

NOTES ON CERTAIN BELIEFS CONCERNING
WILL POWER AMONG THE SIOUAN
TRIBES.

WILHELM VON HUMBOLDT, in his memoir upon 'The American Verb,' in summing up the results of his profound study, makes the following statement (I quote from the translation of Dr. Daniel G. Brinton): "The leading and governing part of speech in them [the American languages under consideration] is the Pronoun; every subject of discourse is connected with the idea of Personality."

The Siouan linguistic group was not included in the number of languages concerning which the learned author made this statement, but, as the group presents no evidence to controvert his general conclusion, it may be considered as forming no exception to this characteristic of the American tongues.

It is not the purpose of this brief paper to discuss linguistic questions, but to call your attention to certain words, customs and ceremonies in which we seem to trace the operation of that psychic peculiarity which has left so marked an impress upon the languages of the American people—the dominance of 'the idea of Personality.'

In considering the emblematic use of the tree in the Dakotan group, the Siouan Indian's anthropomorphic conception of nature was pointed out, and the fundamental reason of this conception was indicated as lying in his predicating of the permeating life of the universe, that peculiar quality or power of which he as a man was conscious within himself, to wit, the power by which he directed his own acts, or willed a course by which to bring about certain results. This quality or power he may be said to have deified under the term *Wakan-da* (using the Omaha and Ponka tongue), the hidden and mysterious power which brings to pass.

The name of that by which a man thinks,

feels and wills, is called in the Omaha language *Wa-zhin'*. A glance at some of the terms in which *Wa-zhin'* is used will illustrate the mental conception of which the word is an expression.

Wi'-e-wa-zhin' means, to do a thing of one's own accord, of one's free will, unbiased or uninfluenced by another. (*Wi*, I; *e*, the sign of objective; *wa-zhin'*, directive energy or will power.)

When the Omaha first saw a railroad train, and watched it moving along without any visible aid from man or animal, they gave it the name which it bears in their language to-day, *E'-wa-zhin-non-ge*, literally translated, "it of its own accord runs." (*E*, it; *wa-zhin'*, will power; *non-ge*, runs.) The childlike simplicity of this descriptive term throws light upon the meaning of *wa-zhin'*, and helps us to understand other words whereof it forms a part.

Anger is called *Wa-zhin'-pi-a-zhi*. *Pi-a-zhi* signifies bad, evil. *Wa-zhin'-pi-a-zhi* indicates that in anger the will power of the man is charged with evil, and he becomes dangerous to himself and to others.

A very different condition of mind is represented by the Word *Wa-zhin'-tha-be*, which denotes kindness, and also hospitality. *Tha-be'* is to be guarded, circumspect in one's words and acts; so we learn that the idea of kindness is to use one's will power to guard one's speech and conduct, so as not to injure any one. In the employment of this word to express the idea of hospitality we discern the broadening of the social feeling through the growth of the higher sentiments.

Wa-zhin'-thne-de, the word for patience, presents another aspect of the idea of self-control. *Thne-de* means long. To be patient, therefore, demands that the energy of the Ego shall be held for a length of time to a given course.

Examples could be multiplied showing the use of *wa-zhin'* in compounding words,

but I will mention only three more instances—three words which are used in connection with certain rites and customs, where, while they serve to explain the ceremonies, the ceremonies themselves throw light upon the psychic phenomena which the words are intended to portray. These three words are, *Wa-zhin'-dhe-dhe*, *Wa-zhin'-a-gdhe* and *Wa-zhin'-ska*.

There is hardly an equivalent in English for the word *Wa-zhin'-dhe-dhe*, unless it is 'telepathy.' *Dhe'-dhe* is to send, and the word *wa-zhin'-dhe-dhe* signifies to send forth one's thought and will power toward another in order to supplement his strength and thereby to affect his action. For instance, when a race is taking place, a man may bend his thought and his will upon one of the contestants, a friend or relative, in the belief that this act of his, this 'sending his mind,' will help his friend to win. Again, among the Omahas, when a man is on the war path, a group of women often of the poorer class, will gather at the tent of the absent warrior, and sing certain songs, called *We-ton-wa-an*. These songs are the medium by which strength is conveyed to the man facing danger; the act is *Wa-zhin'-dhe-dhe*. The words of these songs do not reveal the purpose for which they are sung; they sometimes refer to the difficult task that confronts the warrior, or they predict the bravery of the absent man when he shall meet the enemy, but the omission of any reference in them to the specific act of which the songs are a part is in keeping with the Indian's habit never to dilate upon that which is to him apparent. The family of the absent warrior, to whose tent the women have come to sing these *We-ton-wa-an*, know what the songs are for, and so do all the people within reach of the sound of them. These songs, used solely for the purpose of *Wa-zhin'-dhe-dhe*, are well known and form a class by them-

selves, and the belief in their power is unquestioned.

Other tribes in the Siouan group have similar methods to effect the same purpose, all bearing witness to the common belief among these Indians that will power can be projected to produce definite results.

Although a literal translation of *Wa-zhin'-a-gdhe* (*a'-ghde*, to place upon) might seem at the first glance to indicate that the word had the same meaning as *Wa-zhin'-dhe-dhe* (which, as we have just seen, is to send will power), the word really presents a very different phase of the belief we are considering. *Wa-zhin'-a-gdhe* is the will power placed upon, that is the full consequence of a certain line of conduct are willed to fall upon the person who, of his own accord, has determined on that line of conduct. In ordinary speech the word is used when one abandons another to the natural outcome of unwise behavior, and ceases all efforts to arrest the consequent disastrous results.

This word is used to define a rite peculiar to the *Han'-he-wa-chi*. *Han'-he-wa-chi* means literally, 'in the night dance,' but the word refers to the dream or vision of the members. The *Han'-he-wa-chi* is a society composed of men who have achieved the right to put the Mark of Honor on a maiden. To do this, a man must be able to count one hundred or more deeds called *Wa-dhin'-e-dhe*. When an Omaha reached that point he could look back over years of patient effort, of self-denial and dangers overcome; so long a time did it require for a man to arrive at this Honor that its acquisition was esteemed equal to the receiving of a vision. It was argued that the man must have had supernatural favor granted him or he could not have finally accomplished his purpose. This society was therefore regarded as composed of men possessing great power of mind and will, and they were accordingly looked up to in

the tribe. Each member had his own song or songs, and when they met together a part of the ceremony observed by them was the singing of these songs. If at such a time they fixed their minds upon a certain person whose conduct was displeasing to them they thus, by the act of *Wa-zhin'-ag-dhe*, placed upon the offender the consequences of his acts, so that misfortune would befall him, and even death. It will be noted that this act of the society implied the exertion of a will power by its members which it was believed could isolate the object of their thought—their victim, we may say—and this isolation was effected in some way by thrusting him out of all helpful relations with men and animals, and in the end causing him to die.

Time forbids dwelling upon this curious and interesting belief, or noting the cumulative influence it exerted upon the individual, and upon the social conditions of the community that entertained it; all that can be pointed out at this time is the fact that such a belief was genuinely accepted by these Indians.

Wa-zhin'-ska means intelligence, discernment, wisdom. *Ska* is white, or clear. The word has a broad significance, based upon the natural experience of seeing. When the atmosphere is clear a man can distinguish objects, note their peculiarities, and their relation to each other; so, when the mind is clear, it is said the man's ability to know is not checked by dimness of apprehension, but because of the clear white light within his mind he is able to exercise the power of discrimination, and to discern that which will be conducive to the best interests of himself and others, and thus attain to wisdom.

Wa-zhin'-ska is the word which designates the time when a youth, having passed the period of childhood, has reached the stage where he can enter upon a season of fasting and prayer in order to secure a vis-

ion. The mind of the child is said to be dark; he is like one in the night, unable to distinguish objects; as he grows older, light begins to dawn, and when he can distinctly remember and can place in order the sequence of events of which he has been cognizant, then his mind is said to be becoming 'white,' and he is approaching the suitable mental condition to enter upon the rite which may bring him into personal relations with *Wa-kan'-da*, as manifested in concrete form through the medium of the vision. The use of the word *Wa-zhin'-ska* to indicate this period in the life of a man is significant in view of the meaning of the word itself, and of the importance to the man of the rite he is about to practise.

The potentiality of the vision and its formative influence, as revealed in the development of the tribe, we have already discussed; the point to be emphasized just now is that in the rite by which the Indian seeks the potent vision the idea of his personality is kept intact.

It is of importance to observe in this connection that this rite, which is supposed to open to man the means by which his own powers may be supernaturally augmented, is not under the control of any priesthood or dependent upon any esoteric teaching; nor does it require that the individual merge himself in a society and have only a common right in the supernatural manifestation; nor does he through this rite come under the domination of any set of men. On the contrary, the rite is free and open to every individual who may elect to enter upon the seclusion and fasting and prayer incident to the seeking of a vision, and the securing of the sign that shall ever after be a credential with *Wa-kan'-da*. This sign is always the man's personal and sacred possession; it is something that no one can tamper with, nor can any one deprive him of its benefits.

This rite of the vision, which there is

reason to think is a very ancient one, bears testimony to the Indian's intense feeling of personality, a personality that to a degree was supposed to control the very vision itself; for the potency of the manifestation vouchsafed to a man in his vision was judged by the quality of the man's acts in after life. It was believed that a man of weak will and mind could not be the recipient of a vision that would give him great power, because such a man would not be capable of receiving such a manifestation from Wa-kan-da. Thus the quality of a man's vision, which was to supplement his natural strength by supernatural power, depended upon the character of the man's Wa-zhin', his mind, will-power and energy, or, in other words, his personality.

This estimate of a man's will-power could be traced in other words, customs and ceremonies of the Omahas, and in other tribes belonging to the Siouan group, for this belief was not only connected with sacred rites and social ceremonies, but it was also intermingled with homely customs and offices that were shared in by both old and young. In view of this wealth of testimony from the daily life of these Indians, it is not surprising that the languages of the people should betray the dominance of 'the idea of Personality.'

ALICE C. FLETCHER.

PEABODY MUSEUM,
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

THE SAND-PLAINS OF TRURO, WELLFLEET,
AND EASTHAM.*

LOWER CAPE COD exclusive of Provincetown, or that portion of the Cape comprised within the townships of Truro, Wellfleet, and Eastham, is made up of a succession of sand-plains, of the type so prevalent in eastern Massachusetts. The plains are numerous, nevertheless they can all be re-

ferred to three distinct series, differing from each other in elevation and direction of extent. The northernmost of these are the *Truro Plains*, with an average elevation of eighty feet above sea level. These stretch from High Head southward to about half a mile below North Truro village and eastward to Highland Light. Transverse depressions, with a general northeast and southwest trend, separate the individual plains of this series on the west, while depressions with a north and south or a northwest and southeast trend limit them on the east. The slopes bounding these depressions have all the appearance of old constructional slopes, no indications of subsequent erosion having been observed. As an exception to this, however, the slopes bordering Salt Meadow and Moon Pond Meadow on both sides of High Head should be mentioned, these having all the appearance of ancient erosion scarps. The most typical of the northeast and southwest depressions is the one occupied by the road leading from North Truro station to Highland Light. Here the northern slope has all the characters of a southward descending *delta front* of an ordinary sand-plain, while the slope to the south of the road resembles a northward descending *ice-contact* slope. This difference in angle of slope is well shown by the fact that the village of North Truro is built wholly upon the gentler *delta* (?) slope north of the road. This relation of slopes holds for all the northeast and southwest depressions, while in the north and south and in the northwest and southeast depressions the steeper *ice-contact* (?) slope is invariably on the west, and the gentler *delta* (?) slope on the east. Kettle holes are common.

The *Wellfleet Plains* stretch southward from Highland Light to Wellfleet village, with an average elevation of 140 feet above sea level. Highland Light plain is a typical example. For the main part, a depression

* Abstract of a paper read before the Boston Society of Natural History, January 6, 1897.