



Why the Indians Whip the Buffalo-Berries from the Bushes

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Native AmericanNorth American

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The Indian believes that all things live again; that all were created by one and the same power; that nothing was created in vain; and that in the life beyond the grave he will know all things that he knew here. In that other world he expects to make his living easier, and not suffer from hunger or cold; therefore, all things that die must go to his heaven, in order that he may be supplied with the necessities of life.

The sun is not the Indian's God, but a personification of the Deity; His greatest manifestation; His light.

The Indian believes that to each of His creations God gave some peculiar power, and that the possessors of these special favors are His lieutenants and keepers of the several special attributes; such as wisdom, cunning, speed, and the knowledge of healing wounds. These wonderful gifts, he knew, were bestowed as favors by a common God, and therefore he revered these powers, and, without jealousy, paid tribute thereto.

The bear was great in war, because before the horse came, he would sometimes charge the camps and kill or wound many people. Although many arrows were sent into his huge carcass, he seldom died. Hence the Indian

was sure that the bear could heal his wounds. That the bear possessed a great knowledge of roots and berries, the Indian knew, for he often saw him digging the one and stripping the others from the bushes. The buffalo, the beaver, the wolf, and the eagle—each possessed strange powers that commanded the Indian's admiration and respect, as did many other things in creation.

If about to go to war, the Indian did not ask his God for aid—oh, no. He realized that God made his enemy, too; and that if He desired that enemy's destruction, it would be accomplished without man's aid. So the Indian sang his song to the bear, prayed to the bear, and thus invoked aid from a brute, and not his God, when he sought to destroy his fellows.

Whenever the Indian addressed the Great God, his prayer was for life, and life alone. He is the most religious man I have ever known, as well as the most superstitious; and there are stories dealing with his religious faith that are startling, indeed.

"It is the wrong time of year to talk about berries," said War Eagle, that night in the lodge, "but I shall tell you why your mothers whip the buffalo-berries from the bushes. OLD-man was the one who started it, and our people have followed his example ever since. Ho! OLD-man made a fool of himself that day.

"It was the time when buffalo-berries are red and ripe. All of the bushes along the rivers were loaded with them, and our people were about to gather what they needed, when OLD-man changed things, as far as the gathering was concerned.

"He was travelling along a river, and hungry, as he always was. Standing on the bank of that river, he saw great clusters of red, ripe buffalo-berries in the water. They were larger than any berries he had ever seen, and he said:

"I guess I will get those berries. They look fine, and I need them. Besides, some of the people will see them and get them, if I don't."

"He jumped into the water; looked for the berries; but they were not there. For a time Old-man stood in the river and looked for the berries, but they were gone.

"After a while he climbed out on the bank again, and when the water got smooth once more there were the berries—the same berries, in the same spot in the water.

“Ho!—that is a funny thing. I wonder where they hid that time. I must have those berries!’ he said to himself.

“In he went again—splashing the water like a Grizzly Bear. He looked about him and the berries were gone again. The water was rippling about him, but there were no berries at all. He felt on the bottom of the river but they were not there.

“Well,’ he said, ‘I will climb out and watch to see where they come from; then I shall grab them when I hit the water next time.’

“He did that; but he couldn’t tell where the berries came from. As soon as the water settled and became smooth—there were the berries—the same as before. Ho!—OLD-man was wild; he was angry, I tell you. And in he went flat on his stomach! He made an awful splash and mussed the water greatly; but there were no berries.

“I know what I shall do. I will stay right here and wait for those berries; that is what I shall do’; and he did.

“He thought maybe somebody was looking at him and would laugh, so he glanced along the bank. And there, right over the water, he saw the same bunch of berries on some tall bushes. Don’t you see? OLD-man saw the shadow of the berry-bunch; not the berries. He saw the red shadow-berries on the water; that was all, and he was such a fool he didn’t know they were not real.

“Well, now he was angry in truth. Now he was ready for war. He climbed out on the bank again and cut a club. Then he went at the buffalo-berry bushes and pounded them till all of the red berries fell upon the ground—till the branches were bare of berries.

“‘There,’ he said, ‘that’s what you get for making a fool of the man who made you. You shall be beaten every year as long as you live, to pay for what you have done; you and your children, too.’

“That is how it all came about, and that is why your mothers whip the buffalo-berry bushes and then pick the berries from the ground. Ho!”

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