

Museo Tanks

Riwa Bb

Crow

THE CROW INDIANS

--Robert H. Lowie

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Yet in both cases the human spirit rises superior to the urge of self-preservation. Among On-top-of-the-bull's comrades is his own younger brother. When this lad has gone a little ways, he bursts out crying: "If I leave my brother while he is still alive, I'll never forget that. I will not go, I'll stay with him." Nor is this all. When the party gets home, On-top-of-the-bull's sweetheart learns of his plight and decides to rescue him. One of the warriors tells her the route, but with scant encouragement: "If you don't freeze and are not killed, you can get to him." She steals away with provisions, crosses river after river on the ice, finds her lover, and brings him her food. Yet another trial awaits her. The brother sights a hostile party advancing toward them, and the older man bids his mistress conceal herself. She answers: "I have come a long way to see you and shall die with you now." By a lucky chance the enemy turns in another direction, and the rescue is consummated. The historical parallel holds similar acts of devotion. When Young-cottontail's mates have gone a certain distance, they turn back crying and offer to take him along. A second time he bids them leave him and save themselves. When they return, the youth's father finds out all about his whereabouts and at once starts out with a rescuing party. "How is he getting on, I wonder? Is he still alive?" he said and went off crying. They reach the hero and bring him back in safety.

Tales like these explain what social bonds mean where there is no paternalistic State to guard its wards. The single human being is a mere worm at the mercy of the elements. A man may be a champion marksman, but when there is no game to shoot he falls back on the pemmican his wife has stored against that very emergency; and even in the chase he is most efficient when he hunts in company. His robes and leggings are the work of his wives or kinswomen; his very arrows are not of his own making but the handiwork of skilled craftsmen. If he seeks renown, what are his chances as a lonely raider? Even a well-organized party was likely to be cut to pieces or be hard put to it when fleeing from superior numbers. Crisis lowered on every side, and it meant everything to be able to face life not alone but with a comrade, shielded by one's family and clan, in the bosom of one's club. That is why the kinless man was an outcast and byword of shame, the target for the brutality of sadistic tribesmen, forced to throw himself on the mercy of benign supernaturals.

Yet here is a curious fact. Battered by natural forces and surrounded by enemies, the Crow managed to wrest from existence his portion of happiness. Ask an Indian of the old school whether he prefers modern security to the days of his youth: he will brush aside all recent advantages for a whiff of the buffalo-hunting days. If there was starvation then, there were buffalo tongues, too,--supreme among earthly dishes; if you were likely to be killed, you had a chance to gain glory. What is a Crow to look forward to nowadays? Shall he enter unequal competition with the white farmers? And his sister aspire to wash the laundry of