

The Wisdom of the Trail

Sitka Charley, Indian Though
He Was, Knew, and Failed Not
in the Fight with Grim Death

By JACK LONDON

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They Cringed Before Him.

SITKA CHARLEY had achieved the impossible. Other Indians might have known as much of the wisdom of the trail as did he; but he alone knew the white man's wisdom, the honor of the trail, and the law. But these things had not come to him in a day. The aboriginal mind is slow to generalize, and many facts, repeated often, are required to compass an understanding. Sitka Charley, from boyhood, had been thrown continually with white men, and as a man he had elected to cast his fortunes with them, expatriating himself, once and for all, from his own people. Even then, respecting, almost venerating their power, and pondering over it, he had yet to divine its secret essence—the honor and the law. And it was only by the cumulative evidence of years that he had finally come to understand. Being an alien, when he did know he knew it better than the white man himself; being an Indian, he had achieved the impossible.

And of these things had been bred a certain contempt for his own people—a contempt which he had made it a custom to conceal, but which now burst forth in a polyglot whirlwind of curses upon the heads of Kah-Chucte and Gowhee. They cringed before him like a brace of snarling wolf dogs, too cowardly to spring, too wolfish to cover their fangs. They were not handsome creatures. Neither was Sitka Charley. All three were frightful looking. There was no flesh to their faces; their cheek bones were massed with hideous scabs which had cracked and frozen alternately under the intense frost; while their eyes burned luridly with the light which is born of desperation and hunger. Men so situated, beyond the pale of the honor and the law, are not to be trusted. Sitka Charley knew this; and this was why he had forced them to abandon their rifles with the rest of the camp outfit ten days before. His rifle and Captain Eppingwell's were the only ones that remained.

"Come, get a fire started," he commanded, drawing out the precious match-box with its attendant strips of dry birch bark.

The two Indians fell sullenly to the task of gathering dead branches and underwood. They were weak, and caused often, catching themselves, in the act of stooping, with giddy motions, or staggering to the center of operations with their knees shaking like eggshells. After each trip they rested for a moment, as though sick and dead-weary. At times their eyes took on the patient stolidism of dumb suffering; and again the ego seemed almost surging forth with its wild cry, "I want to exist!"—the dominant note of the whole living universe.

A light breath of air blew from the south, nipping the exposed portions of their bodies and driving the frost, in

race he would have harbored no doubts; but these women were too tender, for such enterprises. Sitka Charley did not know of woman. Five minutes he did not even dream of taking to him with her wonderful, her straight clean English, to the point, without pleading, suading, he had incontinently. Had there been a softness and to mercy in the eyes, a tremulous voice, a taking advantage of her clear-searching eyes and ringing voice, her utter frank and tacit assumption of equality, he would have been his reason. He had seen that this was a new breed of women, and ere they had been tried for many days, he knew why the such women mastered the men, and why the sons of his own kind could not prevail against them. Tender and soft! Day after day he watched her, muscle-wearied, indomitable, and the work of his hands, and soft! He knew her, born to easy paths and sunny of the North, unknissed by the chill frost, and he watched and at them twinkling ever weary day.

She had always a smile of cheer, from which the meanest packer was excited, and way grew darker she seemed to and gather greater strength, and Kah-Chucte and Gowhee, who bragged that they knew every mark of the way as a chille did that bales of the tepee, acknowledged they knew not where they were, and she who raised a forgiving smile the curses of the men. She were to them that night, till their weariness fall from them, and ready to face the future, and each scant stint was meant to help, she it was who rebelled against the machinations of her husband, Sitka Charley, and demanded a share neither less than that of the other.

Sitka Charley was proud of this woman. A new richness, greater breadth, had come into his life with her presence. Hitherto he had been his own mentor, had turned to right or left at no man's beck; he had moulded himself according to his own dictates, nourished his manhood regardless of all save his own opinion. For the first time he had felt a call from without for the best that was in him. Just a glance of appreciation from the clear-searching eyes, a word of thanks from the clear-ringing voice, just a slight wreathing of the lips in the wonderful smile, and he walked with the gods for hours to come. It was a new stimulant to his manhood; for the first time he thrilled with a conscious pride in his wisdom of the trail; and between the twain they ever lifted the sinking hearts of their comrades.

The faces of the two men and the woman brightened as they saw him, for after all he was the staff they leaned upon. But Sitka Charley, rigid as was his wont, concealing pain and pleasure impartially beneath an iron exterior, asked them the welfare of the rest, told the distance to the river, and continued on the back trip. Next he met a single Indian, unburdened, limping, lips compressed, and eyes set with the pain of a foot in which the quick fought a losing battle with the dead. All possible care had been taken of him, but in the last extremity the weak and unfortunate must perish, and Sitka Charley deemed his days to be few. The man could not keep up for long, so he gave him rough cheering words. After that came two more Indians, to whom he had allotted the task of helping along Joe, the third white man of the party. They had deserted him. Sitka Charley saw at a glance the lurking spring in their bodies, and knew they had at last cast off his mastery. So he was not taken unawares when he ordered them back in quest of their abandoned charge, and saw the gleam of the hunting knives that they drew from the sheaths. A pitiful spectacle, three weak men lifting their puny strength in the face of the mighty vastness; but the two recoiled under the fierce rifle blows of the one, and returned like beaten dogs to the leash. Two hours later, with Joe reeling between them and Sitka Charley bringing up the rear, they came to the fire, where the remainder of the expedition crouched in the shelter of the fly.

"A few words, my comrades, before we sleep," Sitka Charley said, after they had devoured their slim rations of unleavened bread. He was speaking to the Indians, in their own tongue, having already given the import to the whites. "A few words, my comrades, for your own good, that ye may yet perchance live. I shall give you the law; on his own head be the death of him that breaks it. We have passed the Hills of Silence, and we now travel the head reaches of the Stuart. It may be one sleep, it may be several, it may be many sleeps, but in time we shall come among the men of the Yukon, who have much grub. It were well that we look to the law. Today, Kah-Chucte and Gowhee, whom I commanded to break trail, forgot they were men, and like frightened children ran away. True, they forgot; so let us forget. But hereafter let them remember. If it should happen they do not."—He touched his rifle carelessly, grimly. "Tomorrow they shall carry the flour and see that the white man Joe lies not down by the trail. The cups of flour are counted; should so much as an ounce be wanting at nightfall—Do ye understand? Today there were

others that forgot. Moose-Head and Three-Salmon left the white man Joe to lie in the snow. Let them forget no more. With the light of day shall they go forth and break trail. Ye have heard the law. Look well, lest ye break it."

Sitka Charley found it beyond him to keep the line close up. From Moose-Head and Three-Salmon, who broke trail in advance, to Kah-Chucte, Gowhee, and Joe, it straggled out over a mile. Each staggered, fell, or rested, as he saw fit. The line of march was a progression through a chain of irregular halts. Each drew upon the last remnant of his strength and stumbled onward till it was expended, but in some miraculous way there was always another last remnant. Each time a man fell, it was with the firm belief that he would rise no more; yet he did rise, and again, and again. The flesh yielded, the will conquered; but each triumph was a tragedy. The Indian with the frozen foot, no longer erect, crawled forward on hand and knee. He rarely rested, for he knew the penalty exacted by the frost. Even Mrs. Eppingwell's lips were at last set in a stony smile, and her eyes, seeing, saw not. Often, she stopped, pressing a mittened hand to her heart, gasping and dizzy.

Joe, the white man, had passed beyond the stage of suffering. He no longer begged to be let alone, prayed to die; but was soothed and content under the anodyne of delirium. Kah-Chucte and Gowhee dragged him on roughly, venting upon him many a savage glance or blow. To them it was the acme of injustice. Their hearts were bitter with hate, heavy with fear. Why should they cumber their strength with his weakness? To do so, meant death; not to do so—and they remembered the law of Sitka Charley, and the rifle.

Joe fell with greater frequency as the daylight waned, and so hard was he to raise that they dropped farther and farther behind. Sometimes all three pitched into the snow, so weak had the Indians become. Yet on their backs was life, and strength, and warmth. Within the four sacks were all the potentialities of existence. They could not but think of this, and it was



Could Not Keep Up for Long.

not strange, that which came to pass. They had fallen by the side of a great timber jam where a thousand cords of firewood waited the match. Next by was an air hole through the ice. Kah-Chucte looked on the wood and the water, as did Gowhee; then they looked on each other. Never a word was spoken. Gowhee struck a fire; Kah-Chucte filled a tin cup with water and heated it; Joe babbling things in another land, in a tongue they did not understand. The mixed flour with the warm water was a thin paste, and of this they drank many cupsful. They did not say any to Joe; but he did not mind. He did not mind anything, not a his moccasins, which scorched and smoked along the coals. A crust of snow fell about them, softly, carelessly, wrapping them in a white robe of white. And their feet would have yet trod many trails, had not destiny brushed the clouds aside and cleared the air. Nay, ten minutes' delay would have been fatal. Sitka Charley, looking back, saw the pillared smoke of their fire, so guessed. And he looked ahead at those who were faithful, and at Mrs. Eppingwell.

"So my good comrades, ye have again



Smiled Vivaciously at the Wisdom of the Trail.

forgotten that you were men? Good. Very good. There will be fewer belittles to feed."

Sitka Charley refied the flour as he spoke, strapping the pack to the one on his own back. He kicked Joe till the pain broke through the poor devil's bliss and brought him doddering to his feet. Then he showed him out upon the trail and started him on his way. The two Indians attempted to slip off.

"Hold, Gowhee! And thou, too, Kah-Chucte! Hath the flour given such strength to thy legs that they may outrun the swift-winged lead? Think not to cheat the law. Be men for the last time, and be content that ye die full-stomached. Come, step up, back to the timber, shoulder to shoulder. Come!"

The two men obeyed, quietly, without fear; for it is the future which presses upon the man, not the present.

"Thou, Gowhee, hast a wife and children and a deer-skin lodge in the Chippewyan. What is thy will in the matter?"

"Give thou her of the goods which are mine by the word of the captain—the blankets, the beads, the tobacco,

the box which makes strange sounds after the manner of the white man. Say that I did die on the trail, but say not how."

"And thou, Kah-Chucte, who hast no wife nor child?"

"Mine is a sister, the wife of the Factor at Koshim. He beats her, and she is not happy. Give thou her the goods which are mine by the contract, and tell her it were well she go back to her own people. Shouldst thou meet the man, and be so minded, it were a good deed that he should die. He beats her, and she is afraid."

"Are ye content to die by the law?"

"We are."

"Then good-by, my good comrades. May ye sit by the well-filled pot, in warm lodges, ere the day is done."

As he spoke, he raised his rifle, and many echoes broke the silence. Hardly had they died away, when other rifles spoke in the distance. Sitka Charley started. There had been more than one shot, yet there was but one other rifle in the party. He gave a fleeting glance at the men who lay so quietly, smiled vivaciously at the wisdom of the trail, and hurried on to meet the men of the Yukon.

MAKE APPEAL TO APPETITE

Food Materials Which Are of Little Real Value Have Distinct Place on Table.

Not all food materials are said to be valuable in proportion to the appeal which they make to the appetite. For example, the flavor substances in foods which stimulate the olfactory and gustatory nerves, and thus give rise to a desire for the food, are not ordinarily the substances which the body depends for its energy. The latter materials include fats or oils and carbohydrates—when chemically pure, they are of little value. The fat in a piece of meat is not so much a source of energy as it is a source of pleasure. In a recent experiment it was found that of the 129 calories which represent the fuel value of a very thin 20 gm. (three-fourths ounce) slice, only nine calories remained when the slice was sent to the table, 120 calories being represented by the fat which "fried out" into the pan. In this case a considerable amount of flavor body also goes into the fat, yet most persons would not consider eating it unless it has been skillfully blended with large quantities of other foods; whereas the scrap of skeleton tissue which has lost 93 per cent of its food value is regarded as a dainty morsel.

Be a "Live Wire."

To increase your earning capacity, you must be an energetic, live specimen of humankind. You should be throbbing with surplus power. You should possess a degree of strength that will give you confidence and courage and endurance. Then you can go on day after day adding to your skill and knowledge and power in your profession. And when you have climbed to the highest point on one sphere of endeavor, you will be ready to look around for other work, and continue to experience the delights that come only with the daily struggle, required for the attainment of the objects one has in view. Do not forget the value of systematic effort. Do not waste your energies. Intelligence of direction is all-important. Force to be of value, must be applied at the proper place. Effort, to be productive of reward, must be directed by superior intelligence.—Exchange.

QUEER BELIEFS ABOUT MOON

Superstitions Handed Down From Past Ages Have Not by Any Means Died Out.

The idea that the moon powerfully influences not merely the weather and the growth of crops but the functions of the human body and even the careers of men and women was almost a part of the religion of the ancient Egyptians, Jews, Greeks and Romans. The same idea runs through English literature, and the very words "lunatic" and "lucid" are derived from it. The works of Shakespeare, Spenser, Beaumont, Fletcher, Ben Jonson, and even such modern authors as Byron, Scott and Shelley, are full of references to the moon. It does not appear in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Moon" yet one has but to read "The Moon" to find a striking illustration.

"Lunatic" is a word which people these days use to describe people whose ideas about the moon country, and universal. In our country, at the others in which civilization is at its highest, one needs but to consult farmers' almanacs to find that much faith is placed in these superstitions by persons with even a fair education.

Though different peoples have their own traditions, it seems that the most part the full moon's influence is the most auspicious phase, the being propitious in proportion to its luminous face is on the increase, the worst phase of all being at the dark of the moon.

He Was No Poet.

"You have a pretty good business, even in December."

"Yes," said the proprietor of the ocean hotel.

"They hear the sea a-calling, I presume."

"I dunno about that. We keep sending out booklets right along,"—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Language in the Making.

"Lexicographers have to determine nice shades in the meaning of words."

"No doubt."

"Dictionary makers of the future have their work cut out for them."

"How so?"

"Wait until geezer, guy and gink get into the language,"—Louisville Courier-Journal.