

NOTES ON THE TILLAMOOK

BY

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The following notes on the Tillamook of the Oregon coast were collected incidentally during a search for the last survivors of the lower Chinook on the Siletz Reservation about 1890. They were obtained from an old Tillamook called Hyas John and from an old Siletz, one of the very few survivors of the tribe who remembered the Siletz dialect.

Comparatively little is on record concerning the Oregon coast tribes, and since the rapid disintegration of their culture there remains little hope of much information about them being secured. They are, however, the principal link between the Indians of northern California and those of lower Columbia river and Puget Sound. It seems desirable, therefore, to make available the data obtained.

The name Tillamook, by which the tribe is known, is actually a Chinook word, Tšilēmuks, meaning *Those of Neēlīm*, the stem of the word being -qēlim. In lower Chinook, the initial q is transformed into a glottal stop before the accented syllable.

FOOD

Roots were cooked in pits; stones were heated, put into the pit, and covered with grass; then the roots were placed on the grass. They were covered with grass and finally with soil, after which a fire was lighted on top. No water was put in.

Dried elk meat was boiled in a kettle made of the bark of the Douglas fir, which was first heated over a fire and then pressed into a hole made in the ground until it lined the hole. Water was poured into the bark vessel, and bones of the elk and dried meat were thrown in. Then red-hot stones were placed in the water.

HOUSES

The houses were built of cedar planks. The men made large, wide boards, which were burned, and smoothed by scraping the charred wood. No nails or pegs were used. The planks were placed between

two poles and rested on loops made of vines by means of which each pair of poles was held together. The houses were rectangular and very long, with a round door in each side, and two or more fireplaces in the middle. Three families lived in each house. The beds were generally arranged along the walls and separated from the main room by matting. When many persons lived in one house, beds were also arranged between the two fireplaces. The persons living in each house were generally relatives. Provisions were kept in a separate house, which was made of grass. The grass walls and roof were placed between pairs of poles which were tied together in places. These storehouses, which belonged to the women, had the same plan as the dwelling houses. They were used only in summer. The provisions were packed in baskets; they were placed about four or five above the ground, near a fire, to dry. Provisions were never dried outside the house. Sometimes poor people lived in grass houses in winter as well as in summer.

Sweat-houses were made of two pairs of poles tied together. They were covered with hemlock bark, which in turn was covered with soil. Outside the house a fire was made in which stones were heated until they were red-hot. They were then thrown into the hole which had been dug in the floor of the sweat-house and were sprinkled with water. There was no rule as to the number of stones required. The sweat-house was used only in case of sickness.

CHIEFTAINCY AND WAR

There were two chiefs for every river, among the Tillamook as well as among the Alsea. It was their duty to take care of the people. They had to guard against attacks by people from neighboring rivers. One of these two men was the principal chief. Only chiefs owned slaves. The chiefs also had messengers, poor people of the tribe, not slaves, who carried out their orders.

If people wished to make war upon a neighboring tribe, an agreement between the two town-chiefs of the river towns was required. In such a case a meeting was called of the inhabitants of the river towns. A messenger was sent out who informed the men secretly to come to an appointed place. Only men went there. When war was decided upon, the warriors started without the knowledge of their wives. The messengers of the chiefs were present at the council. First, the two chiefs met and discussed the matter in hand. If

they did not agree, the planned expedition was not made. If they did agree, they called together the people, who had to obey their orders. The chief distributed weapons and the men set out and attacked the enemies during the night. Everybody was killed except the women. If the enemy made resistance, the attacking party returned into the woods. If possible, they shot upon the enemy from above. The chiefs led the expedition, but they themselves did not fight; they only talked to the people. The enemies did not try to kill the chiefs. Chiefs could call off the warriors at any time.

If a chief demanded a tribute from the people of another river and it was denied, a war would result.

The people living at the headwaters of a river had the right to go down to its mouth and hunt there. There was no law forbidding the people on one river to catch fish in another river. Only when a person committed murder, they took revenge and made war. Sometimes the villages were protected by stockades.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

During pregnancy, the prospective parents were not allowed to eat the foot or the knee of an elk, otherwise the child would have feet and knees like the elk. If they should eat sturgeon, the child would have a small nose and small eyes; if they ate clams, the child would have a large mouth. They must not wear bead necklaces, otherwise there would be marks around the child's neck.

The person who made the cradle was paid for his service. When the child was born, all the relatives were called into the house, because it was believed that the child would not die if he saw all his friends, who called it by the proper term of relationship. The cradle had the form of a small canoe, and was painted. The parents engaged a shaman who performed a dance carrying the child in its cradle. This was believed to make the child an expert canoe-man and to prevent the capsizing of his canoe. Girls, while still in the cradle, were given digging sticks and baskets. It was believed that this would make them successful in digging roots and gathering food. The mother must give away all the property that was in the house. Very soon after birth, the head-presser was put on. Whenever the child was washed the face was rubbed down, the nose pulled, the arms and legs rubbed down. This was generally done three times a day. The head-presser was kept on until the child was able to walk. If the

couple had older children, they were sent away at the time when the infant's ears were pierced, to stay away about a week; otherwise, the ear would swell and the infant die. When the child began to walk, an old woman was engaged to sing for it, in order to keep it well. The stones and canoe that were used when the child was born were carried into the woods and hidden. Nobody was allowed to see them. Newborn children were believed to be wise and to know the thoughts of every person. They would die if they were treated badly.

PUBERTY

When a boy was about twenty years old, his father would send him into the woods and up the hills to obtain a guardian spirit. He was given a piece of a blanket and was required to deliver a speech stating what he intended to be—a hunter, shaman, or warrior. After the young man had been out fasting for some time, the guardian spirit of one of these occupations came to him and accordingly he became a hunter, shaman, or warrior. For three or four nights he would swim in cold water.

Girls were also able to obtain power. A young girl who wanted to obtain a guardian spirit was placed on a large plank on which she had to squat for several days, her elbows resting on her thighs. During this time she fasted. Her head was covered with a basket cap, and her blanket was adorned with dentalia and abalone shells. She had a fire of her own and had to stay by herself. She also cooked for herself. She did not use a sweat-house. Sometimes she would dance during the night. An old woman was appointed to watch her. Generally a woman shaman was selected for this purpose. In payment for her services, the old woman took all the ornaments and clothing the girl had worn. If her father was a poor man, his neighbors helped him pay. After two days, the girl was sent out at midnight. She had to go up the mountains and bathe in ponds. The following morning she returned. After she came back she was given new dentalia, was not allowed to sit near the fire, nor touch the fire. After she had been in the house for two days, she had to rise early in the morning before sunrise and had to swim in the river. After her bath she was rubbed with rotten wood. This was intended to make her skin as white as the white wood. Two or three women must watch her, and when she reëntered they decorated her and painted her with red ochre. She was given something to eat before the birds began to sing. It was believed that if the birds should

begin to sing while she was bathing in the river, she would die. After the performance of all these rituals, her hands were tied and then she was allowed to touch the fire again. The first time she touched the fire she had to use a very long poker. After she had attended to the fire, she was scratched with a flint knife all over her body until blood flowed. During the whole period of preparation, she was not allowed to eat elk, deer, or beaver meat nor any berries. After the whole ceremony was over, a woman shaman was employed, who gave her berries to eat and who received a large payment for this service. Before the girl began to eat the woman shaman sang for her. She would sit about eight feet distant from the girl and throw the berries into her mouth. If she missed, it was a sign that the girl would die young.

These observances were not kept in the case of children of slaves. Girls were allowed to eat roots and fish and shellfish caught with the hand or with hooks. They were not allowed to eat anything killed with the bow or caught with a net; otherwise the bow or the net would become unlucky. A girl must not come near a sick person, because the person might die.

MARRIAGE

A young man who wanted to marry had to engage a messenger to speak to the girl's father. This messenger was paid before he started. He was given dentalia, which were hung around his neck. It was considered honorable to buy a wife at a high price, otherwise the children would be laughed at and called slaves. If the girl's father accepted the presents he sent a return payment through the messenger. About a week later, the young man went to get his wife. His relatives collected much food of all kinds, and they contributed money to the purchase price of the girl. The girl's relatives stated on what day they intended to bring the girl. Her father had to pay as much as he received. As soon as the relatives of the young man had assembled, they paid the purchase price to the girl's father. Then the young man and the girl were allowed to sit side by side, and the father of the girl and the father of the young man delivered speeches relating to the agreement of marriage. One of the husband's friends had to guarantee a fine, in case the young man beat his wife. After the marriage ceremony, the people were feasted with berries, fish, and meat. After the feast, the girl's father distributed, among the young man's relatives, food which they took back home. Once every month this exchange of visits was repeated.

After marriage, the young couple stayed for five days with the bride's father. At the end of this period they removed to the house of the groom's father, with whom, also, they stayed for five days. Then they returned to the wife's father, with whom they generally remained. They might, however, change their residence later on.

The young man was instructed by his father to cut wood for his father-in-law. In this he was assisted by his brothers and neighbors. He also went hunting and fishing for his parents-in-law. Every time the young man went to visit his parents-in-law he took food to them.

The purchase price for the wife was generally one adult slave and a child slave. Levirate was customary.

BURIAL

Burial did not take place directly after death. The body was kept until all the relatives were assembled—sometimes for five or six days. After they had assembled, they gave shell-money to the body, to be buried with it. They put dentalia around the neck and painted the hair. They put anklets of haliotis shell around the feet, decorated the body with haliotis shells, and put rings of dentalia on the arms and wrists. A good, expensive boat was painted red and placed on forked poles, so that one end was a little higher than the other. A hole was cut in the bottom and a board placed underneath to keep dogs and wolves away. The body was placed in the middle of the canoe which was then covered with another canoe, placed over it in inverted position. After this had been done, posts were put up, which were nicely painted. Holes were made in dishes and these together with the baskets which the dead had used were hung up on the canoe. Everything that the deceased had used for eating and fishing was given to him, and was hung up on a long stick over the canoe. They believed that he would take it all along.

BELIEFS

It was said that if a canoe passed the "Medicine Rocks" called Tk'a and the canoe-men did not sacrifice and pray to them, the canoe would sink at once. The "Medicine Rocks" consist of three rocks, on two of which the heads of persons may be recognized. On the left side of the master of the salmon stands his wife, both of them easily recognized; on his right side is their dead child. When the transformer, Tk'a, left the Siletz country, he assumed the form of this rock.¹

¹ See page 12.

In the country of the Alsea he transformed himself into a dead tree which never rotted. A person who passed the tree must shoot an arrow into it. The trunk of the tree is now full of arrows. It was said that if the people wasted the berries that they picked, Tk'a became angry and the following summer there would be no berries and it would be dry. The master of the salmon brought the "warm-house dance" from Wailaki.² The Shasta and Rogue river Indians have the same dance. Originally it did not belong to the Siletz.

When people were having a discussion, their speeches, it was said, would go back to Tk'a; who was also considered the ancestor of the Siletz.

ECLIPSES

During an eclipse of the sun or moon, all the shamans assembled and danced for five nights. While the eclipse lasted, every vessel in the house was turned over, and the people were not allowed to eat. They praised the moon or the sun. They believed that the transformer was angry and wanted to destroy the world. Nobody was allowed to look upward. If a person had to leave the house, he must look down to the ground. It was believed that the killing of a person strong in magic caused the eclipse, and the vessels were turned over so that his blood should not drip into them.

THE FIRST SALMON OF THE SEASON

The first salmon of the season was given to the chief, who had to eat the whole fish, head, tail, and all. It was put on a frame supported by four forked sticks placed in a rectangle. Over each pair of these sticks rods were placed, which were again connected by a number of cross-rods. The fish were roasted on the cross-rods. After they were done they were cut with a string and divided among the people. One person, who knew all the taboos relating to the manner in which the first fish were to be treated, had to do this cutting. The bones were thrown into the fire; the whole roasting frame was burned and also the material which was used for cleaning the salmon; the blood was wiped up carefully and burned. They continued to do this for about a week. If the people did not eat the salmon carefully, but just threw it into the water without using it, the master of the salmon would become angry and take back the salmon, and the people would become sick. The Alsea boiled the first salmon.

² Perhaps Yreka—pronounced "Wyreka"—in Shasta territory.—Ed.

At this season the people also held a dance. Two canoes were tied together and connected by a platform, upon which the shaman in charge of the fishing danced.

Just as many salmon as were killed went back, even if they had been dried. When a person roasted salmon and burnt one side, the salmon, when he returned to his master, held his hands to the burnt cheek. If a person harpooned a salmon and lost his harpoon point, the salmon took the harpoon along and laughed at the man, and the man had to die. The fish then painted his face and danced like a man who had killed another person. At night, when they played, the salmon became real men. Shamans were able to see them there. At such a time the shaman would not go out. Shamans did not eat a certain species of salmon, but gave them away when they caught them. (?)

Fish whose skin has been removed to make bags for fish roe, are entirely naked when they return to their country. They complain that their clothing has been taken away from them.

There was a separate method of treating the fish for every river, because there was believed to be a separate master of the salmon for each river. The methods of cutting the fish were different. Thus it was that the fish could be recognized when they returned to their country.

SHAMANISM

When the narrator's father wanted to become a medicine man, he fasted for five days. Every evening he sang and danced. His face was painted and his head was decorated with feathers. He had two carved wands, called qelqaloxten, with a head at one end and a figure of two men at the other end. These wands were said to belong to the salmon. The head of a humming bird was tied to one end. His father danced with the carved sticks for two nights. After he was through with these sticks, he took two others, which were painted with coal. The last night he danced, he asked his people to tie two canoes in the middle of the river. In the village they had nothing to eat. On the following morning, he sent two boys to the canoes and they found three salmon in them, although nobody had been there. This was considered proof that he had power over the salmon.

The shaman used a small bone to kill his enemy. The bone was nicely smoothed and a hair was tied to one end. The enemy into

whom it was thrown must dry up and die. If the person was to be cured, this bone must be taken out of his body; then the medicine man who cured the sick person showed the bone which caused the sickness.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

If a bad person died he was seen at the place where he had been buried, and he had to stay there a long time and could not find his way to the country of the ghosts. Such a person would knock at the houses. Sometimes it took a year before he found his way to the land of the souls, which is in the sky.

The people learned about the country of the dead in the following manner: A person had died. The body was kept in the house for five days, while the people were dancing a great shaman's dance, trying to bring him back. After the fifth night, the dead one arose and asked to be given something to eat. Then he told them all he had seen. The soul of man after death had to travel a long time. He followed a trail and after two days, when he had nearly reached the country of the souls, he came to a river. There he had to sit for ten days, if he was a bad person. After ten days a canoe came across to get him. When he reached the other side, all the souls were gathered in one house. They were very glad that another person had arrived to live with them. In the evening they danced. The river was full of fish, and there were beautiful birds there and game was plentiful. Old people were young again. Tsaai'yahatl is the master of this country.

A bad person took the wrong trail, on which there was no food, and where he was kept for some time until he was guided back to the right trail. If he was very bad, he continually took the wrong trail and went to a bad country, which is below. When he arrived there, the chief gave him his left hand, made him his slave, and maltreated him. First, he was boiled in a big kettle. This was done because he had a bad smell and had to be washed, but he could not die. Then he was given new clothing, and snakes and vermin were his food. Sometimes he was thrown into the fire where he had to stay. The good people who went to the upper world would come back, but they did not know when. The bad people never came back. They believed the good would return in the same form they had had when living.

If a child died, and another child was born soon after, it might be the same child who had returned. A similarity of marks or outer appearance was taken as a proof of such identity. They did not believe that adults might be reborn as children. Adults did not return, because they knew how to get food in the country of the dead, but children did not know how, therefore they cried because they had nothing to eat. They wished to see their fathers and mothers, and the chief sent them back to their parents.

CEREMONIALS

The people would go from one place to another to dance. They were paid for their dancing. The dances which were practiced here came from the south. The people were not always invited to make these dances, but sometimes came of their own initiative; nevertheless, they were paid for dancing. They used masks. Some of these masks represented birds. In early days, the dances were known as the Rogue river pantomimes. The dancers also used aprons and rattles, but no leggings. Masks were never worn by shamans.

TALES

1. The transformer Tk'a traveled all over the world. He was also called the master of salmon. He created everything and commanded the people to be good. When he came to the mouth of a river he tried to make a cascade at that place. When he was traveling about, he carried a bunch of arrows. When he came to a nice place he would take out some arrows, break them to pieces, and throw them down. Then he began to shout as though he were going to dance, and the arrows would be transformed into human beings and begin to dance. When day came he would take his quiver and the arrows would go back into it. This was his way of amusing himself; he did this every night whenever it pleased him. When he came to Siletz he called the people his relatives. When he left he transformed his body into the rock Tk'a,³ while his soul went to the country of the salmon from which the fish come every year.

2. A man went out to sea and found a whale. He called the people together and they began to carve it. The man who found it cut open its stomach and crawled into the hole he had made. The people who were cutting off pieces of the whale skin became angry, because this

³ See page 8.

person had cut right into the body of the whale, and one of them expressed a wish that the whale might drift out to sea. As soon as he had wished so, the whale went adrift. After a while the man who had crawled into the stomach of the whale came out, and discovered that he was adrift. Not even the mountains of his country were in sight. Then he began to cry. A strong wind arose and he felt very cold. He went back into the whale, where he was protected against the cold. For a whole year he drifted about, and since his head, while he was in the whale, rubbed against the walls of the stomach, he lost all his hair.

One day when he came out of the stomach he saw many canoes. He thought, "I wish the people in these canoes would take me ashore." Then he shouted, "Come here." The people asked, "Where do you come from?" He replied, "At one time my people cut this whale, and they became angry with me and sent the whale adrift. I alone stayed in the whale. I have been here a whole year. Please take me ashore!" One of the people replied, "My canoe is too small; if it were larger, I should gladly take you ashore, but none of us has a canoe large enough for you. When you see one, call it." After a little while, the man saw a larger canoe coming. He shouted and the person in the canoe approached. He told him what had happened to him, and the man agreed to take him ashore. The canoe-men did not paddle, but sang, holding their arms with elbows extended from the shoulders and lifting their hands and moving them down again. When they made these motions the canoe passed rapidly through the water. It was not long before they landed in the village of the man. He went right up to his house, where his father, his mother, his wife, and his child lived. He found them, but they were all blind, because for a whole year they had been weeping. Then he washed their eyes with water and thus restored their eyesight.

3. A married man was going to catch salmon in a small brook. He went up the river, and when he was near the source of the brook, he heard the voice of a bird, which cried, "Ho!" He thought, "What bird may that be? Certainly it must be very large, because its voice is so loud." He went on, and after a while he heard again the voice of the bird—"Ho!" He looked upward, and thought he would discover it, but did not see anything. He was wearing a grass blanket, tied together under his arms and reaching to his knees. He went on and looked around, trying to find the bird. Suddenly he saw a man approaching. He was afraid. When they met, the man asked him,

“Why are you afraid? I am the one whose voice you heard; you wanted to see me, and here I am. Look at the bearskin I wear. When I shake it, it thunders.” Then he assumed the shape of a bird. The young man took off his blanket and leaned his spear against a tree. The bird put the man in his armpit and told him to shut his eyes; only when they arrived at the bird’s home was he to open them. The bird told him that if he should open his eyes while they were flying, they would fall down and die. While they were flying, the man became exceedingly warm in the armpit of the thunder bird, but he did not open his eyes. They flew for a long time. Finally they arrived, and the bird told the man to open his eyes. Only sand was to be seen; there was no vegetation at all. They had reached the country on the other side of the ocean. Then the thunder bird took the visitor to his house, which was built of whale skin. The entrance was the mouth(?) of the whale. He stayed there.

One day, when the young man went to the water, he saw many salmon. He thought, “I wish I could eat them.” He made a salmon-harpoon, and the next day began to catch salmon, and carried them back home. The thunder bird took his spoon and put the salmon into it. He placed them by the side of the fire and gave one of the salmon to the young man. The others he ate himself. In the evening the young man went out and saw people fishing with torches made of pitch wood. He did not know what they were doing. The thunder bird knew at once what the young man was thinking; and said, “They are catching salmon,” meaning, however, that they were catching whales. The next morning when the young man went out again, he saw that each of the canoes had caught a number of whales. After he had stayed there for a year, the thunder bird asked him, “Do you wish to return home?” The young man expressed his desire to return, and the thunder bird carried him back to Nestucka, and took along two large whales. The man was found by his people, who carried him back home. In the evening they made him sing. On the following day he sang, “Go to the beach where you found me.” He sent two people, who found the two whales, lying a short distance apart on the beach. The messengers went home and reported that they had found two whales, and the people went down, but the young man told them not to carve them. Then he went down and carved the whales. He saw the thunder bird sitting on a rock not far from the beach. Its tail reached from the rock to the water. Then the

people came from all parts of the country to buy whale oil from the Nestucka and they gave in exchange dentalia and other valuable shells.

4. A man went into the wilderness to obtain supernatural power. He remained away for a whole year, and when he came back he climbed a rock on the Nestucka river, where he stayed. He had almost lost his senses after his long fast. One day his two sons, who were sad, because they did not know what had become of their father, went out. They came to the beach and reached the rock. They were carrying bows and arrows, and the elder one said to his brother, "Let me look whether there are any birds on this rock." He climbed up and looked about. Then he saw his father sitting on top staring out over the sea. He was singing. His face was painted and his head was decorated with feathers. The boy recognized him and retreated quietly. He ran to his brother and said that he had seen their father. He said, "I am afraid; I fear he has been transformed into an evil being, he looks so curious." The father did not see the boys. They ran home and told their mother what they had seen. Their father had five wives. When they heard the report made by the boys, they sent to the other houses, and four men went out to the rock. When the men reached the man they addressed him, asking why he was acting this way. He did not reply, but continued to sing. Then they took hold of him and carried him home. When he reached the house, they made a bed for him, called all the people, and made him dance. When evening came they began to dance; then he spoke. Early in the morning he asked them to take him up the river to a small lake, where he was going to continue his dance. Three men took him in a canoe across the lake, while others went along the shore. When the canoe reached the middle of the lake, it began to circle about; the stern went down into the water, while the bow stood up vertically. The men who were carrying the dancer saved themselves by swimming ashore; the dancer, however, was drowned. They searched for his body, but could not find it. Finally, in the evening, they said, "Let us go on to the place where he was going to dance." Before they arrived, the chief came out of the house and told them to prepare themselves, to comb their hair, to paint their faces, to sing and to dance. They inquired, "How can we dance when we have lost our dancer?" The chief said, "That doesn't matter. You shall dance anyway." Then they prepared themselves and soon entered the house. When they entered, they found the dancer ready,

painted and decorated with feathers. They were surprised and afraid. He danced the whole night. In the morning they were hungry and sent three boys up the mountains to hunt elk. The boys wanted to take their bows and arrows, but the dancer told them that all they would need would be a knife to carve the elks. The boys thought that this was a curious request and the dancer knew at once what they thought. He said, "You believe that you cannot kill the elk without bows and arrows, but all I want you to do is to go and fetch the meat of the elk that I shall have killed before you get there." The three boys went and when they reached the top of the mountain they saw lying there four elks which had just been killed. Blood was flowing from the cuts in their throats. They skinned them, boiled some of the meat, and carried back all they could carry. When they reached the house, the dancer questioned them, "Did you bring the meat?" They showed what they had brought and boiled it. After the boys had rested awhile, he sent them to the sea to get whale meat. In the evening they came back carrying whale meat. They danced again the same evening. On the next day he sent some people up the mountains to get elk meat, and others to the sea to get whale meat. Whenever the people needed food, he would sing and thus obtain elks and whales for them for which he was paid.⁴

⁴ A number of Tillamook myths were published in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, xi, 23-38, 133-150, 1898.