

A Visit Among the Cherokee Indians

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Cherokee, Indian Nation
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I am on a pilgrimage to "The Land of Silence," and am with the "Children of the Woods." The land is the "Boundary" of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, and the children are the Cherokee. Of all parts of North Carolina and of the entire South this is the least known and understood, both as to country and people. These Indians are the only ones east of the Mississippi river under the care of the United States government in these high North Carolina mountains. They have a little world of their own, a very beautiful world, set upon the noblest mountains east of the Rockies.

having no superior as a mountain stream anywhere. Our objective point was the Cherokee Indian school. The river being a trifle high we thought it prudent not to ford it but to carry our camera, plates and other impedimenta by pack, the distance to the school being but short. At the fume we saw the first Indian, a full-blooded with feather in hat, and as we made our way along the picturesque path bordering the Oconalufy, there was a strangely contrasting scene. Three full-blood boys were met, and at that moment a tree yielded to the blows of an axe and tumbled into the margin of the river. The boys from the school and the tree was cut by a man who was clearing the right of way for the new railroad which is to pierce the very heart of this Indian country and which will connect Sevierville, Tenn., with a point on the Western North Carolina Railway, two miles from Whittier. This road will be 5 1/2 miles in length and will cross the lofty Smoky mountains at Porter's Gap. It will open this wonderful Indian country to the traveler. The Indian boys looked at us rather shyly and never spoke until questioned. A foot-bridge, built of large logs from which planks were suspended, gave

ing by night from the camp in which thousands of her people were being guarded during the great expedition of 1838. His mother and others crept into a deep gorge at the camp and went up it, traveling all night, and when in North Carolina, at a point near a road, had warning from scouts in advance that soldiers were coming. David and his mother hid on the mountain slope overlooking the road and saw the soldiers, with them being David's father, on their way to Tennessee, many Indians being passed each other. David told this story in excellent English, and in pathetic fashion. Most of his people are now in the Indian Territory. Occasionally there is some visiting between the two places and some letter-writing. David is a thoroughly dependable man and Superintendent Harris said he knew more about the boundary of this Indian nation, officially known as the "Eastern Band," than any other man alive and besides this he knows every other Indian personally. Governor Glenn has often met David and has a very good opinion of him. Superintendent Harris led us to a lofty hill facing the school, by way of another suspension bridge, and we

A visit was paid to the home of ex-principal chief, Bird Solonsetts. Little Bird lived in English. His cabin was simply itself, beside a branch which was a succession of water-falls, and in a tiny space set about with chestnut, black walnut, poplar and apple trees, and a little garden; the house having been built by the owner, of hewn chestnut logs, carefully chinked with clay; very small and very clean, the chimney being of stone well set in clay, the place being wild in every way with a cliff, sharp with jagged rocks on one side. Solonsetts is 65 years old, is a Baptist preacher and served in the Confederate army in the Cherokee battalion which was raised by Major W. H. Thomas, who before the civil war was the Indian agent. These Cherokee fought well, most of the time in East Tennessee, and the people there were terribly afraid of them, as most of them believed the Indians would take their scalps, though this was never done. David, Owl said Solonsetts could walk as fast in a day as any man in the Nation.

Superintendent Harris, while we were in search of new scenes and impressions, spoke about the school, saying it had 175 pupils and was originally established by the Quakers or Friends, under government auspices, but had for a number of years been entirely under government control, like the schools beyond the Mississippi. All the children speak Cherokee, but do not use it nearly so much as they do English. They are in turn educating their parents, many of whom speak English, and the parents frequently visit the school. It is twenty miles to the headwaters of the Oconalufy river, up in the Smoky

enough to understand and speak if pretend they do not know a word. The only land within the entire boundary which is not owned by the Indian Nation is a tract of 344 acres adjoining the school, on this being a store occupied by whites. All other farms and houses occupied by the whites are merely rented from the Nation. Whites and Indians seem entirely friendly. The counters and shelves of the store are piled with things the Indians like, including the gayest of prints and of handkerchiefs, mainly very bright reds. Much barter trade is carried on, Indians bringing in things they raise. They have a way of shelling just enough corn to pay for what they want and of taking this to the store. They grow a very peculiar corn, snowy white, with exceedingly large grains, which they term "four corn" and which makes admirable bread or hominy. The Indians beat it into flour in a mortar of chestnut or grind it at their watermills, to which the water is led through flumes, the wheels be-



An Indian Family Group—At the Home of Wiltse.

passage across the roaring and rather deep river, the bridge forming a graceful loop from shore to shore and very high above the stream; in fact a suspension bridge of a type very common in all this high mountain region and picturesque to the last degree. Near the bridge were Indian canoes, each dug from a tree, very narrow and very long, and on the shore of the stream was a smithy on which was painted "Joe Owl, Blacksmith." Joe was inside, hard at work. He responded pleasantly to our greeting. He was a representative of the Owl family, the most numerous among these Cherokees, the Wolf family ranking next as to numbers. Attractive buildings, all white and yellow, showed through the trees, a well ordered lawn rose in graceful swells from the level of the rough road and a bevy of little boys was seen playing. Indians all. At the school there was a warm greeting by the superintendent, Mr. DeWitt Harris, and by the industrial teacher, Joseph C. Bradley. The latter is a most interesting man who, after graduating at this school went to Carlisle, and there stood high in studies and football, being a member of one of its noted teams which toured the country. This tour brought him good fortune in generous fashion, for in Wisconsin he met a Chippewa girl, a beauty in face and figure, who, like her husband, is well educated. A pledge of this union of the West and South and of two noted, though far apart tribes, is a year-old boy.

climbed, with our heavy loads, cut away some timber, at a height of many hundred feet above the river, and took a picture of the school and its splendid background of mountains, and fertile valley alongside, making a noble panorama. We descended and entered a two-horse team which "Uncle" David drove. At the river ford a team of four big oxen was coming across, drawing a heavy wagon, and Artist Brock made a fine snapshot after David had a free use of Cherokee and the driver what was wanted. The road, rough in the extreme, led part way along the river, which is called commonly the Lufly. The stream reflected everything and was like a moving mirror. It was found that the mountains were a wonderful blue, even near at hand, and Mr. Brock declared if we told the outside world how blue they were we would be considered nature-fakers. At the river side was a practical exhibition of the fruits of the statement that many white men thought the Indians had no rights against them, for the ruins of a machine for washing gold were seen, which white men had installed there and were operating until the United States drove them away.

Most of the Cherokees are Baptists, the remainder being Methodists. Yellow Baptist churches are scattered, a most primitive little affair, its chimney being down, but it was said it would be put up by the time cold weather arrived. In this Cherokee boundary there is from the latter part of May 10th and as early as October 1st and sometimes it comes every month in the year. Along the river, above the very fine farm of the school is an estate between footings and lawn tennis. The grown men and the boys play it. A stop was made at the home of Wiltse, a full-blood. Neither he nor his family could speak a word of English and his house was the only untidy Cherokee one seen. A man named Wolf came up who spoke English and he and David Owl interpreted. A young mother and her baby were in the porch. In a jiffy she slung her baby at her back and posed before the camera, then gave the youngster into the arms of her mother and went to work beating flour on a mortar, using a heavy and long wooden beater. Her mother wore a comb in the back of her hair, made of carved chestnut wood and Wiltse, her husband, was smoking a pipe made of black pipe-stone, on it being the figure of a frog, the eyes in some way made remarkably bright. Wiltse had made both comb and pipe himself. His wife made admirable baskets of beautiful shape, pattern and color, of river cane or of split wood, and one of these which was bought had been made by her mother almost half a century ago. The young woman who was beating the corn was as plump as a partridge, all curves, and this was the case with all the young Indian women. Some of the faces grew upon us. They seemed intensely Asiatic. Japanese, if you please, for this young woman, dressed in Japanese fashion, would have passed for one of the latter race. It is no trouble for the Indians to pose when they are in their native land, and they are full of good trout. These fish are also here at Cherokee, but the fish in the river are mainly black bass, rainbow trout and pike. All the Indians agreed in saying that there was no longer any game in their boundary save a few bear high up on the mountain-side at the headwaters of the river. Wherever we went we found that, barring the never ceasing roar of the river, it was a world of silence and that the people do not shout or sing or whistle, very rarely speak unless first addressed, then use the fewest words possible, speaking through lips which seem to be closed. It was found also that game both in fur and feather is so scarce as to be literally counted for nothing and that noises of birds and insects are practically unheard. It is said that the birds never sing except in the spring, and only a few were seen, among these snow birds, blue birds, crows and sparrows. Nature seems in this boundary to be taking a rest.



Beating the Flour Corn.

a simple people, for no others in this State live so near to nature's heart as these, and for this reason they are particularly appealing. It is not needful to tell here the sad and shameful story of the treatment of the Cherokees, the original owners of this part of North Carolina, by the whites. The Indian possessed land; the whites came and coveted it. This is the story in a few words. The Cherokees were in the main always peaceable and in 1839 there were over thirty thousand of them. The United States adopted the policy of moving all the Indians to the Indian Territory. The real wishes of the Cherokees were never justly considered. Conditions became singular in the extreme. North Carolina owned all Tennessee. An agreement was made between it and the United States by which the latter was to extinguish the title of the Cherokees in North Carolina and to receive Tennessee, which North Carolina ceded. In those days the Cherokees lived in the valley and when in 1838 they were rounded up for their long journey to the far West it was comparatively easy to get them together, volunteer militia from this State doing this and holding them for the United States troops. Part of the Indians agreed to go, part never consented, but all who could possibly be found were escorted under heavy guard across the Smoky mountains. Several thousand of them, escaping from the guards at night, made the way back to their beloved mountains, where they have lived ever since, unmolested by the government or the State. It was impossible to recapture them, as they hid in the deepest gorges and in these wildest of wild places made their living until times grew quiet. Untold suffering and sorrow came from this largely enforced migration and nothing sadder has occurred in all history since the captivity of the Israelites.

Suddenly there was a visible blaze of color moving through the grove and up the hill, and with swift steps and a great noise, an Indian woman, bright red from her bare feet to her head. At her back was a pack in which was a bushel of blood-red peaches known as the Indian peach and she bore this heavy load without effort. Her hair, inkly black, was knotted in Psyche fashion. With her was her little son. She spoke no word of English but Bradley interpreted. Her name was Yvonne or Annie, "Red," and her son's name was Korasak; in English Spade. Her home was two miles further up the mountain and after she had been photographed she and the boy moved swiftly away, the long climb being mere play for her, while Mr. Brock and I agreed it would have been a heart-breaker for either of us with her load.

Next came a big ox team, two Cherokees attending it, one carrying the extremely long whips these people use. They were hauling chestnut firewood to the school, woodpile, preparing for the winter weather, for the temperature here goes as low as 3 degrees below zero. A party of Indian girls was observed playing in the grounds near the neat and spacious buildings and pictures were made of these and the boys, all being full-blooded, with the exception of a half-breed girl, whose hair was extremely light. Her name was Yvonne and gracefully curbed. At this moment David Owl, chief of the Indian police and official interpreter, came up. He has held this position nine years and died it admirably. He is about 75 years of age, a full-blood, born in Cherokee county, and has traveled considerably. He told a most interesting story about his boyhood. His mother brought him back to these mountains after escap-

ing very narrow and of great height. The trails to the school, the mills, the store and the mountain-side are frequently marked by the brilliant red of the women's clothes and they carry their babies and their burdens on their backs, wrapping the papoose in sheets of burlap of which are crossed, and they claim this is really the only way to properly carry baby or burden. A trip to Bird Town was made, to see whether a game known as Indian ball could be arranged, this being a sort of lacrosse, a compromise between football and lawn tennis. The grown men and the boys play it. A stop was made at the home of Wiltse, a full-blood. Neither he nor his family could speak a word of English and his house was the only untidy Cherokee one seen. A man named Wolf came up who spoke English and he and David Owl interpreted. A young mother and her baby were in the porch. In a jiffy she slung her baby at her back and posed before the camera, then gave the youngster into the arms of her mother and went to work beating flour on a mortar, using a heavy and long wooden beater. Her mother wore a comb in the back of her hair, made of carved chestnut wood and Wiltse, her husband, was smoking a pipe made of black pipe-stone, on it being the figure of a frog, the eyes in some way made remarkably bright. Wiltse had made both comb and pipe himself. His wife made admirable baskets of beautiful shape, pattern and color, of river cane or of split wood, and one of these which was bought had been made by her mother almost half a century ago. The young woman who was beating the corn was as plump as a partridge, all curves, and this was the case with all the young Indian women. Some of the faces grew upon us. They seemed intensely Asiatic. Japanese, if you please, for this young woman, dressed in Japanese fashion, would have passed for one of the latter race. It is no trouble for the Indians to pose when they are in their native land, and they are full of good trout. These fish are also here at Cherokee, but the fish in the river are mainly black bass, rainbow trout and pike. All the Indians agreed in saying that there was no longer any game in their boundary save a few bear high up on the mountain-side at the headwaters of the river. Wherever we went we found that, barring the never ceasing roar of the river, it was a world of silence and that the people do not shout or sing or whistle, very rarely speak unless first addressed, then use the fewest words possible, speaking through lips which seem to be closed. It was found also that game both in fur and feather is so scarce as to be literally counted for nothing and that noises of birds and insects are practically unheard. It is said that the birds never sing except in the spring, and only a few were seen, among these snow birds, blue birds, crows and sparrows. Nature seems in this boundary to be taking a rest.

sign of bad luck and that the player is sure to be hurt or something happen. The Indians never "cross their legs" even if their best players are thus thrown out. The night is spent in this sort of conjuration and dancing, etc., and when the sides are made up the first work of the day is to make the bets. Each man bets against a particular opponent on the other side, being careful to see that articles thus put up are of equal value. Then the mass of articles wagered is piled together and put under a guard, sometimes there being enough to fill a big wagon. Then the Indians retire, each side to itself, into the thick woods, each on its own side of the play ground, and the men undress and put on the one articles of apparel worn in the game, this being a breech-clout. Each man carries a pair of long ball-bats, very small rackets, with long handles. At a signal they rush out, giving the war-whoop and long yells, the ruler being to give four war-whoops before they meet in the centre, where the ball, a small one of rubber and yarn, is put in play. The Indians catch at it with their play-sticks and their highest skill is in holding it in these and trying to lodge their opponents. Their skill in picking up, catching and carrying the ball, which is never touched with the hand, is remarkable. There is interference, as in football, that is the seizing of player by player, and then trying to lodge these opponents. The wrestlers get in their work and there are many splendid contests of strength. A party of the highest Cherokee came over to pay their respects, this including chief John Goings, Assistant Chief Joseph Saunook, and ex-Chief Bird Solonsetts. These sat on the lawn, in company with Superintendent Harris, Gardner Sampson Owl and Industrial Teacher Joseph C. Bradley, and while the writer talked with them about the possibilities of the Nation and the great work the United States was doing for it, the group was photographed. Chief Goings had walked several miles and was in his shirt sleeves. They were very intent listeners, but the only speaker was Bradley, who asked one or two questions. One of the oldest women in the Nation is Lydia Sanders, a full-blood, and her home was visited. Some yards away the place was seen, looking wonderfully picturesque, and a small dog rushed out in the sunniest fashion and with frantic barking. A young woman hurried after him and thrashed him soundly. The dog's name is Suriegeoge and it means Little Growler. Lydia was making baskets, and her niece, Sallie Saunook, with her baby, was with her. The name of Sallie's baby is Dan Saunook. Sallie is a decidedly good looking and baby laughed and kicked its dangling legs. She chirped to him. David clasped his hands and baby bowed in glee. Sallie was educated at the school but Lydia speaks not a word of English. This primitive baby, very small and clean, faced a wonderful stretch of blue mountains, with the river in the foreground, and the sun, which was sinking, shone bright upon the crests of the peaks. On returning to the school the Indian girls were found, in the almost twilight, playing a game. One stood at a post, all the others being at another post, in a row. The one cried out "What are you going to do when the blackman comes?" to which the others responded in chorus, "Run like a turkey and try to get home." Then they all ran, attempting to get to the post without being caught, while she attempted to catch them. Those she caught helped her next time. The chiefs and ex-chiefs were in conference with Superintendent Harris, who is a sort of Indian agent as well, and they came at an opportunity, for a little before their arrival.

The "Boundary," as this Indian country is known, lies almost under the shadow of the great Smoky mountains on the one side and that of the Blue Ridge on the other. The weather had been most unpromising but in defiance of it the writer and Mr. Brock, the widely known Asheville artist, braved everything and took the chances of sunshine. Fate appreciated the daring of the deed and so kind as to give sunshine, the result being a magnificent series of photographs illustrating Indian life in every way. The Western North Carolina Railway, a division of the Southern, leads near the borders of this Indian country, and we left it at Whittier, four miles from that place entering the Boundary. The railway had followed for many miles the ways disclosed through swift Tuckasee river, the name of which in the Cherokee tongue means Turtle river, it having always been remarkable for the number of soft-shell turtles. At the Indian boundary we came to Socco creek, clear and sweet, along its bank being a flume used in moving planks and blocks, the latter going to the great wood-pulp and acid works at Canton. This particular flume being the mile-long one of great numbers in that region. It was but a short way to the river which is the joy and pride of the Cherokees, the Oconalufy, this ranking in clearness and sweetness and beauty with the Nantahala and

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