



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

BLACKFOOT  
LODGE TALES

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George Bird Grinnell

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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# Blackfoot Lodge Tales

*by*

GEORGE BIRD GRINNELL





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# Note

We were sitting about the fire in the lodge on Two Medicine. Double Runner, Small Leggings, Mad Wolf, and the Little Blackfoot were smoking and talking, and I was writing in my note-book. As I put aside the book, and reached out my hand for the pipe, Double Runner bent over and picked up a scrap of printed paper, which had fallen to the ground. He looked at it for a moment without speaking, and then, holding it up and calling me by name, said:—

“*Pi-nut-ú-ye is-tsim-okan*, this is education. Here is the difference between you and me, between the Indians and the white people. You know what this means. I do not. If I did know, I should be as smart as you. If all my people knew, the white people would not always get the best of us.”

“*Nisah* (elder brother), your words are true. Therefore you ought to see that your children go to school, so that they may get the white man’s knowledge. When they are men, they will have to trade with the white people; and if they know nothing, they can never get rich. The times have changed. It will never again be as it was when you and I were young.”

“You say well, *Pi-nut-ú-ye is-tsim-okan*, I have seen the days; and I know it is so. The old things are passing away, and the children of my children will be like white people. None of them will know how it used to be in their father’s days unless they read the things which we have told you, and which you are all the time writing down in your books.”

“They are all written down, *Nisah*, the story of the three tribes, *Sík-si-kau*, *Káinah*, and *Pikú’ni*.”

# Indians And Their Stories

THE most shameful chapter of American history is that in which is recorded the account of our dealings with the Indians. The story of our government's intercourse with this race is an unbroken narrative of injustice, fraud, and robbery. Our people have disregarded honesty and truth whenever they have come in contact with the Indian, and he has had no rights because he has never had the power to enforce any.

Protests against governmental swindling of these savages have been made again and again, but such remonstrances attract no general attention. Almost every one is ready to acknowledge that in the past the Indians have been shamefully robbed, but it appears to be believed that this no longer takes place. This is a great mistake. We treat them now much as we have always treated them. Within two years, I have been present on a reservation where government commissioners, by means of threats, by bribes given to chiefs, and by casting fraudulently the votes of absentees, succeeded after months of effort in securing votes enough to warrant them in asserting that a tribe of Indians, entirely wild and totally ignorant of farming, had consented to sell their lands, and to settle down each upon<sup>1</sup> 0 acres of the most utterly arid and barren land to be found on the North American continent. The fraud perpetrated on this tribe was as gross as could be practised by one set of men upon another. In a similar way the Southern Utes were recently induced to consent to give up their reservation for another.

Americans are a conscientious people, yet they take no interest in these frauds. They have the Anglo-Saxon spirit of fair play, which sympathizes with weakness, yet no protest is made against the oppression which the Indian suffers. They are generous; a famine in Ireland, Japan, or Russia arouses the

1 Early Riser, *i.e.* The Morning Star.

sympathy and calls forth the bounty of the nation, yet they give no heed to the distress of the Indians, who are in the very midst of them. They do not realize that Indians are human beings like themselves.

For this state of things there must be a reason, and this reason is to be found, I believe, in the fact that practically no one has any personal knowledge of the Indian race. The few who are acquainted with them are neither writers nor public speakers, and for the most part would find it easier to break a horse than to write a letter. If the general public knows little of this race, those who legislate about them are equally ignorant. From the congressional page who distributes the copies of a pending bill, up through the representatives and senators who vote for it, to the president whose signature makes the measure a law, all are entirely unacquainted with this people or their needs.

Many stories about Indians have been written, some of which are interesting and some, perhaps, true. All, however, have been written by civilized people, and have thus of necessity been misleading. The reason for this is plain. The white person who gives his idea of a story of Indian life inevitably looks at things from the civilized point of view, and assigns to the Indian such motives and feelings as govern the civilized man. But often the feelings which lead an Indian to perform a particular action are not those which would induce a white man to do the same thing, or if they are, the train of reasoning which led up to the Indian's motive is not the reasoning of the white man.

In a volume about the Pawnees,<sup>2</sup> I endeavored to show how Indians think and feel by letting some of them tell their own stories in their own fashion, and thus explain in their own way how they look at the every-day occurrences of their life, what motives govern them, and how they reason.

In the present volume, I treat of another race of Indians in

2 Pawnee Hero Stories and Folk-Tales.

precisely the same way. I give the Blackfoot stories as they have been told to me by the Indians themselves, not elaborating nor adding to them. In all cases except one they were written down as they fell from the lips of the storyteller. Sometimes I have transposed a sentence or two, or have added a few words of explanation; but the stories as here given are told in the words of the original narrators as nearly as it is possible to render those words into the simplest every-day English. These are Indians' stories, pictures of Indian life drawn by Indian artists, and showing this life from the Indian's point of view. Those who read these stories will have the narratives just as they came to me from the lips of the Indians themselves; and from the tales they can get a true notion of the real man who is speaking. He is not the Indian of the newspapers, nor of the novel, nor of the Eastern sentimentalist, nor of the Western boomer, but the real Indian as he is in his daily life among his own people, his friends, where he is not embarrassed by the presence of strangers, nor trying to produce effects, but is himself—the true, natural man.

And when you are talking with your Indian friend, as you sit beside him and smoke with him on the bare prairie during a halt in the day's march, or at night lie at length about your lonely camp fire in the mountains, or form one of a circle of feasters in his home lodge, you get very near to nature. Some of the sentiments which he expresses may horrify your civilized mind, but they are not unlike those which your own small boy might utter. The Indian talks of blood and wounds and death in a commonplace, matter-of-fact way that may startle you. But these things used to be a part of his daily life; and even to-day you may sometimes hear a dried-up, palsied survivor of the ancient wars cackle out his shrill laugh when he tells as a merry jest, a bloodcurdling story of the torture he inflicted on some enemy in the long ago.

I have elsewhere expressed my views on Indian character, the conclusions founded on an acquaintance with this race

extending over more than twenty years, during which time I have met many tribes, with some of whom I have lived on terms of the closest intimacy.

The Indian is a man, not very different from his white brother, except that he is undeveloped. In his natural state he is kind and affectionate in his family, is hospitable, honest and straightforward with his fellows,—a true friend. If you are his guest, the best he has is at your disposal; if the camp is starving, you will still have set before you your share of what food there may be in the lodge. For his friend he will die, if need be. He is glad to perform acts of kindness for those he likes. While travelling in the heats of summer over long, waterless stretches of prairie, I have had an Indian, who saw me suffering from thirst, leave me, without mentioning his errand, and ride thirty miles to fetch me a canteen of cool water.

The Indian is intensely religious. No people pray more earnestly nor more frequently. This is especially true of all Indians of the Plains.

The Indian has the mind and feelings of a child with the stature of a man; and if this is clearly understood and considered, it will readily account for much of the bad that we hear about him, and for many of the evil traits which are commonly attributed to him. Civilized and educated, the Indian of the better class is not less intelligent than the average white man, and he has every capacity for becoming a good citizen.

This is the view held not only by myself, but by all of the many old frontiersmen that I have known, who have had occasion to live much among Indians, and by most experienced army officers. It was the view held by my friend and schoolmate, the lamented Lieutenant Casey, whose good work in transforming the fierce Northern Cheyennes into United States soldiers is well known among all officers of the army, and whose sad death by an Indian bullet has not yet, I believe, been forgotten by the public.

It is proper that something should be said as to how this book came to be written.

About ten years ago, Mr. J.W. Schultz of Montana, who was then living in the Blackfoot camp, contributed to the columns of the *Forest and Stream*, under the title "Life among the Blackfeet," a series of sketches of that people. These papers seemed to me of unusual interest, and worthy a record in a form more permanent than the columns of a newspaper; but no opportunity was then presented for filling in the outlines given in them.

Shortly after this, I visited the Pi-kūn-i tribe of the Blackfeet, and I have spent more or less time in their camps every year since. I have learned to know well all their principal men, besides many of the Bloods and the Blackfeet, and have devoted much time and effort to the work of accumulating from their old men and best warriors the facts bearing on the history, customs, and oral literature of the tribe, which are presented in this volume.

In 1889 my book on the Pawnees was published, and seemed to arouse so much interest in Indian life, from the Indian's standpoint, that I wrote to Mr. Schultz, urging him, as I had often done before, to put his observations in shape for publication, and offered to edit his work, and to see it through the press. Mr. Schultz was unwilling to undertake this task, and begged me to use all the material which I had gathered, and whatever he could supply, in the preparation of a book about the Blackfeet.

A portion of the material contained in these pages was originally made public by Mr. Schultz, and he was thus the discoverer of the literature of the Blackfeet. My own investigations have made me familiar with all the stories here recorded, from original sources, but some of them he first published in the columns of the *Forest and Stream*. For this work he is entitled to great credit, for it is most unusual to find any one living the rough life beyond the frontier, and mingling in daily intercourse with Indians, who has the intelligence to study their traditions, history, and customs, and the industry to reduce his observations to writing.

Besides the invaluable assistance given me by Mr. Schultz, I acknowledge with gratitude the kindly aid of Miss Cora M.

Ross, one of the school teachers at the Blackfoot agency, who has furnished me with a version of the story of the origin of the Medicine Lodge; and of Mrs. Thomas Dawson, who gave me help on the story of the Lost Children. William Jackson, an educated half-breed, who did good service from 1874 to 1879, scouting under Generals Custer and Miles, and William Russell, half-breed, at one time government interpreter at the agency, have both given me valuable assistance. The latter has always placed himself at my service, when I needed an interpreter, while Mr. Jackson has been at great pains to assist me in securing several tales which I might not otherwise have obtained, and has helped me in many ways. The veteran prairie man, Mr. Hugh Monroe, and his son, John Monroe, have also given me much information. Most of the stories I owe to Blackfeet, Bloods, and Piegans of pure race. Some of these men have died within the past few years, among them the kindly and venerable Red Eagle; Almost-a-Dog, a noble old man who was regarded with respect and affection by Indians and whites; and that matchless orator, Four Bears. Others, still living, to whom I owe thanks, are Wolf Calf, Big Nose, Heavy Runner, Young Bear Chief, Wolf Tail, Rabid Wolf, Running Rabbit, White Calf, All-are-his-Children, Double Runner, Lone Medicine Person, and many others.

The stories here given cover a wide range of subjects, but are fair examples of the oral literature of the Blackfeet. They deal with religion, the origin of things, the performances of medicine men, the bravery and single-heartedness of warriors.

It will be observed that in more than one case two stories begin in the same way, and for a few paragraphs are told in language which is almost identical. In like manner it is often to be noted that in different stories the same incidents occur. This is all natural enough, when it is remembered that the range of the Indians' experiences is very narrow. The incidents of camp life, of hunting and war excursions, do not offer a very wide variety of conditions; and of course the stories of the people deal chiefly with matters with which they are familiar. They are based on the every-day life of the narrators.

The reader of these Blackfoot stories will not fail to notice many curious resemblances to tales told among other distant and different peoples. Their similarity to those current among the Ojibwas, and other Eastern Algonquin tribes, is sufficiently obvious and altogether to be expected, nor is it at all remarkable that we should find, among the Blackfeet, tales identical with those told by tribes of different stock far to the south; but it is a little startling to see in the story of the Worm Pipe a close parallel to the classical myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. In another of the stories is an incident which might have been taken bodily from the Odyssey.

Well-equipped students of general folk-lore will find in these tales much to interest them, and to such may be left the task of commenting on this collection.

STORIES OF  
ADVENTURE



# The Peace With The Snakes

## I

In those days there was a Piegan chief named Owl Bear. He was a great chief, very brave and generous. One night he had a dream: he saw many dead bodies of the enemy lying about, scalped, and he knew that he must go to war. So he called out for a feast, and after the people had eaten, he said:—

“I had a strong dream last night. I went to war against the Snakes, and killed many of their warriors. So the signs are good, and I feel that I must go. Let us have a big party now, and I will be the leader. We will start to-morrow night.”

Then he told two old men to go out in the camp and shout the news, so that all might know. A big party was made up. Two hundred men, they say, went with this chief to war. The first night they travelled only a little way, for they were not used to walking, and soon got tired.

In the morning the chief got up early and went and made a sacrifice, and when he came back to the others, some said, “Come now, tell us your dream of this night.”

“I dreamed good,” said Owl Bear. “I had a good dream. We will have good luck.”

But many others said they had bad dreams. They saw blood running from their bodies.

Night came, and the party started on, travelling south, and keeping near the foot-hills; and when daylight came, they stopped in thick pine woods and built war lodges. They put up poles as for a lodge, and covered them very thick with pine boughs, so they could build fires and cook, and no one would see the light and smoke; and they all ate some of the food they carried, and then went to sleep.

Again the chief had a good dream, but the others all had bad dreams, and some talked about turning back; but Owl Bear

laughed at them, and when night came, all started on. So they travelled for some nights, and all kept dreaming bad except the chief. He always had good dreams. One day after a sleep, a person again asked Owl Bear if he dreamed good. "Yes," he replied. "I have again dreamed of good luck."

"We still dream bad," the person said, "and now some of us are going to turn back. We will go no further, for bad luck is surely ahead." "Go back! go back!" said Owl Bear. "I think you are cowards; I want no cowards with me." They did not speak again. Many of them turned around, and started north, toward home.

Two more days' travel. Owl Bear and his warriors went on, and then another party turned back, for they still had bad dreams. All the men now left with him were his relations. All the others had turned back.

They travelled on, and travelled on, always having bad dreams, until they came close to the Elk River.<sup>3</sup> Then the oldest relation said, "Come, my chief, let us all turn back. We still have bad dreams. We cannot have good luck."

"No," replied Owl Bear, "I will not turn back."

Then they were going to seize him and tie his hands, for they had talked of this before. They thought to tie him and make him go back with them. Then the chief got very angry. He put an arrow on his bow, and said: "Do not touch me. You are my relations; but if any of you try to tie me, I will kill you. Now I am ashamed. My relations are cowards and will turn back. I have told you I have always dreamed good, and that we would have good luck. Now I don't care; I am covered with shame. I am going now to the Snake camp and will give them my body. I am ashamed. Go! go! and when you get home put on women's dresses. You are no longer men."

They said no more. They turned back homeward, and the chief was all alone. His heart was very sad as he travelled on, and he was much ashamed, for his relations had left him.

3 Yellowstone River.

## II

Night was coming on. The sun had set and rain was beginning to fall. Owl Bear looked around for some place where he could sleep dry. Close by he saw a hole in the rocks. He got down on his hands and knees and crept in. Here it was very dark. He could see nothing, so he crept very slowly, feeling as he went. All at once his hand touched something strange. He felt of it. It was a person's foot, and there was a moccasin on it. He stopped, and sat still. Then he felt a little further. Yes, it was a person's leg. He could feel the cowskin legging. Now he did not know what to do. He thought perhaps it was a dead person; and again, he thought it might be one of his relations, who had become ashamed and turned back after him.

Pretty soon he put his hand on the leg again and felt along up. He touched the person's belly. It was warm. He felt of the breast, and could feel it rise and fall as the breath came and went; and the heart was beating fast. Still the person did not move. Maybe he was afraid. Perhaps he thought that was a ghost feeling of him.

Owl Bear now knew this person was not dead. He thought he would try if he could learn who the man was, for he was not afraid. His heart was sad. His people and his relations had left him, and he had made up his mind to give his body to the Snakes. So he began and felt all over the man,—of his face, hair, robe, leggings, belt, weapons; and by and by he stopped feeling of him. He could not tell whether it was one of his people or not.

Pretty soon the strange person sat up and felt all over Owl Bear; and when he had finished, he took the Piegan's hand and opened it and held it up, waving it from side to side, saying by signs, "Who are you?"

Owl Bear put his closed hand against the person's cheek and rubbed it; he said in signs, "Piegan!" and then he asked the person who he was. A finger was placed against his breast and moved across it *zigzag*. It was the sign for "Snake."

"Hai yah!" thought Owl Bear, "a Snake, my enemy." For a long time he sat still, thinking. By and by he drew his knife from his belt and placed it in the Snake's hand, and signed, "Kill me!" He waited. He thought soon his heart would be cut. He wanted to die. Why live? His people had left him.

Then the Snake took Owl Bear's hand and put a knife in it and motioned that Owl Bear should cut his heart, but the Piegan would not do it. He lay down, and the Snake lay down beside him. Maybe they slept. Likely not.

So the night went and morning came. It was light, and they crawled out of the cave, and talked a long time together by signs. Owl Bear told the Snake where he had come from, how his party had dreamed bad and left him, and that he was going alone to give his body to the Snakes.

Then the Snake said: "I was going to war, too. I was going against the Piegans. Now I am done. Are you a chief?"

"I am the head chief," replied Owl Bear. "I lead. All the others follow."

"I am the same as you," said the Snake. "I am the chief. I like you. You are brave. You gave me your knife to kill you with. How is your heart? Shall the Snakes and the Piegans make peace?"

"Your words are good," replied Owl Bear. "I am glad."

"How many nights will it take you to go home and come back here with your people?" asked the Snake.

Owl Bear thought and counted. "In twenty-five nights," he replied, "the Piegans will camp down by that creek."

"My trail," said the Snake, "goes across the mountains. I will try to be here in twenty-five nights, but I will camp with my people just behind that first mountain. When you get here with the Piegans, come with one of your wives and stay all night with me. In the morning the Snakes will move and put up their lodges beside the Piegans."

"As you say," replied the chief, "so it shall be done." Then they built a fire and cooked some meat and ate together.

"I am ashamed to go home," said Owl Bear. "I have taken no horses, no scalps. Let me cut off your side locks?"

"Take them," said the Snake.

Owl Bear cut off the chiefs braids close to his head, and then the Snake cut off the Piegan's braids. Then they exchanged clothes and weapons and started out, the Piegan north, the Snake south.

### III

"Owl Bear has come! Owl Bear has come!" the people were shouting.

The warriors rushed to his lodge. *Whish!* how quickly it was filled! Hundreds stood outside, waiting to hear the news.

For a long time the chief did not speak. He was still angry with his people. An old man was talking, telling the news of the camp. Owl Bear did not look at him. He ate some food and rested. Many were in the lodge who had started to war with him. They were now ashamed. They did not speak, either, but kept looking at the fire. After a long time the chief said: "I travelled on alone. I met a Snake. I took his scalp and clothes, and his weapons. See, here is his scalp!" And he held up the two braids of hair.

No one spoke, but the chief saw them nudge each other and smile a little; and soon they went out and said to one another: "What a lie! That is not an enemy's scalp; there is no flesh on it. He has robbed some dead person."

Some one told the chief what they said, but he only laughed and replied:—

"I do not care. They were too much afraid even to go on and rob a dead person. They should wear women's dresses."

Near sunset, Owl Bear called for a horse, and rode all through camp so every one could hear, shouting out: "Listen! listen! To-morrow we move camp. We travel south. The Piegans and Snakes are going to make peace. If any one refuses to go, I will kill him. All must go."

Then an old medicine man came up to him and said: "Kyi, Owl Bear! listen to me. Why talk like this? You know we are not afraid of the Snakes. Have we not fought them and driven them out of this country? Do you think we are afraid to go and meet them? No. We will go and make peace with them as you say, and if they want to fight, we will fight. Now you are angry with those who started to war with you. Don't be angry. Dreams belong to the Sun. He gave them to us, so that we can see ahead and know what will happen. The Piegans are not cowards. Their dreams told them to turn back. So do not be angry with them any more."

"There is truth in what you say, old man," replied Owl Bear; "I will take your words."

#### IV

In those days the Piegans were a great tribe. When they travelled, if you were with the head ones, you could not see the last ones, they were so far back. They had more horses than they could count, so they used fresh horses every day and travelled very fast. On the twenty-fourth day they reached the place where Owl Bear had told the Snake they would camp, and put up their lodges along the creek. Soon some young men came in, and said they had seen some fresh horse trails up toward the mountain.

"It must be the Snakes," said the chief; "they have already arrived, although there is yet one night." So he called one of his wives, and getting on their horses they set out to find the Snake camp. They took the trail up over the mountain, and soon came in sight of the lodges. It was a big camp. Every open place in the valley was covered with lodges, and the hills were dotted with horses; for the Snakes had a great many more horses than the Piegans.

Some of the Snakes saw the Piegans coming, and they ran to the chief, saying: "Two strangers are in sight, coming this way. What shall be done?"

“Do not harm them,” replied the chief. “They are friends of mine. I have been expecting them.” Then the Snakes wondered, for the chief had told them nothing about his war trip.

Now when Owl Bear had come to the camp, he asked in signs for the chiefs lodge, and they pointed him to one in the middle. It was small and old. The Piegan got off his horse, and the Snake chief came out and hugged him and kissed him, and said: “I am glad you have come to-day to my lodge. So are my people. You are tired. Enter my lodge and we will eat.” So they went inside and many of the Snakes came in, and they had a great feast.

Then the Snake chief told his people how he had met the Piegan, and how brave he was, and that now they were going to make a great peace; and he sent some men to tell the people, so that they would be ready to move camp in the morning. Evening came. Everywhere people were shouting out for feasts, and the chief took Owl Bear to them. It was very late when they returned. Then the Snake had one of his wives make a bed at the back of the lodge; and when it was ready he said: “Now, my friend, there is your bed. This is now your lodge; also the woman who made the bed, she is now your wife; also everything in this lodge is yours. The parfleches, saddles, food, robes, bowls, everything is yours. I give them to you because you are my friend and a brave man.”

“You give me too much,” replied Owl Bear. “I am ashamed, but I take your words. I have nothing with me but one wife. She is yours.”

Next morning camp was broken early. The horses were driven in, and the Snake chief gave Owl Bear his whole band,—two hundred head, all large, powerful horses.

All were now ready, and the chiefs started ahead. Close behind them were all the warriors, hundreds and hundreds, and last came the women and children, and the young men driving the loose horses. As they came in sight of the Piegan camp, all the warriors started out to meet them, dressed in

their war costumes and singing the great war song. There was no wind, and the sound came across the valley and up the hill like the noise of thunder. Then the Snakes began to sing, and thus the two parties advanced. At last they met. The Piegans turned and rode beside them, and so they came to the camp. Then they got off their horses and kissed each other. Every Piegan asked a Snake into his lodge to eat and rest, and the Snake women put up their lodges beside the Piegan lodges. So the great peace was made.

In Owl Bear's lodge there was a great feast, and when they had finished he said to his people: "Here is the man whose scalp I took. Did I say I killed him? No. I gave him my knife and told him to kill me. He would not do it; and he gave me his knife, but I would not kill him. So we talked together what we should do, and now we have made peace. And now (turning to the Snake) this is your lodge, also all the things in it. My horses, too, I give you. All are yours."

So it was. The Piegan took the Snake's wife, lodge, and horses, and the Snake took the Piegan's, and they camped side by side. All the people camped together, and feasted each other and made presents. So the peace was made.

## V

For many days they camped side by side. The young men kept hunting, and the women were always busy drying meat and tanning robes and cowskins. Buffalo were always close, and after a while the people had all the meat and robes they could carry. Then, one day, the Snake chief said to Owl Bear: "Now, my friend, we have camped a long time together, and I am glad we have made peace. We have dug a hole in the ground, and in it we have put our anger and covered it up, so there is no more war between us. And now I think it time to go. To-morrow morning the Snakes break camp and go back south."

"Your words are good," replied Owl Bear. "I too am glad we have made this peace. You say you must go south, and I feel

lonesome. I would like you to go with us so we could camp together a long time, but as you say, so it shall be done. Tomorrow you will start south. I too shall break camp, for I would be lonesome here without you; and the Piegans will start in the home direction.”

The lodges were being taken down and packed. The men sat about the fireplaces, taking a last smoke together. They were now great friends. Many Snakes had married Piegan women, and many Piegans had married Snake women. At last all was ready. The great chiefs mounted their horses and started out, and soon both parties were strung out on the trail.

Some young men, however, stayed behind to gamble a while. It was yet early in the morning, and by riding fast it would not take them long to catch up with their camps. All day they kept playing; and sometimes the Piegans would win, and sometimes the Snakes.

It was now almost sunset. “Let us have one horse race,” they said, “and we will stop.” Each side had a good horse, and they ran their best; but they came in so close together it could not be told who won. The Snakes claimed that their horse won, and the Piegans would not allow it. So they got angry and began to quarrel, and pretty soon they began to fight and to shoot at each other, and some were killed.

Since that time the Snakes and Piegans have never been at peace.