

ONA TALES AND LEGENDS

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/Hamn/ is a ghost. Ordinary men cannot see it, but doctors can. Ordinary men can hear it. It comes with tidings of fights or deaths and hovers about at night round the Ona camp. Men have been somewhat hurt with it. Yet the nearest description of it is that it looks like flour and shows the hearts of those who have died.

When a dog dies, they may put it down to a fox doctor, /Whash Joön/, fox's witchcraft.

Long ago /Krren/, the Sun, and /Kerrein/, the Moon, were man and wife, till the moon began to think that she was equal to the sun. Then the sun smote her in the face and would have killed her, but she ran away. He chased her and she jumped off a cliff with him after her, and started to drift round and round the world without going down till /Kwonyipe/, a great doctor, wanted to get married; but his sweetheart would have nothing to do with him as she was so shy with the sun and moon looking on. So /Kwonyipe/ told them to go down, and they did, but soon came up again. Since then they have steadily been getting lazier, spending more time down and less time up. The Sun is still cross with the Moon and still chases her but he cannot catch her, for they are never seen together.

By and by /Kwonyipe/ wanted to marry a second wife /Okhtah/, /O-Kerreechin/'s sister, very beautiful to look upon. /O-Kerreechin/ was a fine young fellow, tall, slender, white and a good hunter; but he did not want to give his sister to /Kwonyipe/ to be his second wife because he loved her very much. /Kwonyipe/ got vexed and turned him into the screech owl, /Shee-et/, and told him he should no longer eat guanaco meat but mice, and should hide in old trees so as not to see the sun.

Then /Kwonyipe/ went to /Okhtah/, but she would have nothing to do with him, she was so angry with him for having changed her brother. So he got wild and said "you shall be black and naked, you shall have no clothes or fur or feathers, you shall go about at night and not in the day, people shall be afraid to see you, and if they do see you they will get sick and die."

Three young Ona were with us one day, when a bat fluttered close to our faces; they were very much alarmed and said that they would die or have misfortune. During the next year two died and one lost his father, brother and sister. A thing like this of course tends to strengthen the Ona belief in their stories.

/Kwaweishen/ was a man from the frozen South. So cold is his country that he could find no water, it was frozen; so the marrow in his bones dried up. He was a quarreler and a strong wrestler. He came to Ona land and met /Kiayesk/. They started to wrestle furiously. /Kiayesk/ got hold of him by the throat with one hand and by the back of his head with the other, and put out such force that he gave him a top knot and a flat head with his right hand and with his left a white patch on the throat.

/Kwaweishen/ took hold of /Kiayesk/ round the middle and twisted his back so that /Kiayesk/, the black shag stands as though he had a broken back. /Kwaweishen/ has changed his name to /Karkaäi/, the large vulture. He is the doctor of the South wind and it is at his command that the snow comes.

When /Kamshoat/ was a lad he was /Klokten/ (*) and he went a long journey by himself. He went very far away, Northward, and when he came back he told the people that in the country where he had been the leaves of the forest were green in Summer, red in Autumn, fell off in Winter and budded in the Spring. The people laughed at /Kamshoat/ and called him a liar, for at that time all trees were evergreens and the people could not believe that there was any other kind. /Kamshoat/ went off very angry and came back in the shape of the first parakeet with the green leaves of

Summer on his back and the red leaves of Autumn on his tail and breast; and now he perches on the branches and when they are green he paints them red with his breast; and when people pass he makes a great noise and is supposed to say "What did I tell you before, when you would not believe me? But now you see that what I said was true." /Kamshoat/ is now called /Kerrhprrh/.

(*) When lads are able to shift for themselves they are called /Klokten/ till they become men, and during this time they must not play or laugh much but learn to hunt and make arrows.

The noisy little birds are also supposed to be very spiteful in their twitterings and make great fun of the unsuccessful hunter when he is returning from the chase, boasting of the great deed they did when they were men; they are also supposed to warn guanaco of the approach of a hunter.

/Cheip/, the sparrow and /Shijah/, the robin redbreast, when they were men, had rather a serious quarrel and /Shijah/ seized /Cheip/ by the throat with one hand and by the back of his head with the other, thus giving him a white mark on his throat and a top knot on his head. /Cheip/ with a mighty effort got away from his enemy and gave him a blow on the nose that caused the blood to run down over his breast, and that stain he could never get rid of.

The Ona believe that all the stars were once persons but they only have the names and histories of some 20 or 30. Insects, birds, all animals, except foxes and dogs, mountains, cliffs, rocks, almost every thing that has a name, except their tools and the smaller plants, were once people. The wind /Sinu/ for instance was a great man, his wife was the whale / Ohchin/, one of their daughters /Sinu K-Tam/ is the hummingbird. I have seen an Ona pick up a small beetle from a path and put it on a branch so that it should not be trodden on because it was a good doctor when it was a man.

When two large companies of Ona meet on fairly friendly terms they often run a race of from two to six miles. All the men join in from 15 to 40 years of age unless they are sick or in mourning. They don't have any prizes and even the last keep on till the end of the race. They also wrestle company against company, but only a pair at a time; as soon as one pair go down another pair are ready to start. The men form an inner ring round the wrestlers and the women and children crowd outside. They wrestle on soft ground so that no one shall be hurt. If two men find they are fairly equal they go on wrestling with short intervals till one or other has had enough and says so; the other is considered the victor.

They play shooting arrows among themselves but never company against company. A strong man will shoot an arrow 200 yards but will not shoot at guanaco more than 40 yards away. The Ona have splendid sight and follow the track of a man over camp and stony ground in a manner it is not possible to explain. They are very much afraid of sickness which they believe the doctors give them, but they have no fear of dying fighting; they are dreadfully revengeful and few men of 30 have not committed one murder at least.
