

The Washington Historical Quarterly

HOW ASIA USED TO DRIP AT THE SPOUT INTO AMERICA

How America was first peopled is a topic of wide interest. It challenges speculation at large no less than in scientific laboratories, perhaps more. That question used to weary me a bit through its frequency, when I began my work as a young ethnologist, twenty years ago. The curiosity of the man in the street as to the Indians seemed to stop at—Where do they come from?

Mormon solved the question at an early date by stating on his tablet that they were the two lost tribes of Israel; and his opinion is still shared by many of his adherents. Some of the Catholic missionaries in the Northwest independently came to a similar conclusion, on account of resemblances among tribes in remote parts of the globe. Some of them went so far as to quote linguistic parallels between the Hebraic and Athapascan languages—Petitot for instance.

The ethnographers were too busy with their research on particular groups of Indians to give much thought to the broader aspects of origin. The Indians had so many root languages utterly distinct from each other, so many dialects within each language, they were so diversified in culture, that they must be almost as old as America itself. Their antiquity in a way defied close investigation, and it was left to take care of itself. Veteran ethnologists showed impatience—they still do, but less—when their juniors put their hands into their preserves. Some young impertinents suggested that the classification of linguistic stocks, 39 in all, could be much reduced; or, that much of our Indian stuff in museums is of recent derivative origin, for instance, the floral and geometric designs on costumes. But repeatedly they met with gentle rebukes. Why meddle with things?

Archaeologists alone would at times throw a bomb, to arouse public interest—their work in America is either explosive or very dull—and to emulate their European *confrères* in antiquity. One of them would dig up a skull that was a hundred thousand years old or more, just as is often done in the old refuse of Europe. But

it was contended in other quarters that the skull was a mere intruder from the upper surfaces; it had slipped down where it did not belong. Traces of a very ancient culture or people on our continent were unearthed from time to time. But none of them so far have finally established that native American races are really indigenous at bottom. And it is fairly clear that America was still without Man when other parts were peopled.

The attitude of scientists towards this problem has undergone a marked change in the past decade. From one of indifference it has become inquisitive, when not venturesome. Red, yellow and green stripes are being drawn laterally on the map of the continents; I have seen it done by a noted English anthropologist at the last meeting in America of the British Association. The North American people would be mostly from Asia, and those of Central and South America would go back to remote Equatorial ancestors overseas. The fashion of thinking inter-continentially as it were is spreading. America is fast losing its insularity. Rivet, a French Professor, startled us with his study of what he calls "Les Malayo? Polynésiens en Amérique" (*Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris*, 1926). By Malayo-Polynesians in America he means the Hokan linguistic stock, a large one, in California and Mexico. To support his theory, he gives more than a hundred large pages of linguistic evidence. And we cannot see how it can be dismissed, as has been done, by a mere shrug of the shoulders. This is a field that should be further investigated. Europeans for years have studied striking parallels in the manual devices of the South American natives—pan pipes, for instance, the blow gun, the poison dart, and many other things. Linguists recently have stated that Athapascan was an Asiatic language, rather than an American—of Mongolian extraction. Yet its ramifications cover huge territories on our continent, from Alaska to Mexico. I heard this year a Sorbonne professor state that Athapascan was part of a system that extends as far as Burma in Asia, on the one side, and Mexico, on the other. Yet not a single page of evidence on this has so far been published, that I know.

From this it is apparent that *savants* like other mortals are creatures of fashions. Some of them accept on too little explicit evidence that the Red Man is extra-American, whereas others quite as hastily rejected, a few years before, the notion that America has been peopled from without. Had I to gamble on this alternative, I would rather put my money on the last proposition—the Mexico-Burman extravaganza as it were. It appeals more to imagination

for one thing, and some day large tomes which nobody can read may be produced in support. The simple fact of their appearance will be taken as final proof.

I was not aware that my research on the tribes of the Northwest Coast would ever bring this problem of origins close to my own doorstep. The West Coast for one thing is a long way off the tip of the Alaskan peninsula; and its nations are so individualized in language—six distinct linguistic stocks—that such diversity can be produced only through a slow process of change. One must go, I thought, and investigate the problem of Asiatic migrations on the spot, that is, on the Strait of Bering itself, from East Cape, through Diomedede islands to Cape Prince of Wales—as this has recently been done. When I began on location the study of the Tsimshyan nations and their thirty tribes, my impression was that what I found there would lead me nowhere else. The further I dug in, the further I would sink into the bogs of local antiquity, from which no one—certain not an ethnographer—ever escapes in his life-time. I accepted my fate with some discomfort.

When collecting the data on one given family I would come upon the individual names of its members, the emblems or coat-of-arms and other privileges actual or mystic, the hunting grounds, the myths and accounts of origin, reminiscences of war and migrations. What impressed me most was the historical or dynamic character of my new materials. A story of changes and growth was gradually unfolding itself, the story of these people; and the process of mutation has been rapid; its last phase was practically within the personal knowledge of present-day survivors. I could no longer ignore definite trends one way or another; and my interest in these gained momentum from year to year, in the course of a census-like survey of every family in the thirty tribes of the Tsimshyan, during seven seasons of research for the National Museum of Canada.

The individual names in some of the leading families were Tlingit rather than Tsimshyan, that is, they belonged to a foreign northern nation; so did their principal emblems, the Eagle, the Raven and the Wolf. Other things also definitely pointed to their northern origin, Tlingit or interior Athapascan. The best informed among them were emphatic in their opinion that their ancestors were northerners who had come only recently into the Tsimshyan system through warfare or adoption. Not only that: they have relatives in the north to this day, whom they know by name and still visit occasionally. And I covered enough ground to secure con-

firmation of their traditional or personal knowledge from people far removed from each other.

Other families had not so much information to give; neither could they boast of similar crests and ceremonial privileges. But the land previously had been wholly their own. Tsimsyan they had been as far back as they could remember. They were of the old stock. That is why they had no story to tell, since they had always been here. Peaceful sedentary people have no history.

This contrast between newcomers and the earlier occupants is one that repeated itself with every family in the hundreds that I analyzed throughout the Tsimsyan nations. Conclusions in retrospect now force themselves into the foreground, and they open up new vistas. I will outline them here in a few strokes; elsewhere they will be brought out in full.

Of the four Tsimsyan phratries—these are confederacies of related and semi-independent clans and families—two are in the nature of recent accessions from outside; the Eagle and the Wolf phratries. Yet they were both the leading factors in the social and economic life of the Tsimsyans in the past hundred years. The Wolves were the leaders among the Niska, one of the three Tsimsyan nations, and the Eagles, among the Tsimsyan proper. The Wolves were also in the lead among the Gitksan of the Upper Skeena. In actual numbers the Eagles and the Wolves presumably represented half of the whole Tsimsyan population.

Both of these were of northern extraction. They mostly forced themselves into the Tsimsyan groups through a slow process which I will describe later; and this, fairly recently—perhaps wholly in the past two or three hundred years; some of them certainly no earlier than six generations past or even less. Part of these newcomers were of Tlingit extraction, from the Alaskan coast as far north as the Eskimo habitat; others were Athapascan, from the interior—mostly from the Yukon district. The Eagles on the whole were from the sea coast, whereas the Wolves were also from the interior. Some of the Eagle phratry had come also from the Tlingit but through the Haidas of Queen Charlotte Islands.

The third phratry, that of the Ravens, was partly Tlingit or northern. Its leading families conquered scattered tribes of the Tsimsyans and settled among them only in the past hundred and fifty years or less. Tlingit remained their language until the recent defeat of their chief warrior Haimas at the hands of Eagle warriors of the Nass. Tlingit at one time was one of their two languages as far down the coast as the Skeena, and the fortunes of

war might easily have abolished the local vernacular insofar as the Tsimsyans proper were concerned.

Only the last of the four phratries, the Killer-whale and Fire-weeds, is predominantly indigenous, yet not completely in all its parts. Foreign elements are also in evidence here and there. But it constitutes the older Tsimsyan stratum together with a part of the Raven phratry. These people, curiously enough, had few if any heraldic emblems such as are now characteristic of the Northwest Coast people; and some of them at least were not even exogamic, that is, compelled to marry outside of their own phratry.

With time and space it would be easy to show how the Eagles, the Wolves, and the Ravens, filtered into the Tsimsyan system from the north. But the story is too long and diversified. A single instance will suffice, of the Legyarh group in the Eagle phratry.

Some generations past a feud broke out between the two leading clans of Na'a—now Port Chester, Alaska—, the Eagles and the Wolves. A party of Eagles, as a result of defeat and humiliation, migrated south to the country of the Tsimsyans. A few of its members proceeded further south to the country of the Bella-Bella (northern Kwakiutl), and settled there, on the coast.

The three sons of an Eagle "princess" who married there were often taunted by other children for their Tlingit origin. Violent quarrels later made it necessary for them to move back northwards. One of them settled among the Haidas of Queen Charlotte Island, where his descendants still survive; and two, among the Tsimsyans of the lower Skeena: Legyarh and Skagwait. These were well received on account of their high rank and standing—for their Tlingit antecedents were widely known everywhere.

Legyarh and Skagwait in the course of two generations (personal names are hereditary) moved to the front rank among the Tsimsyans, displacing others, mostly through their success as traders. This happened at the time when the first circumnavigators bartered goods for pelts on the Northwest Coast. As they had relatives among the four northern nations, they could travel with immunity wherever they pleased—a privilege not shared by others. The growth of their wealth and prestige worried the other leaders of the Tsimsyan to such an extent that, one day, they decided in secret conclave to check the rise of these semi-strangers through their defeat and humiliation in a *potlatch* or contest of wealth between them and the other chiefs. They pooled all their wealth together—in particular, the copper shields which at the time were like bank notes to the natives.

Legyarh had wind of the affair, as he had a finger in every pie, mostly through intermarriages between his relatives and the local families. He secretly organized his kinsmen *in four nations* to resist the attack, and came out victorious in a memorable contest of wealth that actually happened at Metlakatla at the mouth of the Skeena. He produced fourteen coppers to the utter surprise of his rivals, who could muster only thirteen. Legyarh was too shrewd not to utilize his victory for further advancement and self-glorification. He hired a Haida artist, in whose equipment were long ropes made of the hide of killer-whales, and brought him to a high cliff at the mouth of the Nass, in front of which the fisherfolk of three nations had to pass every spring to fish the *ulaken* (candle-fish) at Fishery Bay on the lower Nass. There they contrived together a device whereby the Haida engraved and painted red on the perpendicular face of the rock fourteen coppers surrounding a human face—that of Legyarh. This was in commemoration of his ascent to the head-cheftainship of the Tsimsyans.

From that moment Legyarh's power as a warrior and a trader knew no bounds; he waged war, plundered his enemies, and made slaves. When the Hudson's Bay Company founded a post among the Tsimsyans in 1832, it was at his invitation in his own domains—at Port Simpson, close to the Alaskan border. The last chapter of warfare between Legyarh and his enemies among the Haidas, happened in front of the Hudson's Bay Company's fort, about 1850; and this battle is a matter of historic no less than pictorial record.

The power of Legyarh was broken only by the white man and his most powerful agents, the missionary and small-pox, and this happened only after 1860.

Legyarh was not the first representative of the Eagle phratry of the Tlingits to settle among the Tsimsyan. A clan of the same Tlingit phratry had preceded him up the Nass; and another to the mid-Skeena, which had come through the Haidas. This Haida-Tsimsyan family, that of Githawn, soon entered into conflict with Legyarh, over divided privileges; and Legyarh had the upper hand. A subdivision of the Skeena clan of the Eagle ascended the Skeena to the Gitksan country, there to establish a new outpost. But this had no time to spread further up the river. It is represented only in one out of seven tribes of the Gitksan.

Accounts similar in type, though different in particulars, could be told of the southward migrations of the Wolves, much at the same time as the Eagles. But the Wolves were mostly from the northern interior—the Sekanais, Tsetsaut and Tahlтан nations of

the Athapascan. They were from the Yukon and the interior of the Alaskan peninsula. Instead of invading the territories of the Tsimshyan from the coast, as the Eagles had done, they mostly pounced upon the local occupants in small parties from the headwaters of three rivers—the Stikine, the Nass and the Skeena. The tales of war relating to these incessant invasions are numerous among every one of the upper tribes of the Niska and the Gitksan. The nomads of the interior nearly always had the advantage over the village dwellers of the coast and the rivers, for they knew where to find them; and they pounced upon them at dawn when they were asleep in their lodges. In most cases they settled down with the survivors and became village-dwellers themselves in the very homes of their defeated rivals. This infusion of northern interior elements is considerable there, and it has deeply affected the characteristics of the people and their culture. They are as much of the nomadic hunter type of the interior as they are of the coast sedentary habits and a born preference for fish for food.

The temptation here would be to extend this brief outline of southward migrations at every point north and east of the Tsimshyan country. But I must limit myself to a few general statements as to their main features.

The intrusive elements among the three nations of the Tsimshyans are preponderant not only in numbers but also in status and influence. Their coming in their present organic form probably covers less than two hundred years; that is, it presumably happened at the time of—or after—the coming of the first Russian cossacks to the country of the Tlingit, then known as the Kolosches—about 1740 and later.

The earlier occupants had a different culture and social organization, and they are still represented by a number of families at the present day—particularly on the lower Skeena.

The northerners did not invade the Nass or the Skeena in large armed parties, as one might believe, but they dribbled in a few at a time. Some were welcomed by semi-relatives and friends with whom they intermarried; but most of them came in with a chip on their shoulder, or more boldly still, through murder and rapine. They daunted the earlier occupants and made of them serfs or slaves. In so doing they themselves lost their earlier identity and became assimilated; from nomads, when they were from the interior, they became sedentary, and they took on the Tsimshyan language.

Tsimshyan in such circumstances could not remain pure, either

in culture or in language, as there is considerable diversity of origin. Tlingit diluted the earlier Tsimshyan dialect of the coast; Sekanais and Carrier, that of the upper Skeena; and Tsetsaut, that of the Nass. So that we now have three Tsimshyan dialects. A dialect to arise does not necessarily require centuries, but only the intensive blending of new elements. And this seems to have happened to the Tsimshyan in the past six generations.

A peculiar thing is that the language spread northwards whereas the people using it were actually fast drifting south. Many natives whose blood originally was Tlingit or Athapascan later spoke Tsimshyan. The survivors of the Tsetsaut nation of Portland Canal bodily became Niska (Tsimshyan). Danjalee, one of them, lives among the Niska, at Kincolith; he is still a nomadic hunter and speaks Tsetsaut a part of the time. But Tsimshyan is now the language heard on the hunting territories of his nation, formerly one of the Athapascan group.

The Tsimshyan language is thus merely bottlelike. As a cultural form it exists; it has grown and developed; it is a thing by itself. It has changed the more rapidly since the tribes using it shifted at almost every generation in their rapid migrations further south. The liquid in the bottle was ever a bit different through leakage and dilution.

The history of the Tsimshyans is full of significance insofar as it is typical. It has thus a bearing on that of other northwestern tribes far and wide. But here again, for lack of space, I may suggest, rather than produce, evidence.

Wherever tribes are to be found in the Alaskan peninsula or in British Columbia, the same processes are steadily at work. For instance:

Along the coast, the Queen Charlotte Islands, like the Nass and Skeena, were deeply affected through migrations from the main coast, chiefly the Tlingit country to the northeast. Indeed their Kaigane division on Prince of Wales Island consisted of a heavy admixture of Haida and Tlingit blood. The district south of the Skeena was repeatedly invaded by the Tsimshyans of the Skeena and the coast. The Bella-Coolas further south on the coast are an Athapascan enclave; they are from the northern interior. The Kwakiutl of northern Vancouver Island were at war with the Nootkas, whom they were pressing further south. The Nootkas likewise were driving down their southern neighbours—a Salish nation—at the time when Captain Cook wintered among them (1779). Similar pressure ridges were operating southwards along

the Fraser, between the Salish and the Okanagans. The Lillooet further north were an intrusive Athapascan people among the Salish. The Tlingit themselves along the Alaskan coast were of mixed extraction, native no less than Athapascan of the northern interior. When Robert Campbell, a Hudson's Bay Company's trader, first explored the Liard and the upper Stikine about 1840, he found that everywhere the Kutchins were invading the preserves of their southern kinsmen, the Tahltans, or of the Tlingit. No use here to lengthen the list or go into particulars.

The question is, Why did this happen? There must be a cause, perhaps a simple cause, for a phenomenon so strikingly uniform all over the northwestern map. And the cause is there. It hits us in the face everywhere.

Those Indians were prowling around for food, and they pounced upon it wherever they found it. Their country was cold and barren; they moved away from it to warmer climes and the treasure chest of fish and fruit and game further south.

When they landed upon the object of their quest they stumbled upon other natives that tried to hold on to their privilege of first and only occupants. Perhaps repelled at first, they came back. As they were only a handful—the sub-arctic regions could not feed an army—they had to fall back upon ingenuity to drive in a wedge somewhere. It is what they did, and the process is strikingly the same everywhere. During times of starvations they fell upon their opponents when they were asleep, before dawn. They killed the warriors and usually spared the others. But the next day they owned new food stores, new hunting and fishing preserves; and these were always further to the south or the southwest. The climate on the Northwest Coast is mild and balmy; the salmon and all kinds of fish, and the game were incredibly plentiful. Nature was bounteous. That was a sufficient inducement to draw them like a magnet.

Everybody wanted to crowd in within the same preserves; and this brought invasions, warfare, the growth of population, the ramification of languages into dialects, ambitions and an incentive for progress. All these are indeed dominant features in Northwest Coast ethnology.

The Athapascans of the interior of Alaska had little inducement to stay forever in the tundras of the sub-arctic circle. Their little bands spread fan-like in every direction. If several of them moved southwest of the mountain ranges, others found their way east to the Mackenzie. Like their western brothers they had a ten-

dency to travel towards the sun. There was something of the nomadism of Tamerlan and Gengis Khan in their blood. They would never sleep twice as it were under the same star. Some of them shot through to the flat lands of the buffalo. Their farthest representatives to the south are the Apaches and the Navahos of Arizona. They stood at what is now the Canadian border at the time of the discovery. But they were on their way down. When Geronimo, the famous Navaho warrior, became a prisoner of state in the early eighties, he had started on the warpath for the conquest of the corn maiden in Mexico.

Where did those roving Athapascans come from? From Alaska, yes. But, is that all? Or shall we walk over the doorstep?

If you want to have the clearest account of their likely origin beyond this, you must read what Petitot, the French missionary, has to say. He lived among the tribes of the Western sub-Arctic circle for many years after 1860. He still remains the best student in Athapaskan history and linguistics to this day. Most of his writings seem to have escaped the attention of American ethnologists, perhaps because they were published in France and in French.

To him those northern nomads were not primarily a stone-age people, but one that had lapsed from a higher culture, wherein bronze or iron were one of the primary desiderata in life. But they had moved away from their former sources of supply.

How could this have happened unless they once had belonged to Asia, had shared if only at the outskirts in the benefits of the ancient civilization that had its seat at the heart of the old Mongolian continent?

Primitive Asiatic tribes were driven off northwards around the Siberian periphery. Kamchatka and the northeastern peninsula held many of them—the Chukchees, the Koriaks, and others. These are strikingly American-like; or else our Athapascans and Northwest Coast people are strikingly Chukchee-like physically and culturally. Asia was full of people to its spout. The spout rested on the northwestern tip of the American continent, only forty miles away. One shore can be seen from the other in clear weather. Islands conveniently sit in between. A native trade rout from one side to the other existed from time immemorial. Trade wares, even China beads and pipes, were imported into America, in particular among the Eskimos. They are found in prehistoric sites as far as the Coppermine region. America on the other hand was rather empty of people and it had much food to spare. The inevit-

able happened—the story of the siphon in nature's laboratory.

Asia dripped at the spout of its huge tea-pot into the American
vacuity, and this must have happened for millenaea.

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