

MY OLD PEOPLE SAY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF SOUTHERN YUKON TERRITORY. BY CATHARINE MCCLELLAN. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada (Publications in Ethnology, no. 6 (1) and (2) — two volumes) 1975. 9¾ x 6½ inches, 637 pages including notes, bibliography, glossary and index of native terms, and index; illustrated. Soft cover, no price indicated.

This impressive publication represents the results of ethnographic research carried out in 1949-51 among three linguistically distinct groups in the southern Yukon Territory, from east to west: (1) the Inland Tlingit in the area of Lakes Atlin and Teslin and the Nisutlin River; (2) the Tagish, centred at Tagish and Carcross, who once spoke an Athabaskan dialect but adopted Tlingit in the last century; and (3) the Southern Tutchone, who speak another Athabaskan dialect, and are represented by six "bands" spread from the upper Alsek River and Whitehorse on the south, to Lakes Kluane, Aishihik and Laberge in the north, where they adjoin the linguistically distinct Northern Tutchone of the Lewes River and other Yukon tributaries. The Northern and Southern Tutchone represent, therefore, a splitting of Osgood's "Tutchone tribe." The Indian groups of southern Yukon have been, until now, neglected ethnologically, and so this work, in preparation for over ten years, is doubly welcome. While it contains a little data from the author's later extended fieldwork among the Southern Tutchone (1962-63, 1965, 1966, 1968), further detailed information about the oral literature, the ceremonial and religious life of these people and their neighbours has been reserved for future publication.

This is a handsome, scholarly and informative book, which should appeal to anyone interested in the North, whether white or Indian, layman or anthropologist. The author writes with verve, modesty and real concern for her subjects; and it is clear that many of the accounts are based on personal experience — experience that demanded courage, endurance and scientific devotion. For example, the information about the trapline and the habits of wolves has obviously been written by someone who has accompanied a hunter and been chased by wolves. Whenever possible, the Indians are allowed to speak for themselves, so that the rich details of their lives are illuminated by these insights into their own thoughts and feelings. This is made possible by the methodology adopted by the author. In every instance, what she

has to say is based upon direct, personal and first-hand information: the observations of early travellers, her own observations, and the comments, explanations, and stories of her informants, recorded in the words originally used. It is this actuality which is so difficult to achieve, and yet is so important. McClellan has mastered through her own "shorthand" and speed the ability to write down the Indians' words as spoken. This exact record, even if not thoroughly understood at the time, preserves expressions and statements which later become clear. Without it, there would be no reliable guide to that "inner world" of the native Yukoner.

Each chapter opens with an appropriate and often moving quotation, such as "People were starving ahead of me," and "How can I stop crying? The whole world turned over with the death of my son!" (both Inland Tlingit). The opening and closing of each chapter are also graced by the black-and-white illustrations of native designs, prepared by the author's niece, Catherine S. Kernan. Most interesting and valuable, to this reviewer at least, are the comparative data which serve to place southern Yukon customs in their cultural context, and the exciting theoretical questions which the author raises.

In the *Introduction* we learn how and where this pioneer work was carried out, and we marvel at how much information was obtained despite relatively short field seasons and the difficulties of dealing with three different languages, for only one of which (Tlingit) was any published guide available. Yet we are given maps with place names in all three languages, and native names and words are included throughout the text. The writer modestly admits her lack of professional skill as a linguist, and her transcriptions have evidently suffered sometimes at the printer's hands; but despite errors which linguists may discover, she has given them material of inestimable value, because it can no longer be obtained, and has exhibited the scholar's respect for the data themselves. After consulting Naish and Story¹ and Krauss² for Tlingit and Southern Tutchone phonemes, the author decided that "rather than tidy up my earlier phonetic rendering in accordance with these or other schemes [which might have introduced new errors], it has seemed only honest to leave them as they stand with all their probable inaccuracies and inconsistencies, [hoping that] they may serve as preliminary guides to dialectical variations of Tlingit and Tutchone, and suggest the nature of remnant Tagish."

In Chapter I, *Southern Yukon and Its Peo-*

ples: *The Ethnographer's View*, the author straightens out the confusions created by misleading tribal designations given by earlier writers, through a meticulous process of identifying places, social groups and their remnants, movements, and mixtures. No one who reads these discussions can remain content with static ethnographies presented in terms of fixed "tribes, bands, and boundaries."

The rest of the book presents the ethnographic information as much as possible from the "inside." It is substantive, meaty and founded on solid concrete evidence; and while theoretical problems that arise from the data are discussed, the author is not playing with "model-building." Rather, she has repeatedly to face the problem of whether to organize the materials primarily by major topic or by "tribal" group, the choice often depending upon whether there is enough ethnographic detail to distinguish cultural differences between groups. In such cases she moves regularly from Southern Tutchone, to Tagish, to Inland Tlingit — an order which is not only geographical, but proceeds from the less structured sociocultural world of the Southern Tutchone to the more highly organized hierarchical one of the Inland Tlingit, between which stand the Tagish. While all three groups are founded on matrilineal moieties, Wolf and Crow (Raven), with similar reciprocal relationships, only the southernmost "band" of the Southern Tutchone, in contact with the Chilkat Tlingit, have adopted sibs and house names from the latter. The Inland Tlingit, however, have fully developed "houses" (lineages), sibs, and sib traditions, like their coastal relatives, as well as clearly defined chiefs, in contrast to the individualism and unfocused authority characteristic of the Southern Tutchone.

It is impossible to give an adequate idea of the wide scope of this survey or of the richness of the ethnographic detail within the limits of a review, although some samples may be indicated. In Chapter II, *The Universe and Its Inhabitants: The Native View*, the author attempts the almost impossible task of presenting the whole cultural *Lebenswelt* of the natives, including notions of power, ideas of time and space, weather control, and the occupants of the human world and the other-than-human worlds. If this chapter seems less successful than later ones, because the topics themselves are not obviously connected, it may well be because the Indians have never formulated a logically coherent system. An understanding of their ideas, however, grows as we read further, for the effects

are cumulative. Most valuable here is the discussion of the moral dilemma in which the Indians find themselves, because to live they must kill animal beings which they consider have souls like their own. Is it to relieve this guilt that the Southern Tutchone tell of the mythical time when animals killed and ate men?

In Chapter III, *The Yearly Round*, the three groups are presented separately, although differences between them are not as pronounced as those caused by environmental peculiarities. The long personal accounts, here as elsewhere, are employed most effectively for vivid detail and emotional tone.

In Chapter IV, *A Yukon Bestiary*, Chapter V, *Fish and Fishing*, Chapter VI, *Some Useful Plants*, Chapter VII, *A Yukon Cook Book*, and Chapter VIII, *A Yukon Medicine Chest*, are presented careful biological identifications of the animal and plant species, their ranges, and habits, etc., and, more important, the common attitudes of all three groups toward these natural sources of native subsistence, and how they are obtained and used. But to the Indian, all these, and animals in particular, must be treated with scrupulous ritual, many being considered to have powers greater than man's, or to be under the protection of powerful beings. The author is careful to avoid imposing the Western dichotomy between natural and supernatural upon the native world, which instead distinguishes between ordinary human power and powers which are superhuman. Encounters with animals, birds, and even insects are often more important to the Indian than meeting other humans, for they may be the supreme occasions on which he secures the help of animal spirits, when man and animal become close, as they were "in the beginning of time, when the gap between the two kinds of beings was not as great as it is today." Also of interest is the emphasis on fresh meat as the essential part of the diet, the social importance of food (feasts, gifts, sharing), and the severe food taboos imposed during life crises. Why should there be such restrictions among peoples who face real scarcity and starvation?

In Chapter IX, *Settlement Patterns and Housing*, Chapter X, *Southern Yukon Technology*, and Chapter XI, *A Yukon Style Book*, the author contrasts modern villages with the aboriginal dwellings of people who once had to move constantly for subsistence, and whose lives were transformed by the introduction of steel tools and manufactured goods after the Gold Rush of 1898. Native

artefacts include tools, weapons, aids to transportation, utensils, clothing, ornaments, etc. The author has obviously helped in the arduous task of tanning moose hides, and has run on snowshoes, and so knows the trick of stepping into the bindings, and how to judge a well-made pair. She evaluates Yukon material culture as being ingenious and efficient, but not rich. Among many other topics are discussed the Indians' intense interest in fine clothes, prudishness in keeping themselves always covered (except for youths in training), use of garments as status markers, and identification of the "self" with its covering. One is impressed by the author's careful tracing of times, sources, trade routes, and sequences of various kinds of imported goods, such as glass beads, or of aboriginal materials like dentalia, obtained from other natives or white people. Documentation from traveller's reports, museum collections, and archaeological finds, supplements what native memories can provide, and gives a dynamic picture.

Chapter XII, *The Human Being*, and Chapter XIII, *The Round of Life*, concern the Indians' views of themselves as human, which include what would correspond to Western notions of "soul", "mind" and "ghost", and the personality types recognized by the Indians. For each group is traced the life cycle of men and women from conception and birth to old age and death, a cycle structured by belief in reincarnation and fear of contamination from menstruation and childbirth. The rituals of the life crises, especially the long ordeals of girls at puberty, repeated in magical detail to some extent at childbirth and widowhood, are especially impressive, and made vivid by personal accounts. Repeated emphasis in ritual situations is placed on industriousness, generous sharing of food, respect for the aged, and care to avoid cutting the "life line" of oneself or of others. The Inland Tlingit repeat the puberty ritual in shortened form at the menopause, when the woman "becomes a hunter again," and "changes back to a man." The description of the relationship between the living and the dead, especially among the Tagish and Inland Tlingit, provides us with even greater insight into the nature of the powers first referred to in Chapter II.

Chapter XIV, *Kinship and Kinship Behavior*, Chapter XV, *Moiety and Sib*, and Chapter XVI, *Authority and the Control of Resources*, provide a sketch of the social worlds of the three "tribes." Kin include the dead, whose names are given to their reincarnations, and kinship is extended to mem-

bers of other tribes, and even to animals, thus determining how these are to be addressed. Again the author demonstrates her respect for data by presenting her Southern Tutchone and Tagish kin terminologies untampered, despite phonetic uncertainties. We should note the emphasis upon "father's people" among all three matrilineal groups, and how relief from the tensions between superior and inferior are afforded by adroit manipulation of the institutionalized avoidance or joking between certain relatives. Especially important was McClellan's discovery of avoidance between older and younger brother among the Inland Tlingit. In the interior, sibs, at least as corporate bodies controlling ceremonial rights and tangible property, seem to date from the late nineteenth century, when surplus wealth made possible big potlatches. While a simple moiety system may have preceded such sibs of Tlingit derivation, the problem of the original priority of moiety or sib remains moot.

Although territories were formerly owned by sibs (where these existed), and there were everywhere strong emotional attachments to such lands, kin relationships could be invoked or invented to give anyone access to the resources in any area. The institution of the modern registered trapline has broken down the aboriginal relationship to the land, and with it, the symbolic importance of sib-owed mountains or rivers. Whereas chieftainship among the Tagish and Inland Tlingit was a function of rank, with one chief for each sib in any community, among the Southern Tutchone the two moiety chiefs in each group owed their position to wealth and personality, while still farther north, character was decisive and a son in the opposite moiety could succeed his father. Intertribal trade was largely in the hands of such leaders or chiefs. A comparison of interior and coastal Tlingit accounts, corroborated by the Krause³ brothers (ethnologists) and by Mrs. Willard⁴ (the missionary's wife), all writing in 1881-82, and by earlier reports from Robert Campbell⁵, Hudson's Bay Company agent at Fort Selkirk, provides a striking picture of strong, aggressive coastal Tlingit exploiting the submissive "Stick Indians" of the interior, while the latter tried to exploit their neighbours further inland. Some tribes were traditional enemies, warfare being particularly well developed between the Inland Tlingit and the Tahltan.

In Chapter XVIII, *Those Who Deal with Power*, the author studies the phenomena characterized by superhuman power mani-

fested by personalized spirits. Those who tapped or used such sources of power were the shamans. They were individualists, surprisingly open to innovations in ideology and practice. The shaman was most often a man, although a woman past menopause was the strongest, because she "fully understood both sexes." Powers were often inherited in the matriline, but could pass from father to son; they might be sought, or come unbidden and unwanted, for the regimen of a shaman was arduous, and the novitiate a terrifying ordeal. Shamans cured illness by recovering a lost soul, extracting a "disease object," or forcing the confession of a guilty witch. They controlled the weather, brought game to the hunter, and gave public exhibitions of their powers. Some shamans "died" and visited "heaven." While such stories now incorporate obviously Christian elements, visits to other worlds were part of pre-contact beliefs. The shaman always returned with new songs (the medium of power), new rules and amulets for the people, thus starting a modest "prophet movement." McClellan suggests that these influences were more widespread in the northwest than is usually supposed, and that they are not so much associated with times of deprivation as periods of prosperity, a thesis she plans to develop in a future publication.

Witches, fortune-tellers, "animal" intruders into the human body, "Bushmen" who steal girls, "Wealth-Woman" who confers fortunes, and the "Invisible Night-Time Spirits" (objectified terrors of abnormal persons), characterize the world of wonder. While probably no Yukon Indian has consciously systematized all these beliefs, "much of his energy went into learning to cope with the fact [that he] constantly confronted various manifestations of superhuman power."

In Chapter XIX, *Conclusion*, the author modestly disavows any attempt to make a final summary for this book which is "offered as one of the many necessary steps that [she hopes] will lead us to a better understanding of the history of both the coast and the interior of northwestern North America." She

adds that "even if the data in this volume are often meagre and disjointed, [she hopes] they will provide a framework into which [she] and others can fit richer and fuller accounts of northern peoples and so begin to formulate further questions." She again challenges us by posing some of these. For example, instead of attempting to define and locate "tribal groups" on our maps, we should try to discover what criteria the *Indians* use in classifying individuals and groups, and what groupings they recognize. In so doing we must remain constantly aware of the importance which the Indians place on individual self-reliance and distinctiveness. While we are impressed by the fact that the Yukon Indians created a culture which has endured for a very long time, despite a harsh and demanding natural environment, we see that modern contacts have strained it badly. But the Indians' great sensitivity to other peoples and their own extraordinary adaptability to new technologies and ideologies suggest that they will achieve a new integration in the future. These volumes will serve to help them maintain their ties with the past and remember what their old people say.

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