PECULIAR INDIAN TRADITIONS.

THEIR BELIEF IN THE SUPERNATURAL—ALL SORTS OF SPIRITS THAT ROAM EVERYWHERE—SPIRITUAL MEDIUMS.

ONE who is familiar with Indian history cannot but be impressed with the universal belief that prevails among all the savage tribes of the existence of spirits that dwell everywhere, and roam throughout the domain of this material world; nor can he forget that they have an abiding faith in a future, which they term the “happy hunting ground.” They say that the “bridge of souls” leads from the earth, over dark and stormy waters, to the spirit land. The Indian deity is supposed to be invisible, yet everywhere present; he is an avenger and searcher of hearts. They also aver that the Indian has three souls, and that after death that which has done well goes to the warm country, that which has done evil goes to the cold region, and that the other guards the body. When a Dakota is sick he thinks the spirit of an enemy or some animal has entered into his body, and the principal business of the “medicine man” is to cast out the unclean spirit with incantations and charms. Nearly all the Dakotas believe in witches and witchcraft; and they hold that the “milky way” in the heavens is the pathway of the spirits; and also believe that over this pathway the spirits of the dead pass to the spirit land.

Unk-te-hee is the Great Spirit of all, who created the earth and man, and who formerly dwelt in a vast cav-
ern under the Falls of St. Anthony, which, they believed, were in the center of the earth, and from which a path led to the great beyond. This Deity sometimes reveals himself in the form of a huge buffalo bull. From him proceed invisible influences. Previous to forming the earth, he assembled in grand conclave, all the aquatic tribes, and ordered them to bring up dirt from beneath the waters, proclaiming death to the disobedient. The beaver and otter forfeited their lives. At last the muskrat went beneath the water, and, after a long time, appeared at the surface, nearly exhausted, with some dirt. From this Unk-te-hee fashioned the earth into a large circular plane. The earth being finished, he took a deity, one of his own offspring, and grinding him to powder, sprinkled it upon the earth, and this produced many worms. The worms were then collected and scattered again. They matured into infants, and these were then collected and scattered and became full-grown Dakotas.

Some hold to the theory that the evil or bad spirit is what is called a Thunder Bird, while others, that it is a great black spider, which inhabits fens and marshes, and lies in wait for his prey. At night he often lights a torch—evidently the jack-o-lantern—and swings it on the marshes to decoy the unwary into his toils. The Great Unk-te-hee and the Great Thunder Bird, or Great Spider, had a terrible battle to determine which should be the ruler of the world, but Unk-te-hee conquered.

Carver's cave was called by the Dakotas, "Wa-kan-Tepee"—sacred lodge. In his book of travels, Carver says: "It is a remarkable cave, of an amazing depth. The Indians term it 'Wakan tepee,' that is, the 'dwell-
ing of the Great Spirit.’ It is now the receptacle for lager beer.”

A beautiful belief is, that the stars are the spirits of their departed friends, and that meteors are messengers from the land of spirits, warning off impending danger; that the evening star is the Virgin Star, and is the spirit of the Virgin wrongfully accused at the feast.

The sun they consider the Father; so they believe the earth to be the mother of all life. The Indian swears by the Father as—“An-pe-tu-wee—hear me; this is true.” They also pray thus: “Wa-kan! Ate, on-she-ma-da! Sacred Spirit—Father! have mercy upon me!”

Toon-Kan, or Inyan, is the stone idol or god of the Dakotas. This god dwells in stone and in rock, and is, they say, the oldest god of all—grandfather of all living things. Some writers think, and with considerable reason, that the stone is merely the symbol of the everlasting, all pervading, invisible Ta-koo-wa-kan—the essence of all life—pervading all nature, animate and inanimate. Rev. Mr. Riggs, says:

“The religious faith of the Dakotas is not in his god as such. It is an intangible, mysterious something of which they are only the embodiment, and that in such measure and degree as may accord with the individual fancy of the worshiper. Each one will worship some of these divinities, or neglect, or despise others, but the great object of all their worship, whatever its chosen medium, is the Ta-koo Wa-kan, which is the supernatural and mysterious. It comprehends all mystery, secret power and divinity. Awe and reverence are its due, and it is as unlimited in manifestation as it is in ideas. All life is Wa-kan; so, also, is everything which
exhibits power, whether in action as the winds and drifting clouds, or in passive endurance, as the boulder by the wayside. For even the commonest stick and stones have a spiritual essence, which must be reverenced as a manifestation of the all-pervading, mysterious power that fills the universe.”

God, in the Dakota tongue is Wa-kan Tan-ka, which means, Big Spirit, or the Big Mysterious. The medicine men claim to be aided by unseen spirits, and hence are called—“men supernatural.” They assert they are the sons or disciples of Unk-te-hee. The sacred O-uzu-ha, or medicine sack, must be made of the skin of the otter, the coon, the weasel, the squirrel, a certain kind of fish, or the skin of serpents. It must contain four kinds of medicine (or magic), representing birds, beasts, herbs and trees, viz:—The down of the female swan, colored red, the roots of certain grasses, bark from the roots of cedar trees, and hair of the Buffalo. From this combination proceeds a Wa-kan influence, so powerful that no human being, unassisted, can resist it. Mr. Riggs says: “By great shrewdness, untiring in dustry, and more or less of actual demonical possession, they convince great numbers of their fellows, and, in the process are convinced themselves, of their sacred character and office.”

The Good or Great Spirit is called “Mi-cha-bo.” “In autumn, in the moon of the falling leaf, ere he composes himself for his winter’s sleep, he fills his great pipe and takes a god-like smoke. The balmy clouds from his pipe float over the hills and woodlands, filling the air with the haze of Indian summer.” The Jossakeeds are soothsayers, who are able, by the aid of spirits, to read the past as well as the future.
"Ka-be-bon-ik-ka" is the god of storms, thunder, lightning, etc. By his magic, the giant that lies on the mountain was turned to stone. He always gives warnings before he finally sends the severe cold of winter, in order that all creatures may have time to prepare for it. There are also water spirits, that dwell in caverns in the depths of the lake, and in some respects resemble the Unk-te-hee of the Dakota. This is a Chippewa spirit.

It is somewhat remarkable, that nearly every spiritual medium in this country and in Europe, claims that he or she is guided by an invisible Indian chief, and that the so-called human forms that are materialized in spiritual circles, are produced by Indian spirits. The reasons assigned for this are, that the Indian, being more closely allied to nature than to any other race, and believing in the spiritual theory, having never been hampered with religious bigotry, as are the whites, have less to overcome when they pass away, and have greater power to return at the option of their will. This idea I have woven into my Indian legend called "Min-ne-too-ka," and by perusing it the reader will get a very correct idea of the spiritual belief that pertains to all Indian tribes, no matter how savage their natures, or how domesticated their tastes.

Major James W. Lynd, in his MS. history of the Dakotas, in the Minnesota Historical Society, says:

"The belief in the powers of some of the Dakotas to call up and converse with the spirits of the dead, is strong, though not general. They frequently make feasts to their spirits and elicit information from them, of distant relatives or friends. Assembling at night in a lodge, they smoke, put out the fire, and then draw-
ing their blankets over their heads, remain singing in unison, in a low key, until the spirit gives them a picture. This they pretend the spirit does, and many a hair-erecting tale is told of spirits' power to reveal hidden things and to communicate unknown facts.

"In 1830 a war-party of Sioux went in search of the Chippewas, and those left at home became anxious for their return, when an old woman, ninety years of age, said she would consult the spirits; so a lodge was cleared, a small fire kindled, and the old woman entered, closing the door after her tightly. Seating herself she lighted the black pipe, and after smoking for a time, laid it aside, beat out the fire, and then drawing her blanket over her head, she commenced to sing in a low key, in anticipation of revelations from the spirits. Crowds of women and children, with a few old men, surrounded the lodge, awaiting anxiously for what should happen. Suddenly the old woman was heard to cry out as if in extreme terror, and hastily throwing open the door they found her lying upon the ground in a swoon. On coming to, she related that she had a terrible picture. Fourteen men rose up from the west, bloody and without their scalps, and thirteen rose up from the east with blood upon their forms, and were in the act of falling. This referred to the advanced body of the Sioux that had gone ahead. Four days after this revelation the Sioux came home with fourteen scalps, but with thirteen of their own party on biers, which confirmed the old woman's statement in every respect. 'Certain men also profess to have an unusual amount of the Wa-kan, or divine principle in them. By it they assume to work miracles, laying on of hands, curing the sick, etc., and many more wonder-
ful operations. Some of them pretend to recollect a former state of existence, even naming the particular body they formerly lived in. Others again, assert a power over nature, and their faculty of seeing into futurity and of conversing with the deities.”

The Arabs believe that when a man rises up from sleep in the morning, the spirit of God sits upon his right shoulder, and the Devil on his left. A Turi-Arab, therefore, on awaking, invariably repeats the exercising formula: “I seek refuge in God from Satan accursed with stones,” sprinkling himself, when possible, with water, as he utters the words. Without this precaution they believe the good spirit would take flight and the evil one would remain with them throughout the day. At sunset the same ceremony is repeated.

For some information contained in this article, outside of my own knowledge, I am indebted to H. L. Gordon, Revs. Riggs, Neil and Pond, all of whom are excellently well posted on Indian history, and are the very best authorities from whom I could quote as to the beliefs and peculiar traditions of the Indians of the Northwest.

An old soldier, whose name I cannot obtain, gives to the press some interesting information that was conveyed to him by the celebrated Indian Missionary, Father De Smet, who for years mingled with the Indians on the Missouri river, and who was among the very first in the country to discover gold in the Black Hills—after whom the celebrated Father De Smet mine was named—but who studiously kept his discovery a secret, fearing that, if known, it would demoralize the Indians. The old officer and the good father sat down together on the banks of the muddy Missouri,
on a moonlight night, in 1870, and from some of the experiences of his thirty-five years of missionary life, he gave the following:

"I have heard a great many traditions among the Indians from their own mouths, speaking and understanding, as I do, many of their languages. Some of these traditions are very poetical, and suggestive of chapters in the Scriptures. The Indians all believe in spirits, good and evil, who again are subordinate to the one Great Spirit. When the young man becomes about sixteen years of age, he is placed under penance. That is, he is put by himself, generally in the woods, and is obliged to fast as long as his constitution can stand it. Some of these aspirants for future fame go without eating for seven or eight days. They do nothing during this time but sleep and dream. Toward the end, when they become feverish, they speak aloud in their dreams. The aged parents then listen, and if the young man, among his wandering words, mentions any particular plant, tree, bird, or animal, the name of such plant, tree, bird, or animal will be that of his particular spirit all through life. This name will be given to him after some appropriate adjectives have been added thereto. He will wear something suggestive of it about his person, and it is firmly believed by him that this special spirit will assist him in battle, and in hunting excursions, and that he will stand between him and danger.

"All the Indians believe, in their own crude way, of a future. Their idea of the hereafter is that when one of them dies he is piloted by his own individual spirit, toward an immense island, which, far off to the west, rises into a high mountain, reaching into the clouds,
and upon the summit of which sits the Supreme Spirit. From this point of observation the Great Spirit overlooks the universe. Here He puts the sun to bed every night and sends out his moon and his stars, and hence he launches forth when angry his thunder and his lightning. On the island are the most beautiful rivers filled with fish, and the woods are alive with buffalo, and other desirable game. But it is not every departed brave who is permitted to enter this Garden of Eden. To reach the same the Indian has to cross a very wide and rapid stream by means of a dead tree lying across the same. In the middle of the stream and a few feet from the natural bridge, just beyond the reach of the wanderer, hangs a grape-vine, with clusters of ripe grapes. A good and brave Indian will cross the log without reaching for the grapes, for he is strong-hearted and needs no refreshments to help him along in his journey, but the faint-hearted, cowardly, lazy and bad Indian will go upon the log frightened and tired out; he will grasp for the grapes, fall into the torrent and be carried to a marshy place, where there are neither fish nor game, save a few coyotes and frogs.

"The origin of the human race some of them explain as follows: The Great Spirit first created a little boy who was upon the earth all alone for many years, but the boy felt lonesome, became melancholy and began crying until he fell asleep. The spirit then sent to him a little girl and she was called his sister and they lived as such together for many years. After the little girl grew up to be a woman she fell asleep one day and had a dream—that five men came to her hut and knocked for admittance, but that she took no notice of them, or opened the door to any of them except the last caller,
After awakening, the girl thought constantly of this dream, and, strange enough, in the course of time five men came to her cabin and asked her to go with them, but she refused all but the fifth and last one, who became her husband. They had at first but three children, one was called the Good Spirit and intercessor with the Great Spirit and the special friend of the Indian race; the second was called the Spirit of Fire and destruction and the great enemy of the white race; the third was called the White Rabbit, and ran away as soon as it was born. Upon the ascendancy of the white race, the first one fled, the second is now with them in their wars, and renders them brave; and the third occasionally appears and makes them fleet in their hunts. They are now awaiting the return of the first spirit. When he comes he will right the wrongs of his people and they will conquer all their enemies.”