

In all their dying processes the Hurons avoid bringing iron into contact with their materials, and use vessels of polished copper.

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*Sketches of the TETE DE BOULE INDIANS,  
River St. Maurice, by J. ADAMS, Esq.*

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ANY information relating to the primitive manners and pursuits of the aborigines of this country, which are now fast giving way before the strides of civilization, must in some degree be interesting to the society which I have the honor of addressing; and however incomplete and partial those notices, which the brief opportunities of a very hurried progress through the tract to be spoken of, alone permitted me to make, particularly as another and paramount duty necessarily occupied nearly the whole of my attention.— Still, I consider that in some degree, the few scanty facts, which chance or enquiry threw before me, will not prove unacceptable; especially as the race to which they apply is now nearly extinct, as a nation, and what yet remains of their habits, is fast fading away into that obscurity which has excluded the histories of many early people from the book of record, and thereby deprived philosophy of the means of tracing the moral progress of man from his savage infancy, through the periods of improvement, maturity and decline, to the last melancholy state of consummated social decay.

Such, in so far as relates to the earliest portion of their history, has been the fate of Greece and Rome, not to ascend

to the remoter eras of African and Asiatic national infancy, or even to the meridian splendor of many of their empires. The efforts of gigantic learning have been foiled in attempts to tear away the veil of concealment from the picture of the early times of even these comparatively modern states; and in lieu of a well defined though distant view of what they were, and how they had risen gradually from barbarism to perfection, it is altogether confused or lost; and our earliest historical records place them before us in a situation elevated far above primæval habits:—barbarous and rude, it is true, in their customs, but builders of ships and of palaces; skilful fabricators of steel and of clothing, and organized, at the time of our first acquaintance with them, into monarchies and political combinations much advanced beyond what we can imagine to have been then, as is now, the condition of primitive natural man.

What an interesting relique would it not have been to after ages, had some traveller—some eastern Strabo or Herodotus visited Greece or Italy ere they had emerged from a state of savage life; observed closely their customs; gathered their religious or historical legends, and disclosed them to the world in the Hebrew language. What light would not such a single work have thrown upon the naked outline of their splendid mythology; and what volumes of condensed laborious research and conjecture have been spared by the bare recital of perhaps a dozen facts, upon which were subsequently heaped the gorgeous apparel and imagery of immortal poetry—delighting and dazzling the mind, it is true, with fine imaginings, but at the same time hindering, or distracting it from the less pleasing contemplation of plain unornamented historic reality.

But, it may be enquired, would the advantage derivable

from such an acquaintance with truth have been commensurate with the gratification afforded by the perusal of the sublime poetical perversion in part founded on it; or of the yet more enticing aberrations of eloquent historians, glad to make it the vehicle of more imposing, because less suspected, naratives? I should answer *yes*;—and if called upon to substantiate the assertion, point out as an example, the historical dramas of Shakspeare; which, however known to the critic to be *false history*, possess not the less influence over his imagination, even in the closet. The interest excited in the mind by the desire of learning plain truth, and that caused by the semi-transparent fictions of fine poetry, grounded on reality, are different passions congenial with the same mind. Nor, to illustrate the sentiment by a remark somewhat bearing upon our subject, do we less admire the fine poetical draught of Indian character developed in “The last of the Mohicans,” because we may have closely seen, in some of our excursions, the real native savage in his homely, dirty blauket garb, and perhaps at a time when labouring under the effects of the least poetical of his customary inclinations.

Passing immediately to our subject, the nation of the Tête de Boule Indians, inhabiting the country around the upper part of the River St. Maurice, and concentrating towards Wemontachinque, as the mart for their hunting produce, is that on which these observations are principally intended to be made. These people, once a formidable race, are now reduced by small-pox, and more especially by the baneful effects of rum, to a miserable remnant of some twenty or twenty-five families, spread over an extent of country, measuring probably seven or eight hundred square leagues, and considering all this great tract as their own lawful

hunting ground; the lakes and rivers intersecting which, are portioned out amongst them, partly by the exertion of their own individual strength, and partly by a kind of feudal grantage from those of their own tribe, in whom they acknowledge some undefinable superiority. This latter at least I suppose, as a young Indian who, at one time, accompanied the St. Maurice exploring expedition as a guide, seemed desirous of obtaining an allotment of hunting ground for himself, and informed the party that it was a necessary preliminary to secure the permission of some chief, who he named, as a paramount Lord of the soil. I believe this young man himself was not a Tête de Boule, but the same custom prevails among the Indians of that nation.

Whatever rank they may formerly have held as a tribe of hunters and warriors, the Tête de Boules of the present day exhibit a melancholy portraiture of degraded human nature. Slaves of the fur traders, by the expenses incidental to their acquired taste for ardent spirits, they are seldom so independent as to be able to carry their furs to other markets than the neighboring posts; and indeed, are generally so much in debt for clothing, arms, ammunition, and provision, independently of rum, to both companies, where there is an opposition between the Hudson's Bay and King's Post agents, that each of these companies have their parties of people constantly engaged running about in small, light birch canoes, searching for Indian encampments, and taking from them whatever *peltries* they find them in possession of, giving them, in return, some rude token or tally, well understood by both parties as a receipt for the value; nor does it appear that the Indians often make opposition to this rather arbitrary method of trading,

I was even informed that should these *engagés* of the fur companies, find parcels of furs at an encampment when the owners are absent, they will seldom scruple to take them, and leave a tally for the amount, indicating to which of the posts they are indebted for the kindness of saving them the trouble of carrying their own goods to market. The men employed to visit the Indians in this manner are always Canadians, or half-breeds, and mostly daring fellows and skilful *voyageurs*; they are known by the (*patois*) appellation of Gens Derrouine, and they always put me in mind of bees returning to their hives, or posts, laden with plunder, and ready for another excursion, as soon as they have safely deposited the treasure with which they were laden.

From the personally distinctive title bestowed upon this race, I had expected to see their heads very remarkably shaped.—This is not the case. I do, indeed, acknowledge that the<sup>d</sup> prominent parts of their cheek bones are somewhat more broadly apart than usual, but by no means so conspicuously as to authorize the peculiar nick-name by which they are distinguished. The young people are generally good looking; and a family of children which we met with were, I believe, unanimously considered by the party, to have fine intelligent countenances. Nor did advanced age seem to destroy their claim to general appearance. We saw men and women of twenty, forty, sixty, ninety, and one hundred and ten years, and to the best of my judgment, as personable at those respective ages, as other classes of Indians, at least such as it has been my chance to fall in with. I cannot help quarrelling with this ridiculous title of *Tête de Boule*, as in the first place, it led me astray, in supposing that I was about to

behold a set of people with heads as round as pumpkins, and because, if intended originally as a caricature, its merit is very mean, from its failure in off-hand resemblance to reality.

It is difficult to say what are the distinguishing moral traits which separate the Tête de Boule tribe from other Canadian Indians, and create them a peculiar race from natural habits. So much has, and so ever will, an intercourse with white traders tend to annihilate or deface the delicate differences of Indian caste, only to be discerned where

“ Man, a NOBLE Savage, walks the woods.”

The general impression made upon my mind from accounts of the most apparently uninfluenced and natural actions of the Têtes de Boule was unfavourable. Manifold instances of rapine, treachery and murder in their social intercourse were related to us with stoical indifference by our guides and other informants, who only seemed astonished that we should expect to hear any thing better of a race of people, which they themselves so much despise and look down upon. The actions to which I allude were such as were performed amongst themselves (of which I mean to relate two or three in the sequel,) and may therefore be considered, as rather more accurate tracings of their native savage character, than excesses occasioned by immediate drunkenness, or conflicts between them and the emissaries of trading posts may be supposed to exhibit. But few redeeming traits were made known to us, nor can I call to mind more than one instance which was calculated to convey an impression of Indian single heartedness or untutored kindness such as we often meet with in Hearne and in the books of other travellers, who have described the more distatn

and more independent tribes of savages : that one shall be mentioned in its proper place.

Their religion is a Paganism, the leading features of which I did not learn ; neither from the ignorance or indifference of our guide on such matters, could I ascertain whether they have any idea of a future state. The good and bad spirit, and probably a plurality of each, they acknowledge in common with other Indians. Superstitious, they undoubtedly are, for beside the graves of their dead, which are very neatly enclosed by walls and covers of birch bark, we always found, independently of the representation of their weapons (if a chief) sword, spear, bow, arrows, &c. a parcel of firewood lying, ready for the use of the occupant could he require it. Of another kind of superstition, we also witnessed some amusing specimens developed before us by Robert M'Vicar, Esq. a partner of the Hudson's Bay company, at his post of Wemontachinque. This gentleman (the friend of Captain Franklin,) besides a very long experience of Indian habits in the N.W. country possesses the advantage of considerable dexterity in slight of hand performances ; and has established his fame as a great conjurer in the minds of these poor savages. The manner in which he one evening worked upon the feelings of two women and a boy, by some displays of this kind, and the absolute command he apparently possessed over their faculties from superstitious awe of his power, though it made us smile, yet I believe affected every one of us at the same time with pity approaching to sadness, that the human mind should even any where be found so prostrated as to be duped by such flimsy deceptions.

But these poor Indians themselves are possessed of no mean talent as masqueraders, of which I will relate an

instance. One evening while residing at the same post, the party were intruded upon by two of the most frightfully distorted and disgusting figures I have ever seen, in the persons of two old men—lame, hump-backed, blackened with gun-powder, and with white teeth protruding from the upper jaw downwards, at least two inches; they were represented to us as idiots and brothers, and seated themselves in the room, making violent gestures, expressive of anger or impatience, and at intervals furiously striking the floor with their paddles. Having been previously prepared to expect a singular arrival at the post on that evening, and the agents of the conspiracy against our discernment having well performed their parts, two of us were deceived, Mr. Ingall alone being sceptical. I myself doubted them at first, but in the end I confess myself to have been taken in by their inimitable acting, as on one of the servants of the post pretending great alarm after they had retired into the next room, and running into ours', apparently for protection, I seriously asked him whether he was so cowardly as to be afraid of such poor decrepid creatures. These two worthies were handsome lads, the eldest not more than seventeen, and sons of an old Canadian hunter, named Flamand, by his wife, a Tête de Boule woman.—The teeth they had cut out of wood, and so fixed them as to resemble the long, curved upper cutting teeth of a beaver. Never was deception more admirably managed.

The Têtes de Boule Indians are very dirty in their domestic habits, and in respect to their cookery, I shall not easily forget peeping into one of their kettles, and observing a large pike, so nearly done, that the bowels and bladder had forced their way through the body; but this mode of boiling fish is, I believe, not particularly



confined to their tribe. I saw no specimens of fine Indian work done by the women; their moccasins and clothing were quite unornamented; nor did I notice any of those fine dyes or extracts which have been brought to so much perfection amongst other Indians. The needle work of the *squaws* is, however, strong and good, and a blanket coat, which was made for me by one of them, is by no means devoid of neat taste, in the ornamental blue seaming which she thought proper to introduce. The materials of their own clothing are always obtained at the posts, and are made up by them in a plain but not unbecoming fashion. I saw only one display of extra finery, and that was on the person of a lady about forty. She was the wife or daughter, (I forget which) of an old chief named Majeshk, and on paying us an introductory visit at one of the lakes, came enveloped in a dashing green table cover, with yellow centre and edges. But alas! on returning this visit rather unexpectedly, we found this laid aside, and the same personage wrapped up in one of the filthiest blankets it has been my lot to behold, even on Tête de Boule shoulders.

It would be unjust to omit mentioning here, that, from the family just spoken of, (the only one we met with "at home," as it were,) the party experienced great hospitality. Thrice they made us acceptable presents of fine fish, sufficient, on two occasions, for all the people; and as they knew we had no rum, the first article they enquired after on visiting us, I am happy in believing that these supplies were given to us from a motive of disinterested kindness, which we repaid to the best of our ability. This is what I alluded to a page or two back.

It now remains for me to endeavour to sketch the characters of two remarkable chiefs, one of whom alone we

met with. The other, a very extraordinary man, who seems to stand distinguished from all his tribe, we only heard of through the medium of our guide, who had long known him personally.

Old Majeshk, the first of these chiefs, is supposed to have reached the age of one hundred and ten ; he is nearly blind, but otherwise in the possession of his faculties, and still paddles in the bow of his canoe. He has been a tall strong-built man, but is now considerably bent, and appears to walk feebly, although this may be merely a natural hesitation, occasioned by the defect of his eyes. Of this man we had heard much while ascending the River St. Maurice, and even that he was a cannibal ; this last, however, the same guide afterwards recanted, asserting that we had not understood him, but repeating that he had at different times destroyed several Canadian hunters. This chief, in his prime, was an ambitious and successful warrior. By his personal enterprize and bravery, he conquered all the Indians who had settled on the parts comprehended between the aux Lievres lakes and the Lake Shosawatasi, an extent from west to east, of about seventy miles, and at a time when the numbers of the Tête de Boule nation were much more respectable than they are at present. It is impossible to ascertain how many he destroyed in these invasions, but tradition makes the loss of lives very serious. All these lakes and waters he has since kept firm possession of, portioning off parcels of them at different times to the members of his family, as they grew old enough to hunt for themselves : but it appears that he has never been disturbed by an enemy invading his acquired dominion.— We endeavoured to fix his real age, but for want of numerical calculation among these people, our nearest approach

to accuracy was learning that he remembered the English conquest, and that he had then been some years a married man. Indian tradition gives him about one hundred and ten years, as before remarked, and his appearance does not disprove the estimate. He now lives on the borders of Lake Mangemagooz, and is taken care of by his daughter and son-in-law, and by a wife about forty years of age, to whom the old gentleman was, as we learned, wedded about twelve months before we met with him. A fine boy, of about seven, we were informed was his son by a former wife; but we observed no appearance of any farther probable increase to his establishment.

The other chief of whom I have to speak, is a much more extraordinary person, and the accounts which we were continually listening to, had greatly excited our curiosity to see him, in which expectation, as I before noticed, we were disappointed, but have since had good reason to believe that he was not unobservant of *our* motions. This man's name (almost Italian) is Menessino, and he is son to old Majeshk. His usual residence is on the shores of Lake Kempt, the largest expanse we discovered, and almost a water labyrinth, from the extraordinary shapes of its deep bays, its narrow straits, and numerous large islands. Here lives Menessino, with his wives and children, in solitude, for he is a murderer proscribed by the law, and seldom ventures to leave his haunts to visit the post of Wemontachingue. At one time he was pursued and secured, by an officer sent up purposely from Three Rivers, and who was conveying him down the St. Maurice for trial, when, at La Tuque (I believe), on that river, he seized an opportunity, although handcuffed, of plunging in below the rapid, and swam over to the other side in

safety, leaving the constable only able to wonder at his escape; as the canoe had not been brought over the portage, and he in consequence could not pursue him, Menessino easily found his way back to his lakes.

In person, he is described as a tall, active, athletic man, with an expression of countenance not displeasing, but even indicative of mildness and quietude. Under this calm exterior is, however, concealed a disposition to cruelty and violent passions, which renders him fearful to all when excited by anger or jealousy. Our guide's rude draught of him, reminded me somewhat of Byron's Corsair, dark and dangerous. Two wives have died by his hand; the grave of one we visited on the shores of Lake Kempt—he killed her in a paroxysm of anger, by cleaving her head with an axe. The manner in which he destroyed the other I do not remember. Strange to relate, the place where he has chosen to bury the first unfortunate woman, seems to be a favorite spot of the murderer, for there we found his bath and summer cabin, which the guide told us he is accustomed to inhabit. On the same spot are also two other graves, one filled by his own mother, who was murdered on a sand-beach of Lake Malawin, by the hands of Menessino's daughter, her own grand-child. Our guide was present when this unnatural murder was perpetrated. He and another were crossing Lake Malawin, on a "derrouine" excursion, when observing two women fighting on the sand, they approached in their canoe, and found they were the mother and daughter of Menessino, who himself was seated by coolly looking on and smoking.—The Canadians expressed a desire to separate them, but Menessino forbade them, and said "let the women fight." The next minute, our guide saw the young girl get the

head of her antagonist under her arm, and twist it round, when the old woman fell dead. Her body was then conveyed more than forty miles by Menessino to the burial place which we visited. The remaining grave there found is that of a child who died naturally. Nothing can surpass the neatness and care with which these graves are covered and defended from the attacks of wild beasts.

Another striking characteristic of this Indian, is, that he never, like others, was in the habit of intoxicating himself at the posts with ardent spirits. Whatever he required he took with him to his lakes. Among his other peculiar whims, Menessino at one time insisted on having a wooden boarded real house, built for him by the Hudson's Bay Company, on a point of Lake Kempt, under penalty of carrying his furs elsewhere; and this was actually done, all the timbers, &c. being conveyed from Wemontachingue, if I remember rightly. This building we had a great desire to see, but the guide pretended that he could not find it while in Lake Kempt, though he said he had several times been at it, and really had so. Since our return to Quebec, this mystery has been cleared up by M. Vassal, of the K. P. C. who arrived after us. He said at once that the guide *must* have known the spot, and was probably afraid of offending Menessino by discovering to us his retreat, as from our description we must have dined on, or very near the point where the house is standing, some way back among the trees. Here, then, is another proof of the reverential awe which this chief has spread around him.—Why the fur traders have so long refrained from securing and delivering him up to justice, I know not—it may be no concern of theirs', and Menessino is the best hunter of all the tribe of Tête de Boules. On one occasion two

Canadians undertook to seize and carry off Menessino from his lake. They tracked him into one of its deep bays, which we were shown, and whence they concluded he could not escape. Menessino was, however, aware of their intention; he left his canoe, and stealing along among the trees, the wary Indian took deliberate aim at the men, as they were cautiously passing, and killed either one or both on the spot; at all events, neither returned from the lake, if my memory is correct.

But it is now time for me to leave this extraordinary character and indeed to close this paper. I will, however add, that for several years no communication has existed between this lone man and old Majeshk, his father. He had some years ago a half brother, whose grave we visited on Lake Nemicachingue, a murderer also, whose catalogue of crime exceeds in horror even that of Menessino, and who himself was at length destroyed by another Indian, whose wife he had repeatedly endeavoured to carry off, and three times attempted to murder the husband.— In the last of these encounters (a dreadful one) Menessino's brother was at last killed by a blow from the axe of his enemy, and the ruffian lies buried on the very spot where, seven years before, he had shot a Canadian woman in cool blood, and afterwards dashed out the brains of a poor child on a rock hard by, who had witnessed the deed; the little fellow lies buried very near the grave of his brutal murderer. Fear of Menessino obliged the Indian who, in self defence, had killed his brother, to leave that part of the country, and he has ever since remained an *engagé* at Lac du Sable post, whither the other has never thought fit to follow him.

Such are some of the lawless acts that have been perpetrated in that wild region, where human life seems scarcely