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INDIANS AS "NATURE'S GENTLEMEN".

The Indians do not belong to one tribe alone, but there were many tribes, living in communities, each tribe having its own language and customs. Some of them were divided into clans which trace back their descent from a common ancestor. Men and women of the same clan did not marry and were not allowed to marry. They are very industrious people, have reddish colored skin and straight black hair. Most of them were fast runners and walked with an easy swinging motion and were active.

Their character was like that of many other people. Some of them were cheerful and friendly and enjoyed and loved to joke while others were serious and distant. It has been said by some persons that the Indians look mean and treacherous but they are not. The story that is charged against them as such is not true. The Indians would do anything for their friends but if mistreated once or betrayed, nothing was too bad for their enemies.

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Being used to Nature and living mostly out in the open the Indians were great imitators, and possessed a nice tact in adopting the manners of those with whom they associated. An Indian is Nature's gentleman-never familiar, not a mixer among the crowd where he maybe, nor a user of vulgar word. The only time when an Indian uses bad language is when he is angry and never in an ordinary conversation, and in using profane language he has to borrow such words from the English language. If invited to take meal with you an Indian quietly waits to see you make use of the unaccustomed implements on the table and the manner in which you eat; he never attempts to help himself or demand more food but patiently waits until you perceive what he requires. This politeness is natural to all Indians. The mixed blood or the partly white Indian may be said to add a little to the physical beauty of the full blood yet has produced a deplorable falling off from the original integrity of the Indian character. The half-breeds mingle with the whites more than the fullbloods and retain that peculiar characteristic of the Indian which is to believe in all professions of friendship until proved false, then never again to be trusted. Neither is the Choctaw ever so selfish as to smoke alone in

the presence of others. Usually at a social gathering where seated on the ground in groups forming a circle, a Choctaw would fill his pipe with twisted home-grown tobacco, light the pipe, after a few puffs would pass it to the next man and so continue until the talk was ended. The women did not indulge in any use of tobacco in any form except a few in advanced years. It was regarded as a great breach of female decorum for a Choctaw woman to use the weed for smoking or to chew tobacco.

At a business meeting, social conversation or debate in council, there never was but one Choctaw who spoke at a time and under no circumstances was he interrupted. This characteristic belonged to all of the Choctaw Indians and can be proven at any Choctaw meeting. This is the same in their way of holding religious business meeting. In the public councils of the Choctaws, as well as in social gatherings or religious meetings, the utmost decorum always prevailed and he, who was talking in social circle or addressing the council or lecturing in the religious meeting, always had as silent and attentive hearers as ever delighted and blessed a speaker.

When the Choctaws are camping out in the woods for a hunt, they would go in a group in a wagon, and after pitching their

camp each generally hunted alone and on foot; and when a Choctaw killed his game unless it was small, he left it where it had fallen, and turning his footsteps homeward, traveled in a straight line here and there breaking a twig or limb leaving its top in the direction he had come, as a guide to his wife whom he intended to send to bring the game home. As soon as the wife was informed of the hunter's success, she mounted a pony and started in the direction as told her. Guided by the broken twigs and limbs which directed her she soon arrived at the spot, picked up and fastened the game to the saddle, mounted her pony and was at home again.

As a marksman a Choctaw cannot be surpassed in the use of a rifle. It mattered not whether the game is standing or running he takes his time in shooting, but a bullet shot from his rifle when directed by his experienced eye was a sure messenger of death. A shotgun was regarded with great contempt and never used and a rifle alone was his choice. To surprise a Choctaw hunter or warrior in the woods to see him before he saw you was a feat not easily accomplished. His watchful and practiced eye was always on the alert, whether he was standing, running, walking or sitting. His acute ear, attentive to every passing sound, heard the most

feeble noise, while to the white man's ear there was utter silence.

A white man once owned a double-barrel shotgun which he proposed to exchange with a Choctaw Indian for his rifle, but he refused; and when he was asked why he objected his reply was "Him push". He did not fancy the reaction or kicking as often experienced in shooting the shotgun.

Austin Thompson is a full blood Choctaw and an itinerant preacher.