

**A FIRST COLLECTION OF
MINOR ESSAYS MOSTLY
ANTHROPOLOGICAL**

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A First Collection of Minor Essays Mostly Anthropological by A. G. Morice

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By the Rev. Father A. G. MORICE, O.M.I.

MISSIONARY TO THE WESTERN DENES.

Honorary Member of the Philological Society of Paris and of the Natural
History Society of British Columbia, Corresponding Member
of the Canadian Institute and of the Geographical Society
of Neufchatel (Switzerland).

Parvum parva decent.

HORACE.

STUART'S LAKE MISSION:

Quesnel P. O., B. C.

1902.

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PREFACE.

The great majority of the little papers which compose the present pamphlet are reprints from magazines. They are reproduced, not on account of their possible intrinsic worth which, at best, cannot be great, but because several of them first appeared in a garb which rendered them in places hardly intelligible. So many typographical errors disfigured them that I could not resist the temptation of trying to outdo the professional printer, even though I live far away from civilization in the backwoods of northern British Columbia. Those who may have seen the said articles in their original dress will say what measure of success I have achieved so far, at least, as typographical accuracy is concerned.

Most of those essays are of a controversial nature, which circumstance will perhaps render their perusal less fatiguing even for that mysterious personage we call the general reader.

In a few cases, I have somewhat enlarged on the original texts, and the two last papers may be said to appear for the first time.

Stuart's Laké Mission, April, 1902.



**A PLEA
FOR THE POOR "DIGGER" INDIAN.**

(From the AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN.)

"With the exception of the Patagonian, the Digger Indian ranks lowest in the scale of humanity".

Such is the opening sentence of an interesting paper on "the Digger Indian and his 'Cry'" by Ellen C. Weber, which appeared in the September [1898] number of the *American Archaeologist**. Now, on the point of joining issue with the fair essayist, I must confess that I know very little about the so-called "Digger", certainly not any more than is to be found in current ethnographical literature. I have not even had the good fortune of seeing what Mr. F. C. Porter wrote of him in a late number of the *Antiquarian*, nor the comments his remarks occasioned. But what I do know of several tribes belonging to the great Déné† family of the north, added to the facts which I glean in the very article from which I quote above, enables me confidently to challenge the appropriateness of its initial statement.

In the first place, I must be allowed to remark that, treating of such questions, we should never let our judgment be influenced by sentiment, nor set up the likes and dislikes of our own

* P. 230.

† For the benefit of such readers as have not seen my former writings, I may state that by Dene I mean that important aboriginal family miscalled Athapascan by others.

race as so many standards whereby to condemn or approve those of others. The food of the Digger has won for him a celebrity which is far from enviable, and has contributed not a little to those occasional outbursts of disgust and those implied protests against the teachings of the monogenists that we should have such a wretched brother in Adam. His *menu*, or such, at least, as that to which he owes his name, is certainly repulsive to the Aryan palate; but, before condemning him, I am tempted to say to his detractors: *Medice, cura teipsum*; before you deride others, consider your own infirmities. The lady author of the article in question speaks of raw oysters and implicitly compares them with an air of complacent superiority with the worms eaten by the Digger. To be frank, and at the risk of appearing uncivilized, I declare that personally I cannot see much reason for a choice. This is at best simply a question of taste, and we know that *de gustibus non est disputandum*. What is ambrosia to the one will be gall to the other. Then we should not forget the unfathomable mysteries of the Chinese culinary art, nor the cotelettes of dog, the salangane, etc. which are relished in the East by highly civilized peoples.

But the Chinese and all the oriental nations are not to be mentioned in the same breath with the whites, will perhaps object a reader. I might take exception to that observation, but let it pass. Now I will ask, Who will tell of the thousands of frogs that are eaten in a single week in Paris, the city which many Frenchmen, following in the lead of Victor Hugo, modestly believe to be the center of civilization? All this, I repeat, is but a matter of taste and can in no wise afford material for ethnic comparisons. Worms, experience shows, are just as edible as dogmeat, bird's nests, frogs or even oysters, and while a portion of mankind heartily abhors them, the other takes as great relish in their nutritive properties.

Another circumstance which militates against the fair name of the aborigine nicknamed Digger is the fact that most of his congeners of the Shoshonean stock occupy relatively high places in the estimation of the American sociologist. Comparisons present themselves unbidden to the mind, and the poor Digger cannot but suffer thereby.

I now revert to the statement quoted at the beginning of this article. "With the exception of the Patagonian, the Digger Indian ranks lowest in the scale of humanity". Who should rank lowest in the scale of humanity but he who is nearest to the brute? Now civilization is the gauge of the distance covered in the road that leads away from the brute. Therefore the above assertion is tantamount to saying that the Digger is the second least civilized of human creatures. But what is civilization? I open the Standard Dictionary, and I see that it is "a condition of human communities characterized by political and social organization and order, advancement in knowledge, refinement, and the arts and progress in general". From the same source I learn also that, according to Guizot, "civilization is an improved condition of man resulting from the establishment of social order in place of the individual independence and lawlessness of the savage and barbarous life". Now since the peoples that are the least civilized stand "lowest in the scale of humanity, I feel quite certain that the Digger Indians occupy therein a place much higher than that assigned them by the lady to whose statement I venture to take exception. They are indubitably more civilized than some of the Déné tribes which I have made my life study. I need, to prove this, but the very terms of her own article, depreciative as they are.

As regards political and social organization, which is the main criterion of civilization, Ellen C. Weber states that she once attended the mourning for a "Digger" chief, and she adds that, owing to the rank of the deceased, Indians had gathered from all points, and that, contrary to custom, even the men joined in the direful chorus of lamentations. From this I deduce two important facts: first, the so-called Diggers have chiefs, and, secondly, those chiefs are granted more consideration than simple commoners.

Now what do we see among the Sékanais Indians, a tribe of Dénés whose habitat lies mainly on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains, in northern British Columbia? Among them there is not the slightest vestige of a social organization; they have no chiefs, no headmen of any sort; they recognize absolutely no authority on earth but their own individual whims.