

BEFORE THEY GOT THICK

This tale of the Lipan Apache reads like a southwestern version of the story of the Plymouth Colony legend: Native Americans help white pioneers survive by bringing them gifts of pumpkin and corn seeds and showing them how to plant them. Related by Percy Bigmouth in 1935, it describes events that probably took place in the early nineteenth century when his ancestors were living near the Texas-Louisiana border. During the Indian wars in the Southwest (1845-56), when official policy in Texas called for the brutal extermination of all Indians, the Lipan hid in Mexico. Eventually they made their home with their kinsmen, the Mescalero Apache, in New Mexico.

MY GRANDMOTHER used to tell this story; she told it to my mother. It is about the time when they lived near the gulf. She says that they lived at a place called "Beside the Smooth Water." They used to camp there on the sand. Sometimes a big wave would come up and then they would pick up many seashells. Sometimes they used to find water turtles. They used to find fish too and gather them and eat them.

One time they had a big wave. It was very bad. They thought the ocean was going to come right up. It came up a long way. Living things from the water covered the bank, were washed up. Then, when the sun came out and it was hot all these things began to swell and smelled bad.

One day they looked over the big water. Then someone saw a little black dot over on the water. He came back and told that he had seen that strange thing. Others came out. They sat there and looked. It was getting larger. They waited. Pretty soon it came up. It was a boat. The boat came to the shore. The Indians went back to the big camp. All the Indians came over and watched. People were coming out. They looked at those people coming out. They saw that the people had blue eyes and were white. They thought these people might live in the water all the time.

They held a council that night. They were undecided whether they should let them live or kill them.

One leader said, "Well, they have a shape just like ours. The difference is that they have light skin and hair."

Another said, "Let's not kill them. They may be a help to us some day. Let's let them go and see what they'll do."

So the next day they watched them. "What shall we call them?" they asked....

Some still wanted to kill them. Others said no. So they decided to let them alone.

The Lipan went away. After a year they said, "Let's go back and see them."

They did so. Only a few were left. Many had starved to death. Some said, "Let's kill them now; they are only a few." But others said, "No, let us be like brothers to them."

It was spring. The Lipan gave them some pumpkin seed and seed corn and told them how to use it. The people took it and after that they got along all right. They raised a little corn and some pumpkins. They started a new life. Later on the Lipan left for a while. When they returned, the white people were getting along very well. The Lipan gave them venison. They were getting along very well. After that, they began to get thick.

PERCY BIGMOUTH. Lipan Apache

KEEP YOUR PRESENTS

A Pawnee, Curly Chief, recalls here a fellow tribesman's rejection of European wares. Actually a federation of four central Plains peoples, the hunting-and-farming Pawnee lived in large earth-lodge villages along the Platte River in Nebraska. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, their lands lay in the path of American pioneers whose wagons were rolling toward the Southwest. This contact with whites brought them social dissolution and disease – in 1849 they lost a fourth of their people to smallpox and cholera. In 1875 the tribe was moved to northern Oklahoma. There is no record of which treaty session Curly Chief is remembering here.

I HEARD that long ago there was a time when there were no people in this country except Indians. After that, the people began to hear of men that had white skins they had been seen far to the east. Before I was born, they came out to our country and visited us. The man who came was from the Government. He wanted to make a treaty with us, and to give us presents, blankets and guns, and flint and steel, and knives.

The Head Chief told him that we needed none of these things. He said, "we have our buffalo and our corn. These things the Ruler gave to us, and they are all that we need. See this robe. This keeps me warm in winter. I need no blanket."

The white men had with them some cattle and the Pawnee Chief said, "Lead out a heifer here on the prairie." They led her out, and the Chief sapping up on her, shot her through behind the shoulder with his arrow, and she fell down and died. Then the Chief said, "Will not my arrow kill? I do not need your guns." Then he sunk his stone knife and skinned the heifer, and cut off a piece of fat meat. When he had done this, he said, "Why should I take your knives? The Ruler has given me something to cut with."

Then taking the fire sticks, he kindled a fire to roast the meat, and while it was cooking, he spoke again and said, "You see, my brother, that the Ruler has given us all that we need; the buffalo for food and clothing; the corn to eat with our dried meat; bows, arrows, knives and hoes; all the implements which we need for killing meat, or for cultivating the ground. Now go back to the country from whence you came. We do not want your presents, and we do not want you to come into our country."

CURLY CHIEF, Pawnee

BUTTOCKS BAGS AND GREEN COFFEE BREAD

In this humorous story from the Jicarilla Apache of northern New Mexico, the “white people” referred to are probably not the Spanish, who set up a mission among the Jicarilla in the mid-eighteenth century, but the Americans. In 1854, United States troops quelled the Jicarella rebels, but in 1878, some warrior took to cattle rustling again. In 1887, the tribe was placed on the northern New Mexico reservation where they live today as successful cattle ranchers.

WHEN THE WHITE PEOPLE first came to this country, they gave the Indians, hats, pants, shoes, and coats. Dishes and blankets were also given them, and food, such as flour, sugar, and coffee.

These foolish people received some too. They heard the other people say “buttocks bag” [pants were called *tlatsizis*, “buttocks bag”], and they asked, “What this bag for? What do you put in it?”

Why, you throw your buttocks in it,” was the answer.

So they decided to do it. They put the pants in a low place and got up on a cliff above them. They hopped in place, getting ready to jump. Then they tried to get in the pants. Their feet missed, and they fell. Then they tied the pants around themselves, but the leg part hung down behind. Some put the pants on backward; some had the legs hanging down in front. That’s the way they went around. They put the shirts on. Some wore them in the right way; some put them on backward. The hats they used for carrying water. They didn’t know what hats were for. They thought a hat was same kind of dipper. They didn’t know what all those things were.

They wouldn’t keep gloves. They said, ‘This must be Bear’s hand.’ The shoes they wouldn’t keep either. “These must be the bear’s moccasins,” they said,

They didn’t know what flour was either. They just threw it away. They kept nothing but the sack and emptied out the flour. All the Indians did this, even those who were not foolish. And the baking powder they threw away too.

At first they tried to eat bacon. They made soup of it and ate too much of it. A lot of them died from eating it.

At first they tried to make flour into mush. They tried to use it like cornmeal. But it was too sticky, and they threw it away. The brown sugar they liked though. Some of the children ate it like candy. They tasted the salt. They knew what that was. The white people gave them beans too. The beans they recognized. They knew how to eat them.

They were all given green coffee. This is what all the Apaches did with it, not just the foolish ones. They boiled the green beans for two days. They didn’t get any softer. The people couldn’t eat it. So they pounded it up and thought they would make mush out of it. It didn’t taste good even though they stirred sugar into it. So they tried to make bread of it after grinding it. That didn’t taste good either. They gave it up then and threw it away.

ANONYMOUS, Jicarilla Apache

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GIVE US GOOD GOODS

Trade often led too dependency on white goods. Indians could not turn away from such conveniences as brass kettles and cloth once they became accustomed to them, or such pleasures as sugar and liquor once they had been tasted. And guns, and knives became essential to the Indians' very survival. Many tribes came to be at the mercy of the trader, as reflected in this 1743 plea to a Hudson's Bay dealer named Isham, who copied down the chief's words in his journal.

YOU TOLD ME last year to bring many Indians. You see I have not lied. Here is a great many young men come with me. Use them kindly! Use them kindly I say! Give them good goods, give them good goods I say!

We lived hard last winter and in want, the [gun] powder being short measure and bad, I say. Tell your servants to fill the measure and not to put their fingers within the brim. Take pity on us, I say!

We come a long way to see you, The French sends for us but we will not go there. We love the English. Give us good black tobacco, moist and hard twisted. Let us see it before opened.

Take pity of us, take pity of us, I say! The guns are bad. Let us trade light guns small in the hand, and well shaped, with locks that will not freeze in the winter...

Let the young men have roll tobacco cheap, kettles thick and high for the shape and size, strong ears [handle loops], and the baile [handle] to lap [fall] just upon the side.

Give us good measure in cloth, Let us see the old measures. Do you mind me!

The young man loves you by coming to see you, take pity, take pity I say! And give them good, they love to dress and be line. Do you understand me!

ANONYMOUS, *tribe unknown*