on the part of Coats, but he also was particular in his enquiries regarding the amount of provisions on hand. It is thought he was sent by the Indians to ascertain this point. If so, he failed either in getting admission or information. It happened most unfortunately that the siege commenced at a time when the fort was actually in want of everything to eat. Buffalo had been scarce the previous winter. Very little dried meat had been made by the Black-feet and still less traded by the fort. All flour, bread, pork, etc., had been expended 2 months before, 'tho the garrison would have had no difficulty in supporting themselves were they not prevented from hunting, as buffalo were numerous within sight of the fort. As the case then stood, but a few bales of dried meat formed their only resource. However, to produce an impression on the Indians that they had an abundance, nearly half was thrown over the pickets to them at different times when they came around asking for meat.

It may appear singular that the besieged would allow their enemies to come close to the pickets and parley every day without firing upon them, but those who are acquainted with the nature of the fur trade and the habits of the Indians will not be surprised. The company intended to locate trading establishments with all the tribes and to use conciliatory measures everywhere with the object of securing the friendship of all the nations. It was not their policy to use force except on occasions of self-defense and extreme emergencies. Had Mr. Culbertson killed any of these Indians it would have proved a great obstacle to the establishing of a trading post in their country,

and likewise would have cut off all hope of escape in the event of being obliged to evacuate.

Matters being brought to this issue, the Indians generally remained quiet in their camp or hunting buffalo in the vicinity, at the same time keeping up a strict watch both night and day upon the fort, having come to the conclusion that ere long it would surrender for want of provisions. The garrison on the other hand, apprehending a long siege, reduced their rations to less than one-quarter of their customary allowance. Occasionally the Crows would come alongside and a parley would take place, though nothing important was thus elicited. At the end of 2 weeks the same state of thing existed, with the exception that the people in the fort had exhausted everything in the way of provisions. Even the few favorite dogs remaining were served up and dished out with a sparing hand to all. They had next to resort to the rawhides which had been used as coverings to the dried meat. These, although covered with dirt, grease, and paint, were cut up and boiled to something like the consistency of glue, and this mixture of all that was disgusting was used to sustain life for a few days longer. The hides being consumed, there remained only the cords made of skin which also were cooked and eaten, and absolute famine presented itself. Things now assumed a serious aspect. Most of the engagees were Canadians who, however hardy when well fed, are always the first to complain or revolt in trying times, notwithstanding their bragging. These urged Mr. Culbertson to abandon the place before they all starved to death. Loud were their murmurs and deep their curses upon his head for what they termed his desire to see them all die. But this gentleman, having determined on his course of action, was not a man to be deterred in carrying it out, neither by the murmurs of his own people nor the persevering siege of the Indians. He knew if they could preserve their lives for a short time, the whole Blackfoot Nation would soon arrive. The season for their appearance had already passed, as also that of the arrival of their annual keel boat up. Assistance might be expected from either or both these quarters. It appeared to him wrong and cowardly to surrender at the commencement of difficulty.

However, day after day passed by bringing forth nothing but increasing hunger—old skins, shoes, and all offals were greedily devoured. Still nothing turned up to encourage them. Men began to look at each other fiercely and that pitch of distress had been reached beyond which all would become too debilitated to act in any way. At this juncture Mr. Culbertson called up all hands and gave orders to prepare to give battle to the Crows as it was his intention to sally out in the morning with all his force and cannon, proceed near them

and fight as long as any remained of his now feeble command. He was led to think, and experience had taught him, that a few well-directed discharges of artillery would drive them away. It is true that by evacuating the place they would all have been gladly allowed to pass unharmed, as their lives were not what the savages sought, but their property. But Mr. Culbertson knew that by leaving the establishment his act would be misinterpreted and lead to the stigmatizing of his character. All who are acquainted with the persons in the employ of the fur companies are aware that no allowances are made for circumstances, and that there is a prevailing disposition to traduce the name of anyone, more especially if he stands in a high position. He therefore decided either to force his enemies to leave the place or to die at the head of his people. It is somewhat remarkable that this plan met with but little opposition. Hunger had made his men desperate. Even those who some time before feared death in the distance now stood boldly forward to face the reality.

The siege had now occupied nearly a month. The camp was well supplied with meat and everything betokened a determination on the part of the Indians to hold out much longer. All hands then were armed and supplied with ammunition, having been informed that the sally would be made about midday following. This was about the time most of the young and efficient warriors were either out guarding their horses at a distance or hunting in different directions. It was a sorrowful night in the fort. All felt that their chance of success was doubtful, their death little short of certainty, but their wretched famished condition threw over the whole a gloom of sullen, silent resolve.

The eventful morning arrived; steadily and quietly this determined man proceeded to carry out his views, but it wanted yet a few hours to the time. When nearly ready the sentinels from the bastions observed some unusual commotion in the camp. Horses were being caught, warriors running about half armed, others riding off in various directions. Old men harangued, the council was called, and everything denoted some new and important event. The cause of all this was explained when on looking to the northwest small blue wreaths of smoke rose up in several places which were hailed with a shout of joy by all the fort. "The Blackfoot camp, our friends, our friends," was the cry of all. Arms were put away and once more smiles were seen on the lank and haggard countenances of these poor people. The Crows sent on discovery soon returned, the whole camp began taking down their lodges, packing their horses in great haste, and before the afternoon the whole camp had moved across the river and were out of sight. That same evening some Blackfoot runners arrived

and the next day 800 lodges of these people encamped at the fort bringing plenty of meat.³³

It is not our intention to give lengthy descriptions of circumstances of this kind or much more might be added that would interest the general reader. Strange things occur in this wild country. Singular emergencies arise which could be wrought up into romantic narrative. But we must not lose sight of the great Chief Rotten Belly, a sketch of whose life is here attempted.

The Blackfeet, as soon as they had been made aware of the conduct and number of the Crows, called a council but could not agree as to the expediency of pursuit. It was argued that although the Crows were inferior in numbers yet they were in a desperate state, greatly disappointed, and a bloody battle would be the result without much advantage to be gained. Indians usually reason in this way. They seldom risk much to gain little. They do not fight grand battles merely from a thirst for blood. Great disparity of force must exist before slaughter commences. Equality of numbers mostly prevents attack, in fact always does when not counterbalanced by the prospects of plunder or national revenge. These considerations had weight enough with chiefs and warriors of the Blackfeet to defer their operations against their enemies until a more favorable opportunity presented, when they could take them by surprise or cut them off in detail according to the usual custom of savage warfare.

The Crows, on the other hand, were glad to escape from their well-armed and numerous enemies. But having got beyond immediate danger they were halted by their chief. Rotten Belly was far from being satisfied. He had so far failed in every point he undertook to perform. His vows remained unfulfilled with the exception that should he fail he would leave his body in the country of the Blackfeet. This was yet in his power and was what he secretly resolved upon; for he knew this defeat and disgrace would lead to his downfall among his people.

While deliberating how to act so as in some way to regain his position and recover in a manner the ground he had lost, chance threw in his way what perhaps he would have most desired. It happened that a war party of 20 Blackfeet had been in the country of the Crows, and not finding them was on its return to its own

³³ This siege actually occurred in June 1834. J. Archdale Hamilton, in a letter to Kenneth McKenzie, written from Fort Union September 17, 1834, stated that the Crow compelled the defenders "to live on Cords Parfleche for 15 days" (letter in Missouri Hist. Soc., St. Louis). Yet the detailed account of the siege in "Extracts from Mr. Culbertson's Journal Kept at Fort McKenzie, Blackfeet Indian Country in 1834," copied by Audubon at Fort Union in 1843, states that it lasted only 2 days, June 25-26, and that a party of Blood Indians brought meat to the defenders on June 30 (Audubon, 1897, vol. 2, pp. 178-180). Bradley's two accounts of this siege, presumably based upon information furnished him by Culbertson four decades after the action, also differ in detail from the Denig version on some points (Bradley, vol. 2, pp. 181-182; vol. 3, pp. 210-215). Probably the bare facts of this dramatic siege had become somewhat embroidered through two decades of verbal retelling before Denig wrote his version of the action in 1856.

nation. These proceeding in a careless way were discovered by the Crows while traveling. The chief and a few warriors in advance of the camp charged upon them, killed two, and the rest took refuge in one of the small wooden forts made by war parties, everywhere to be met with in the Blackfeet district. It was urged by most of the Crows that they should leave them alone, as they had already killed two without any harm to themselves, and by attacking the fortress they would undoubtedly lose some people. All agreed to this except Rotten Belly, who would have charged alone into the fort, but was detained by his people who held the bridle of his horse. It had not escaped the notice of the Crows that, since turning their backs on the trader's fort, this chief was dressed in his most gay and costly war suit. He wore his shirt and leggings fringed with human hair, his war eagle feather bonnet, and his robe of state covered with the scalp locks of his enemies hung over his shoulders. All this display on the occasion of defeat betokened some deadly determination which his friends, both by entreaty and gentle force, attempted to prevent. After disputing with them for a short time he promised to go away along with the rest and leave their enemies for some other time when they could destroy them with less risk to themselves. His horse being set free of the grasp of his followers, he made him prance around as though in sport, then shouting aloud, "One last stroke for the Crow Nation; two Blackfeet cannot pay for the loss of The Little White Bear," he rushed at full speed upon his foes. Making his charger leap the small stockade into the midst of his enemies, he pinned one to the ground with his lance, but received a dozen arrows in his body and fell to rise no more. His people followed close behind, fell upon the Blackfeet, and cut them off to a man without further loss than that of their leader. But this was to them the greatest that could happen. In conformity with his request on several occasions, his body was wrapped in its warrior shroud and deposited on a tree in the country of the Blackfeet to be, as he said, a terror to them even after death.

The lives of most Indian chiefs bear a strong resemblance. The history of one is that of all—the same battles, victories, defeats, and deaths proceed from their unvarying wars with their enemies, and are likely to continue as long as any tribes remain. Among all these nations, where daily struggles take place for each others' lives and property, instances of individual daring arise which, among civilized men in what is called honorable warfare, would immortalize their names but which, for want of record, must soon be forgotten. The fame of any Indian chief is but short-lived. A few days of mourning is all that can be devoted to his memory. Their existence demands action, their force a leader. Their disposition is ambitious, and long before the death of their favorite chief takes place, some other candi-

date for his office is spoken of and approved. This often happens before the decease of a leader. Any great defeat or mismanagement on his part would transfer the power to another who had given proof of his bravery and abilities.

The loss of Rotten Belly was deeply felt and regretted by the Crows, perhaps more than that of any other man either before or since his time. Even to this day he is spoken of as *the* Chief, or the *Great Chief*.³⁴ Other men now took charge of different portions of the Crows who separated into several bands and resumed their old habits and hunting grounds.

OF TRADE AND WAR

The year after the above event, a fort was built at the mouth of Rose Bud River on the Yellowstone for the trade with this nation. It furnished them with arms and other necessaries, and they slowly recovered from the disastrous effects of the smallpox.

Before a trading post had been permanently placed in their country the Crows carried their furs to the Arikara and Mandan forts on the Missouri and disposed of them there. At that time they hunted nothing but beaver, the skins of which were then valuable and easy of transportation. They had not as yet turned their attention to preparing buffalo robes for sale, making only a sufficiency for the use of themselves and families. When the company paid them good prices for their robes it gave them an opportunity to equip themselves better for hunting and war than heretofore and tended considerably to restrict their wandering habits. The camps remained stationary during the fall and winter months near the fort, where they employed their time in killing buffalo, dressing their hides, and purchasing such articles as they most wanted either for defense, convenience, or barter for horses with the tribes farther in the mountains.

Still war was kept up, mostly in the spring and summer, with the different nations mentioned who were considered enemies. In these conflicts the Crows generally lost. At least, they being the smaller tribe, the fall of every warrior or hunter was more severely felt. All winter parties of Blackfeet, Sioux, Assiniboinas, and other hostile nations hovered round their encampments, killed stragglers, and drove

³⁴ Denig's biography of this important Crow chief is the most detailed story of his life that is known. It is corroborated in part and expanded in the works of other writers. Curtis was told that Rotten Belly was second chief of the tribe at the time of the first Crow treaty with the United States, at the Mandan Villages, August 4, 1825, although he refused to sign that treaty. Maximilian witnessed the presentation of a medal to Rotten Belly by John A. Sanford, Indian Subagent, at the Mandan Villages in June 1833. He described Rotten Belly as "a fine tall man, with a pleasing countenance" who "had much influence over his people." This chief was well known to such prominent fur traders as Robert Campbell, N. C. Wyeth, and Captain Bonneville. News of Rotten Belly's death in battle with the Blackfeet was entered in Fort Pierre Journal, August 8, 1834. In 1876, the Crow Indian, Little Face, furnished Bradley a number of stories illustrating Rotten Belly's war record and the potent supernatural powers attributed to him by his tribesmen (Bradley, vol. 9, pp. 299-307; Curtis, 1909, pp. 47-48; Chardon, 1932, pp. 4, 253; Irving, 1851, pp. 189-191, 194-196, 352, 415-416; Maximilian, 1906, vol. 22, p. 351).

off numbers of their horses. On the return of the summer months the Crows went in large numbers to revenge these coups and often bloody battles ensued with considerable loss on both sides.

FACTORS LIMITING THE INCREASE OF CROW POPULATION

No great national calamity overtook them until the year 1848, when the smallpox again made its appearance, they having received the infection from the Snake Indians with whom they were at peace; the Snakes having contracted the pestilence in their dealings with emigrants passing along the Platte Trail. It does not appear to have been nearly so destructive as the same disease at the former period mentioned, 'tho numbers of children died.³⁵ In 1849 the greater part of the Crow Nation was visited by an influenza of so destructive a nature as to take off about 600 persons, among whom were some of the best warriors and wise councilors.³⁶ Since the last date no great havoc has been wrought by epidemics, 'tho they cannot be said to be much on the increase.

Several things tend to prevent their augmentation. Setting aside the loss by war and deaths by different maladies incident to human life, the propagation of the venereal disease among them appears to be the greatest bar to their prosperity, both by its fatal nature and the inability of the tainted persons to procure wives or husbands. Infanticide is also publicly practiced by two-thirds of the married women. Unwilling to be troubled by raising their children, they either kill them in utero, or as soon as brought forth, 'tho the former manner is the most common. Abortions are produced by administering blows on the abdomen or by pressing upon it with a stick, leaning their whole weight thereon and swinging to and fro. The foetus is thus ejected at different periods of its growth, varying from 3 to 7 months. As they are not aware of the danger attending the practice many women die in attempting it. It has been computed by those well acquainted with this tribe that three-fourths of all the women who die are lost in this manner. Usually the husband consents to it, or at least does not punish his wife for so doing, but of late years the voices of all or most of the men are against the crime and it is becoming more rare. The act now reflects disgrace on both the father and

³⁵ Indian Agent Vaughan claimed that the Crow on the headwaters of Powder River caught the smallpox from the Shoshone, who had contracted it from California emigrants, in the fall and winter of 1851. This epidemic, he said, reduced Crow numbers by 30 lodges, killing some 400 members of the tribe in a short time (Ann. Rep. Comm. Ind. Aff., 1853, p. 354).

³⁶ Kurz (1937, pp. 215-216), on October 28, 1851, wrote that influenza had been "dangerously prevalent" among the Crow the previous winter, killing some 150 members of the tribe "among them some of their most prominent tribesmen." Some of the Crow believed Denig had inflicted the disease upon them in retaliation for their theft of 10 horses from Fort Union. "To prevent further spread of the disease . . . the Indians brought back nine of the stolen horses."

mother of the child and, if not done so frequently, it is at least concealed from the public.³⁷

This disgusting and unnatural custom is not peculiar to the Crows. It exists to a more or less extent among all nations of the Upper Missouri but not in such a degree as to effect much their natural increase.

CROW HERMAPHRODITES

Another thing worthy of note with these Crows is the number of Berdêches or hermaphrodites among them. Most civilized communities recognize but two genders, the masculine and feminine. But strange to say, these people have a neuter. This does not proceed from any natural deformity, but from the habits of the child. Occasionally a male child, when arrived at the age of 10 or 12 years or less, cannot be brought to join in any of the work or play of the boys, but on the contrary associates entirely with the girls. Now all the amusements of boys and girls are marked and distinct. The former, at a very early age, are instructed in the use of the bow, shooting at birds, guarding horses, trapping rabbits and other small game, while the latter are taught to cook, dress skins, make moccasins, work with beads and porcupine quills all articles of clothing, and other servile and feminine acquirements. Children of different sexes seldom associate either in their work or play, 'tho as has been observed, instances do occur in which a boy acquires all the habits of a girl, notwithstanding every effort on the part of his parents to prevent it. The disposition appears to be natural and cannot be controlled. When arrived at the age of 12 or 14, and his habits are formed, the parents clothe him in a girl's dress and his whole life is devoted to the labors assigned to the females. He is not to be distinguished in any way from the women, 'tho is seldom much respected by either sex. The parents regret it very much but to no purpose. There used to be some five or six of these hermaphrodites among the Crows, 'tho at the present time there are but two or three. One of these has been married and presents the anomaly of husband and wife in the same dress attending to the same domestic duties.³⁸

³⁷ Denig (1930, p. 521) stated, "It is not far from the correct number if we state that one-eighth of the children are destroyed in utero or after birth by the Crow women."

³⁸ Sexual abnormalities among the Crow were mentioned by both earlier and later writers. In 1806 Alexander Henry wrote, "I am informed they are much addicted to unnatural lusts, and have no scruple in satisfying their desires with their mares and wild animals fresh killed" (Henry and Thompson, 1897, vol. 1, p. 399). Maximilian (in 1833) stated, "They have many bardaches, or hermaphrodites, among them, and exceed all other tribes in unnatural practices" (Maximilian, 1906, vol. 2, p. 354). Father De Smet described a Crow warrior who "in consequence of a dream had put on women's clothing and subjected himself to all the labors and duties of that condition, so humiliating to an Indian" (Chittenden and Richardson, 1905, vol. 3, p. 1017). While on the Crow Reservation in 1902, Simms was informed that there were three hermaphrodites in the tribe and that "a few years ago an Indian agent endeavoured to compel these people, under threat of punishment, to wear men's clothing, but his efforts were unsuccessful" (Simms, 1903, pp. 580-581). Lowie reported but one surviving berdache on that reservation in 1912 (Lowie, 1912, p. 226).

THE CROW TOBACCO-PLANTING CEREMONY

Before closing our remarks on these people, some account of their superstitions appears to be demanded. The power ascribed to their priests and medicine men differ in many respects from those of other tribes. Wherever this is the case, separate descriptions and explanations have been promised in former parts of this work. Hereafter the religion of all the tribes will be minutely considered, its elements disclosed and its effects commented on; but in this place it will only meet with notice so far as to inform of some rites and ceremonies which have a great influence on their national character and government.

The term "medicine men," as now used, has no reference to those who use drugs to cure diseases, but to such as are thought by the entire population to possess superhuman powers to bring about events. Sometimes these persons are supposed to be gifted with the spirit of prophecy, or to work evil ends. This is a prevalent idea with the majority of the roving tribes and will meet with further explanation. But the Crows center *all* power in the *Tobacco Planters*. These are their own people and exhibit no outward difference either in dress or manners from their neighbors, 'tho they are believed to have control over events, seasons, the elements, animals, and all things usually attributed to the works of an overruling Providence. In fact they have no idea of a Supreme Being, a first cause, or of a future state. Neither do the great lumenaries the sun and moon appear to them objects of much veneration, 'tho they are somewhat afraid of thunder.

This nation has from time immemorial planted tobacco. They have carefully preserved the original seed discovered with the continent, which produces leaves similar to the cultivated plant in the Western States and has something of its taste and flavor. They believe that as long as they continue to preserve the seed and have in their homes some of the blossom they will preserve their national existence. They say as soon as none is found they must pass away from the face of the earth. Several other traditions also tend to the continuation of the custom of tobacco planting. Among the first is that those who fulfill the orders of their ancestors in this respect shall be endowed with supernatural powers, to bring rain, avert pestilence, control the wind, conquer disease, make the buffalo come near their camp, and increase the number of all kinds of game; that they can in fact bring about any event not dependent upon ordinary human possibility. This is confined to the few who plant the tobacco, and who, knowing the power and standing thus to be gained, are very anxious to keep up the superstition with the ceremonies attending it. Sometimes, with a view to acquiring property, one of them will sell his right or powers to some aspiring individual. In this case the

candidate gives everything he has in the world—all his horses, dresses, arms, even his lodge and household utensils—to pay for the great medicine and honor to become a Tobacco Planter. On an occasion of this kind the applicant is adopted with great ceremonies into the band of Planters. His flesh is cut and burned in large and deep furrows around the breast and along his arms, leaving for a long time dangerous and disgusting wounds difficult to heal. He is also obliged to go several days without food or water. After passing through this ordeal, he is furnished with some tobacco seed, in exchange for everything that he possesses. In this way the rite is perpetuated, and never has received the least check or interruption. On the contrary, it appears to become more honorable from being more ancient and from the difficulties attendant on becoming a conductor of the ceremony.

The customary place for the planting of the tobacco is on Wind River at the base of the mountain having that name, 'tho it is not confined to this spot alone. Other places are sometimes sought more convenient for the camp when the season arrives. At an appointed spot then the whole nation are invited to meet in a certain moon, which corresponds with about the middle to the last of April. When encamped in the vicinity the women of the camp are detailed to clear off all bushes and rubbish from a space of ground about half an acre square. Even the cleaning of this place is accompanied with the beating of drums, singing, and smoking at intervals. This usually occupies the first day. On the next the spot is hoed, either with iron instruments or with the shoulder blades of buffalo. The latter is the primitive utensil. This operation consumes the greater part of the second day. The third is ushered in by loud haranguing, feasting, singing by the Planters, and all married men and women, mounted on horseback, proceed in file to the neighboring trees and cut each a faggot of wood which is tied together and carried before them on the horse. The women take precedence, and it is distinctly understood that the female who brings in the first bundle of wood must be one who has had no illicit connection with any man but her husband. If she attempts to deceive, the person who is aware of, and a participator in, her guilt steps forward and cries aloud, "she is lame," or unfit for the post of honor; in which case she is forever disgraced. This has happened more than once. Indeed so rare is a virtuous woman in this nation that the above requisition has several times been nearly the cause of an entire suspension of the custom; for they would rather relinquish the whole than alter the manner in which the ceremony has been transmitted to them by their forefathers. Heretofore, however, they have succeeded in finding *one* virtuous female, or one said to be so, 'tho, as has been observed, the search has been attended with difficulty. The next important step taken in this great

national solemnity is to select a man who will solemnly swear he has never slept with any of his relatives' wives more nearly akin than a brother-in-law, that tie included. This individual is found previously to their going after the wood and he brings in the second faggot. Singular as it may appear, the moral character of the males is not superior to the female part of the community, and several weeks have often been employed in the seeking and approving of a man free from the crime of incest. At one time so great was their anxiety to proceed with their custom, and so rare was the proper person that they were obliged to employ one of the gentlemen of the Fur Company to fill the office. Therefore, it may safely be conjectured that if no improvement takes place in their moral condition the rite of tobacco planting will soon be at an end. To proceed. When the two loads of wood are thus cast upon the cleared spot, all the rest follow after, one at a time laying down his burden with great solemnity, encouraged by the Planters, who are stationed round singing and drumming. Beside each of the medicine men are placed pans and bowls of cooked meat, tongues, pemmican, dried berries, and other eatables considered by them as delicacies. Those who lay down a bundle of wood go and seat themselves around these dishes and eat as much as they can. Great quantities are consumed, which have been laid up for months beforehand in anticipation of the above ceremony. When the wood is all collected, it is separated into four large piles, one of which is placed on each corner of the square patch intended for cultivation. Then these piles are all separately smoked to and invoked. Indeed, any and every movement they make during the whole performance partakes of a sacred character. The wood is then strewn equally over the surface of the place, fire put to it and burned to ashes. The whole is rehoed and threshed with willows, which serves the purpose of harrowing. Much time is employed in invocation and other ceremony over the tobacco seed, which in the end is mixed with fine earth and ashes and scattered over the garden. The place is then threshed with brush a second time for the purpose of burying the seed.

Having arrived at this point of the ceremony a grand medicine lodge next claims their attention. This is made by forming a large tent with 8 or 10 lodges connected by poles, sufficiently commodious to contain 200 or 300 persons. The interior is decked out with cloths of brilliant colors, beads, and various other ornaments. Large feasts are cooked and placed therein, and a full band of drums, rattles, bells, and whistles keeps up a deafening and continual noise. Dancing goes forward after the eatables have been dispatched. These dances are conducted with strict decorum, as they, with all the rest of the ceremony, are supposed to bring about a state of happy and prosperous national affairs. Several persons on these occasions cut

and scar their arms and bodies, and exert themselves in dancing without food or water for such a length of time that they are carried away in an unconscious condition from which some are with difficulty revived.

This amusement, or rather devotion, usually occupies three more days, at the end of which time they move camp and march about half a mile, the next day about a mile, the third and fourth about as much more. The idea is that they do not wish the tobacco to think they are running away from it, but are so fond of it as scarcely to have the wish to depart.

As soon as possible after the seed is sown it is desirable to have rain that the same may be washed into the earth and take root. One of the Planters then undertakes to produce rain, and by his desire merchandise and other property is collected from the band often to the amount of 2 or 3 thousand dollars. These articles are freely given to the medicine man by the rest, considering them as sacrifices to the clouds. The Tobacco Planter, after hanging up the different articles on the bushes around, commences a series of smokings and prayers to the heavens for rain. If he succeeds, the whole of the sacrifices belong to him and he acquires increase of fame. But if no rain falls, the goods are suffered to lie there, 'tho no blame is cast on the Planter, for he cunningly asserts that the time is not propitious and that some of the nation have not fulfilled their promises, etc. Occasionally he takes advantage of clouds gathering to predict rain, which would most likely fall without his aid. But they are so blind and bigoted that they actually believe in his power to produce it. One of these Planters can do anything (so they think), can make the grass grow, make buffalo plenty, and foretell any great calamity arising from disease or attacks from enemies.

When all this parade is over the camp resumes its ordinary occupations and traveling, until, about the latter end of August, it marches again to the tobacco field, when they pull the plant up and pack it into sacks. The seed is separated from the blossom and preserved; the stock and leaves are carefully stored away, only to be used on great occasions such as peacemaking with other nations, and religious rites of a national character. It is also used in extreme cases of sickness, not as a drug, but in their usual superstitious manner of smoking, believing its efficacy to consist in the article itself, rendered sacred and powerful by ceremony, and the smoke emitted through the nostrils of a Tobacco Planter.³⁹

³⁹ Curtis obtained a tradition to the effect that No Vitals, who quarreled with the Hidatsa over the buffalo and led the Crow Indians westward to become their first chief, originated the tobacco ceremony. Lowie found the Crow regarded the tobacco as their distinctive medicine, equivalent to the medicine pipe of the Hidatsa. Denig's early description of the tobacco-planting ceremony contains many details lacking in accounts of this ceremony based upon field investigations a half century later, and after the Crow had settled down to sedentary reservation life. (Compare Curtis, 1909, pp. 61-67; Simms, 1904, and Lowie, 1919, entire.)

The foregoing is a rapid sketch of this principal national religious rite. There are many others of smaller note, resembling in every respect those of other tribes, which will be more minutely discussed in another place.

CHIEF LONG HAIR

Since the time of Rotten Belly no great man has ruled the nation. It is at present separated into smaller communities, each governed by a chief. The principal man after the chief above named was Long Hair, so called from having hair on his head 36 feet in length. Although it may appear singular that any human being should be in possession of this length of hair, yet it is nevertheless true. Encouraged by a dream, when a young man, that he would become great in proportion to the growth of his hair, he tied weight to it, which aided its growth, and every few months separated the locks into small parcels which were stuck together with the gum of the pine tree. In this way none of his hair could be lost. If any fell out the gum prevented it from dropping. At the age of 50 his hair was the length mentioned, 'tho no single stalk was longer than usual among females of our own color. This cumbersome bunch of hair he rolled up into two large balls and carried them in front of his saddle while riding. When on foot, the rolls were attached to his girdle. On great festivals he mounted on horseback, unrolled his hair, and rode slowly round the camp with his scalplocks trailing some distance behind him on the ground.

Whether or not it was this peculiarity that brought him into notice we cannot say. No doubt it aided considerably, 'tho he also is spoken of as a brave man. He rose to high power, was well liked, and died a few years since.⁴⁰ At this date, 1856, the Crows have peace with the Assiniboines and some bands of Sioux with whom they occasionally reside and exchange presents.

CHIEF BIG ROBBER

At the treaty of Laramie in 1851, The Big Robber was made chief of the nation by the United States Commissioners, but since that

⁴⁰ "The Long Hair" was the first signer of the Crow's first treaty with the United States at the Mandan Villages, August 4, 1825. Bradley stated that Long Hair was head chief of the numerically superior Mountain Crow, Rotten Belly head chief of the River Crow, after the division of the tribe due to jealousy between these leaders. Little Face, Bradley's principal Crow informant, considered Long Hair the greater of the two leaders. Leonard met Long Hair in the fall of 1831, shortly after Rotten Belly's death. He termed Long Hair "the principal chief or Sachem of the nation and is quite a worthy and venerable old man of 75 or 80 years of age," who "worships nothing but his hair, which is regularly combed and carefully folded up every morning into a roll about three feet long by the principal warriors of his tribe." Leonard said that Long Hair's tresses were "no less than nine feet eleven inches long." Maximilian claimed they were "ten feet long," and Catlin said Messrs. Sublette and Campbell assured him "they had measured his hair by correct means, and found it to be ten feet and seven inches in length; closely inspecting every part of it at the same time, and satisfying themselves that it was the natural growth" (Bradley, vol. 9, pp. 312-313; Catlin, 1841, vol. 1, pp. 49-50; Leonard, 1904, pp. 255-257; Maximilian, 1906, vol. 22, p. 353).

time he has not governed his people. In place of remaining with the greater portion, he is generally found near the emigrant trail along the Platte with a few lodges who do nothing but beg and steal, and contract diseases from passing emigrants which sweep off numbers of his people. He is now despised by the other bands. He has no command, is not respected, as much for seeking other districts as for not remaining and assisting in defending his own country.

PROSPECTS FOR INTERTRIBAL PEACE

A portion of the nation now passes the winter with the Assiniboines, with whom they make out to agree, 'tho the latter steal their horses to some extent. But the Crows are solicitous for peace with all tribes except the Blackfeet, with whom they wish to be at war as long as one of them remains.

The late treaty with the Blackfeet may have the effect of annexing the Piegans and Gros Ventres of the Prairie to their list of friends, but the Blood Indians and Blackfeet will never be brought to live at peace with any of the surrounding nations.⁴¹

BIOGRAPHY OF WOMAN CHIEF

Perhaps the only instance known of a woman attaining the rank of chief among any of the tribes whose histories we attempt has happened among the Crows. It has ever been the custom with these wandering people to regard females in an inferior light in every way. They have no voice in council, or anything to say at assemblies formed by men for camp regulations. Even the privilege of intimate conversation with their husbands is denied them when men are present. They have their own sphere of action in their domestic department, from which they are never allowed to depart, being considered by their husbands more as a part of their property than as companions.

This being the case, they seldom accompany parties to war. Those who do are of the lowest possible description of character, belong to the public generally, have no home or protection. Sometimes females of this stamp are taken along to make and mend shoes, dry meat, cook, etc., but they are never allowed to take part in battle. Even if they were, their inexperience in the use of weapons would soon cause their death. For such as these there is no opportunity to distinguish themselves. They must be content with the station of servant and that of the very lowest kind of drudgery.

The case we are about to relate is that of a Gros Ventre of the Prairie woman taken prisoner by the Crows when about 10 years of age.

⁴¹ Denig's hope for peace between the Crow and Piegan following the first Blackfoot treaty with the United States, at the mouth of the Judith River, October 17, 1855, was not realized. For four decades after that treaty was signed the Piegan continued to make raids upon the Crow camps.

From a personal acquaintance of 12 years with this woman we can lay her true history before the reader.

Shortly after her capture the warrior to whom she belonged perceived a disposition in her to assume masculine habits and employments. As in the case of the Berdêche who, being male inclines to female pursuits, so this child, reversing the position, desired to acquire manly accomplishments. Partly to humor her, and partly for his own convenience, her foster father encouraged the inclination. She was in time placed to guard horses, furnished with bow and arrows, employing her idle time in shooting at the birds around and learning to ride fearlessly. When further advanced in years she carried a gun, learned to shoot, and when yet a young woman was equal if not superior to any of the men in hunting both on horseback and on foot.

During her whole life no change took place in her dress, being clad like the rest of the females with the exception of hunting arms and accoutrements. It also happened that she was taller and stronger than most women—her pursuits no doubt tending to develop strength of nerve and muscle. Long before she had ventured on the warpath she could rival any of the young men in all their amusements and occupations, was a capital shot with the rifle, and would spend most of her time in killing deer and bighorn, which she butchered and carried home on her back when hunting on foot. At other times she joined in the surround on horse, could kill four or five buffalo at a race, cut up the animals without assistance, and bring the meat and hides home.

Although tolerably good looking she did not, it seems, strike the fancy of the young men, and her protector having been killed in battle, she assumed the charge of his lodge and family, performing the double duty of father and mother to his children.

In the course of time it happened that the Blackfeet made a charge on a few lodges of Crows encamped near the trading fort in their country—our heroine being with the lodges. The attack was sudden. Several men were killed and the rest took refuge within the fort saving most of their horses. The enemies made a stand beyond the reach of guns and by signs exhibited a desire to speak to someone in the fort. Neither Whites nor Crows could be found to venture out. But this woman, understanding their language, saddled her horse and set forth to meet them. Everyone sought to detain her, but she would not be persuaded. The fort gates were opened and she went on her dangerous errand. When arrived within hailing distance, and about half rifle shot, several Blackfeet came to meet her, rejoicing in the occasion of securing an easy prize. When within pistol shot, she called on them to stop, but they paid no attention to her words. One of the enemies then fired at her and the rest charged. She immedi-

ately shot down one with her gun, and shot arrows into two more without receiving a wound. The remaining two then rode back to the main body, who came at full speed to murder the woman. They fired showers of balls and pursued her as near to the fort as they could with safety approach. But she escaped unharmed and entered the gates amid the shouts and praises of the Whites and her own people.

This daring act stamped her character as a brave. It was sung by the rest of the camp, and in time was made known to the whole nation. About a year after, she collected a number of young men and headed her first war excursion against the Blackfeet. Fortune again favored her. She approached their camp in the night, stole 70 horses and drove them with great speed toward her home. But the enemies followed, overtook them, and a sharp skirmish ensued, which resulted in the Crows getting off with most of the animals and two Blackfeet scalps. One of the two Blackfeet the woman chieftain killed and scalped with her own hand. The other, although shot down by one of her followers, she was the first to strike and taken from him his gun while he was yet alive 'tho severely wounded. It may reasonably be supposed that coups such as these aided to raise her fame as a warrior, and according to their own usages, from the fact of striking first the bodies of two enemies, she could no more be prevented from having a voice in their deliberations. Other expeditions of a still more hazardous nature were undertaken and successfully carried through by this singular and resolute woman. In every battle around their own camp or those of their enemies some gallant act distinguished her. Old men began to believe she bore a charmed life which, with her daring feats, elevated her to a point of honor and respect not often reached by male warriors, certainly never before conferred upon a female of the Crow Nation. The Indians seemed to be proud of her, sung forth her praise in songs composed by them after each of her brave deeds. When council was held and all the chiefs and warriors assembled, she took her place among the former, ranking third person in the band of 160 lodges. On stated occasions, when the ceremony of striking a post and publicly repeating daring acts was performed, she took precedence of many a brave man whose career had not been so fortunate.

In the meantime she continued her masculine course of life, hunting and war. Heretofore her attention had been but little attracted to personal gain in the way of barter. Whatever hides she brought home from the hunt were given to her friends, 'tho the meat was cured and dried by herself and the children under her charge. When horses were wanting she drew upon her enemies for a supply and had been heretofore uniformly successful. She had numbers of animals

in her possession, with which she could at any time command other necessaries.

But with Indians it is the same as with civilized persons. The richer they become the more desirous they are of acquiring more. As yet no offer of marriage had been made her by anyone. Her habits did not suit their taste. Perhaps they thought she would be rather difficult to manage as a wife. Whatever the reason was, they certainly rather feared than loved her as a conjugal companion, and she continued to lead a single life. With the view of turning her hides to some account by dressing them and fitting them for trading purposes, she took to *herself a wife*. Ranking as a warrior and hunter, she could not be brought to think of female work. It was derogatory to her standing, unsuited to her taste. She therefore went through the usual formula of Indian marriage to obtain an authority over the woman thus bought. Strange country this, where males assume the dress and perform the duties of females, while women turn men and mate with their own sex!

Finding that employing hands advanced her affairs in the lodge, in a few years her establishment was further increased by taking three more wives. This plurality of women added also to her standing and dignity as a chief; for after success at war, riches either in horses or women mark the distinction of rank with all the Prairie tribes. Nothing more was now in her power to gain. She had fame, standing, honor, riches, and as much influence over the band as anyone except two or three leading chiefs. To either of their offices she could in no wise expect to succeed; for to be a leader requires having strong family connection, extensive kindredship, and a popularity of a different description from that allotted to partizans. This being the case, she wisely concluded to maintain her present great name instead of interfering with the claims of others to public notice. For 20 years she conducted herself well in all things appertaining to war and a hunter's life.

In the summer of 1854 she determined to visit in a friendly way the Gros Ventres of the Prairie to which nation, it has been observed, she owed her parentage. The treaty with the Upper Missouri tribes held at Laramie in 1851 had been followed up by overtures of peace to the Blackfeet and the Gros Ventres of the Prairie. The entire body of the latter, with a portion of the former, evinced a willingness to abstain from war excursions, and sent friendly messages to the Crows and Assiniboines containing invitations to visit them. The Assiniboines did so, were well received, hospitably entertained by the Gros Ventres, and dismissed with horses as presents. This intercourse was kept up for 3 or 4 years, with entire satisfaction to both parties, although the Crows had not as yet presented themselves at the camps of their

former enemies. With the view of ascertaining how far their hostile spirit had been quelled, and perhaps of gaining a goodly number of horses, this Woman Chief undertook a visit there, presuming that, as she was in fact one of their nation, could speak their language, and a general peace was desired, she could associate with them without being harmed. Many old and experienced fur traders endeavored to dissuade her from this journey, as her feats against them were too notorious to be easily overlooked. But contrary to the advice of her friends she proceeded.

When near the camp, however, she encountered a large party of the Gros Ventres of the Prairie who had been to Fort Union and were returning home. These she boldly met, spoke to, and smoked with. But on their discovering who she was, they took the advantage while traveling with her to their camp to shoot her down together with the four Crows who had so far borne her company.

This closed the earthly career of this singular woman and effectually placed a bar to any hopes of peace between the Crows and her murderers. Neither has there since appeared another of her sex who preferred the warrior's life to that of domestic duties.⁴²

DANGERS ENCOUNTERED IN THE FUR TRADE WITH THE CROWS

Before closing our remarks on this people, something regarding the trade with them might not be amiss, for the fort built in their country has been the theater of more war and bloodshed both of Whites and Indians than any other spot occupied by the fur traders. From the year before named until 1855, forts have been built in different places along the Yellowstone at distances varying from 150 to 300 miles from its conflux. The mouths of the Tongue River, Rose Bud River, Powder River, Big Horn, O'Fallon's Creek, and the Little Horn have all at times been occupied by trading posts, to which annual supplies were sent up in a mackinaw boat towed with a cordelle by 15 to 20 men, some of whom remained to bring down the peltries the ensuing spring, the others returned to the starting point, Fort Union,

⁴² Kurz met "the famous Absaroka amazon" at Fort Union, October 27, 1851. He said she "looked neither savage nor warlike. . . . She is about 45 years old; appears modest in manner and good natured rather than quick to quarrel." She gave Denig a Blackfoot scalp, which she had taken herself, which Denig presented to Kurz for his collection (Kurz, 1937, pp. 213-214). In his report to Governor Stevens, Denig included a briefer account of this woman's career (Denig, 1930, pp. 433-434). In that source he mentioned an Assiniboin woman had attempted to imitate the Crow woman warrior, only to be killed on her first war excursion. J. Willard Schultz has written a fictionalized biography of Running Eagle, the noted Piegan woman warrior (Schultz, 1919). Running Eagle, who was killed by the Flathead following a series of successful war exploits, was remembered by elderly men on the Blackfeet Reservation, Mont., in the early 1940's. Presumably her war career was initiated after Denig's description of the Crow woman was written. However, she may have been inspired by the example of the Crow's Woman Chief.

at the mouth of the Yellowstone.⁴³ This river is very difficult to navigate at any season. During the summer flood the banks fall in. The current is very swift and the whole surface of the river is covered with floating trees and driftwood. After this stage the river falls too low and the danger then is confined to the sandbars, snags, and ledges of rock reaching nearly across the stream. Through these rocks the water runs with such velocity as not to admit of a loaded boat being hauled through. It is unloaded and the merchandise transported on men's shoulders by land to where the river is less turbulent. These rapids occupy nearly 100 miles in length. For the greater part of this distance the goods are carried by the men and the empty boats dragged up the stream. The downward navigation is more dangerous still. On these rapids the boats are often broken and both men and cargoes lost. The banks of the Yellowstone, moreover, are infested by hordes of Blackfeet Indians or Sioux, both hostile to either Whites or natives. The well-timbered bottoms of the river and deep-cut coulees in the hills afford excellent lurking places for marauding parties ready to kill or rob whenever opportunity offers.

But all these difficulties are of a trifling nature when compared to the situation of the traders around their own fort. Scarcely a week passes but attacks are made on those whose work obliges them to go beyond the gates of the stockade. The Sioux on the one hand, and the Blackfeet on the other, constantly in search of the Crow Indians who are supposed to be near the fort, make this place the center of their operations. When the Crows are stationed in the vicinity all attacks fall upon them, and well they retaliate. But when there are no Indians those who cut wood, guard horses, or go in quest of meat by hunting feel the murderous strokes of these ruthless warriors. Each and every year from 5 to 15 persons attached to the trading establishment have been killed, since commerce has been carried on with the Crows in their own district. The Blackfeet view the fort for the Crows in the light Rotten Belly did that for them. It supplies their enemies with arms and munitions of war, besides other conveniences for hunting and existing as a nation. Also the Blackfeet never entirely forgot the attempt of the Crow chieftain to cut off their support by besieging their fort in the hopes of being able to pillage it. They have always been a fierce people, killing the trappers in the mountains, in which encounters they suffered loss which they revenge to this day on any and all white persons not connected with

⁴³ For the Crow trade the American Fur Co. and its successors built four trading posts on the Middle Yellowstone in less than a quarter century. Each in turn was abandoned after a few years' service. There were Fort Cass (1832-38), Fort Van Buren (1839-42), Fort Alexander (1842-50), and Fort Sarpy (1850-55) (Chittenden, 1902, vol. 2, pp. 964-965; Larpenteur, 1898; vol. 1, pp. 115, 170-175; McDonnell, 1940, pp. 282-283).

the trading establishment in their own region. Sometimes these, too, go before their savage dispositions.

The Crows never passed the summer in the vicinity of the fort. At that season they were with the Flatheads, Snakes, or Nez Percés bartering the merchandise obtained from the traders for horses, ornaments, etc., with those nations. Late in the autumn some of them encamped near the fort but the greater portion kept in the fastnesses of the mountains, hunting in the valleys and bringing their proceeds to the trading post the following spring. About 6 months in the year the fort was left to defend itself the best way it could with its small number of men. These were further reduced when the mackinaw boats left with the annual returns. At these times those who remained could not with safety venture to the bank of the river to get water within a few steps of the gate. Indeed some were shot standing within the entrance. Whoever went forth to procure wood or meat placed their lives in extreme jeopardy. Every hunter there has been killed, and the fort often reduced to a famished condition when buffalo were in great numbers within sight. The few horses kept for hunting were always stolen, and those who guarded them shot down.

The Blackfeet never do these things openly; concealed among the bushes, grass, or in gullies they lie in wait for those who go out. The fort people seldom if ever killed any enemies. As soon as a man or two were shot the Indians absconded. At the time of attacking they were hidden from view or too numerous to be engaged by the few who were the victims to their bloodthirsty natures.

After keeping up the war in this way for about 16 years neither the Crow Indians nor traders could be brought to station themselves there for any length of time and the Yellowstone has been abandoned by both.⁴⁴ Men could, however, be found to continue operations in the Crow district did the trade prove of sufficient profit to the adventure. But two-thirds of the Indians have of late years taken their robes to the traders on the Platte for disposal. In some instances a few persons have come into their country with merchandise for their trade, which they brought in wagons along the Platte road as far as

⁴⁴ Indian Agent Vaughan, on his visit to the Crow country in August 1854, reported, "Scarcely a day passes but the Crow country is infested with more or less parties of Blackfeet, who murder indiscriminately any one that comes within their reach. At Fort Sarpy so great is the danger that no one ventures even a few yards from his own door without company and being well armed" (Ann. Rep. Comm. Ind. Aff., 1854, p. 85). By spring of 1855, hostile pressure had become so great that the traders burned Fort Sarpy (May 19) and abandoned the Crow country (McDonnell, 1940, pp. 126-127). Thus, at the time of Denig's writing, his company had no post among the Crow. Vaughan was prevented from reaching the Crow in the summer of 1855 by bodies of hostile Sioux on the Lower Yellowstone. When he reestablished contact with the Crow in the summer of 1856, that tribe had not received Government annuities for 2 years. Their chiefs explained to him "they preferred to go without the goods, rather than run the risk of passing through a country beset by their deadliest enemies, the Blackfeet and Blood Indians of the north." Vaughan persuaded 350 Crows to go with him to Fort Union to obtain the annuity goods for the entire tribe (Ann. Rep. Comm. Ind. Aff., 1856, p. 81).

Laramie's Fork, thence turning off and passing the winter near Powder River Mountain. There they build houses, deal with the Crows, and take their returns of furs and skins to St. Louis by the same road they came. As the country now stands, it is destitute of traders. Some camps come to Fort Union for supplies, others go to the Platte posts, and many rove through the mountains, supply themselves with what they want either by barter with other tribes or by robbing any emigrants on their road to the far west.

The trade with the Crows never was very profitable. They buy only the very finest and highest-priced goods which are most desired for the horse trade. Their own clothing also, of European manufacture, consists chiefly of blankets, cloths, etc., which, with English guns and brass kettles, do not bear a large advance of price when sold to them. Add to this their interminable practice of begging and stealing, and the expense and risk in taking goods up the Yellowstone and peltries down, and but little remains to compensate the trader for his time and trouble.

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF THE CROW INDIANS

Situated as they now are, the Crows cannot exist long as a nation. Without adequate supplies of arms and ammunition, warred against by the Blackfeet on one side and most bands of the Sioux on the other, straying along the Platte trail where they contract rapid and deadly diseases, together with the unnatural customs of destroying their offspring, will soon lead to their entire extinction. Or if a few remain they will become robbers and freebooters on any and all persons passing through the solitary regions of the Rocky Mountains.⁴⁵

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⁴⁵ At the time of Denig's writing the chances for the survival of the Crow Indians seemed slim, attacked on two sides as they were by the two strongest military powers of the Northern Plains, the Blackfoot and Teton Dakota. Yet Catlin had voiced a similar concern for the fate of the Crow in 1832: "They are a much smaller tribe than the Blackfeet, with whom they are always at war, and from whose great numbers they suffer prodigiously in battle; and probably will be, in a few years, entirely destroyed by them" (Catlin, 1841, vol. 1, pp. 42-43). Some of our aged Piegan and Blood informants, during the early 1940's, volunteered the opinion that had the U. S. Government not put an end to intertribal warfare, the Blackfoot and Sioux would have exterminated the Crow Indians.

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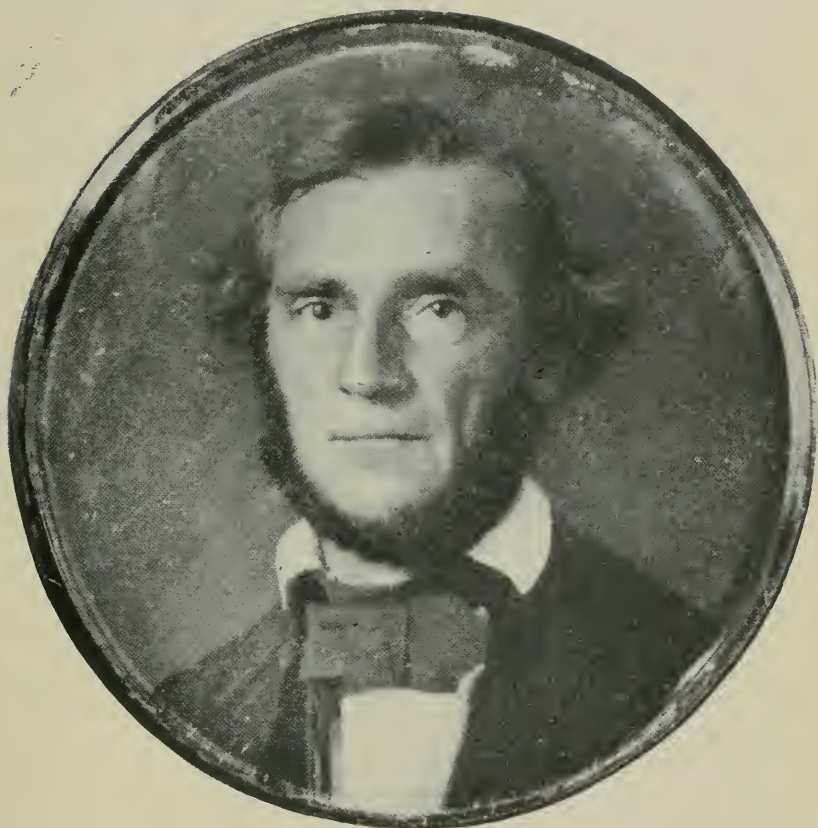
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PORTRAIT OF EDWIN THOMPSON DENIG.



EXTERIOR VIEW OF FORT UNION, 1852.
(Sketch by R. F. Kurz.)

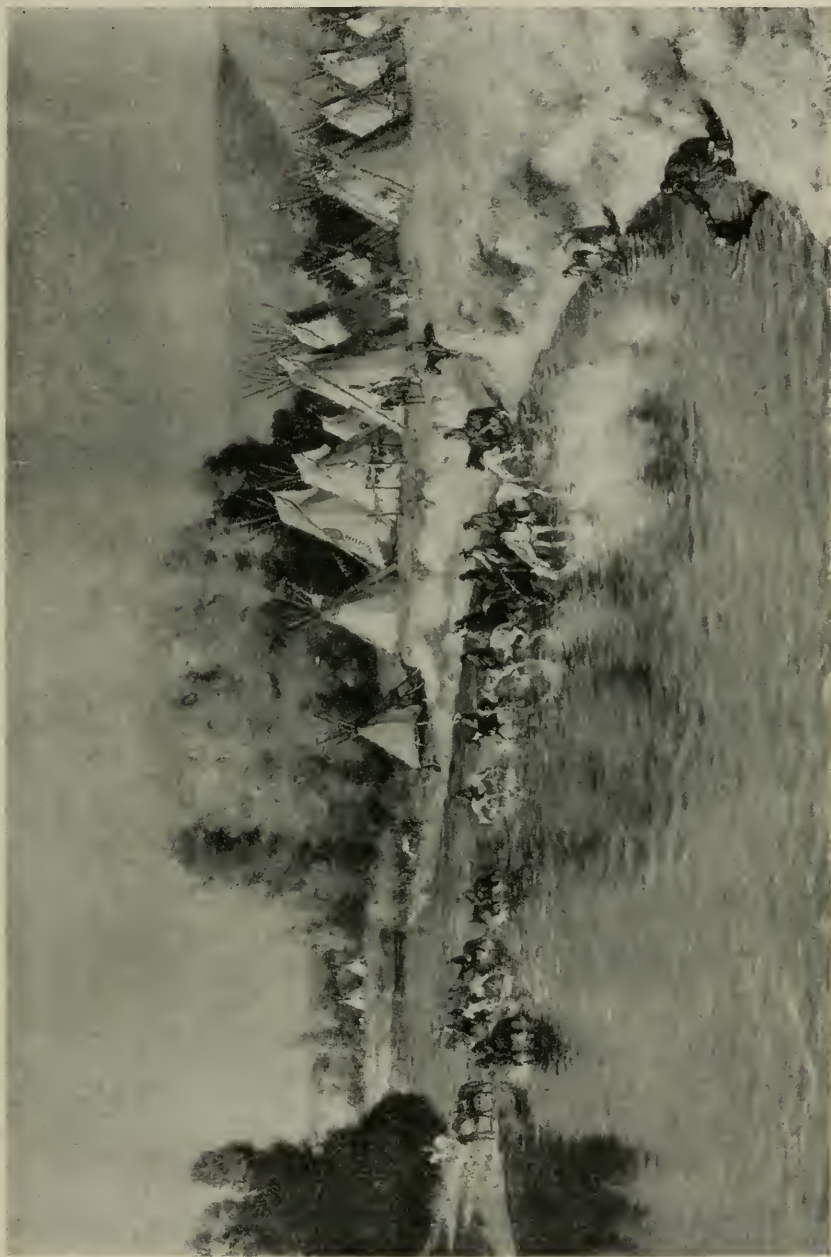


TWO CROWS THE YOUNGER, A CROW INDIAN.
(Painted by George Catlin at Fort Union, 1832.)



"THE WOMAN WHO LIVES IN THE BEAR'S DEN. HER HAIR CUT OFF, SHE
BEING IN MOURNING."

(A Crow woman painted by George Catlin at Fort Union, 1832.)



CROW INDIAN ENCAMPMENT, LITTLE BIG HORN RIVER.
(Painting by J. H. Sharp, 1908.)



THE VOICE OF THE GREAT SPIRIT. A SCAFFOLD BURIAL ON THE
CROW RESERVATION.

(Painting by J. H. Sharp, 1900.)