

## THE DAKOTA FRIEND.

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### Dakota Mythological Tradition.

OANKTAYHEE.

It is a fearful matter to speak of the Oanktayhee, but when relating the Bear Story, we promised to do so and now proceed to redeem the promise.

Oanktayhee is the name of one of the superior and independent gods of the Dakotas. It is very seldom that any of the Indians speak his name but when they have occasion to speak of him they call him the TAKU WAKAN. The word *wakan* signifies unnatural, supernatural or anti-natural. Taku, signifies what. The signification of the proper name of the particular god of which I am writing is unknown, unless it signifies *hard to be killed*.

The form of the Oanktayhee, Oankteri, is like that of the ox, and he is covered with a similar coat of hair. His eyes are like the moon in size, and his horns he can instantly extend at his pleasure, so that they will reach the sky. This is also true of his tail. Awful destructive powers—*wakan* powers, are in the horns and tail. There are many of them both male and female, and propagate their kind like animals. The earth is animated by the spirit of the female, while the dwelling place of the male is the water. It is on this account that the Dakotas address their prayers to the earth as their Grandmother, and the water as their Grandfather.

The Oanktayhee has the power to send out from his body many distinct, invisible, supernatural influences, for the destruction of his enemies, which are termed *toanwan* by the Indians. The meaning of the word is similar to that of *arrows* where it sometimes occurs in the Bible, "The *arrows* of the Almighty," "He sent forth his *arrows*," &c.

One *toanwan* is the whirlwind, another a calm, &c. This god is highly pleased with sacrifices of the down of the female of the swan and the goose, dyed red, white cotton, deerskins tanned white, dogs, tobacco, &c. Some of the gods which are subordinate to the Oanktayhee are the lion (it is supposed) serpent, lizard, frog, ghosts, and eagle, which do his bidding in the air, on the earth and in the earth. The Oanktayhee is the mortal enemy of the Wakeenyan, thunder, which is another of the superior gods of the Dakotas, of which I may say something at another time. Dakotas are not decided which of these gods exceeds the other in power. They often kill each other.—Previous to the production of the

earth, all was water, in which element dwelt, the Oanktayhee. The male and female met in council and after due deliberation, resolved to make this earth. To execute this resolution all the amphibious animals were summoned to appear before the god. All having presented themselves the god issued the command, that dirt should be brought from beneath the water by them, and if they failed to obey, death would be the penalty.

The beaver descended, and was long absent, but failed to bring the dirt. A *toanwan* issued forth from the god, and the beaver floated lifeless upon the water. The otter then descended, but his fate was like that of the beaver. One after another descended and perished like those who preceded them. At last the muskrat went down. He was long absent, but eventually returned to the surface nearly exhausted with the effort, bringing some dirt in one hand. (The forward feet of quadrupeds are always called *hands* by the Dakotas.) The Oanktayhee took the dirt which the muskrat had brought, and flattening it out made this earth on which men dwell. The earth being thus made, the god took one of his own offspring and after reducing him to powder scattered the powder broadcast over the earth, and it became little worms like maggots. The god then swept the earth and gathered up the worms which had been produced, and scattering them a second time, they matured to the size and shape of little children, some of whom could stand and others walk a little. He gathered and sowed them the third time, and they became Indians, and commenced various plays and dances. The Oanktayhee then proceeded to institute the much celebrated Medicine or Wakan Dance, of which some new things might be said.

Boastful songs form one of the most prominent features of the religion of the Oanktayhee, which is the chief religion of the Dakotas. These songs are first sung by the god himself, in the hearing of the wakan men, who thus learn to sing them. One of the songs was given to a Dakota, in the manner following:

A Dakota in company with a Sac Indian, with their wives, were passing through Lake Pepin in their canoes. Suddenly there appeared to them two eyes in the water, which appeared like two moons. It was the Taku Wakan, and in another instant they were aground on his back, and unable to get off. They began to deprecate the approaching judgment, and propitiate the god by casting into the water whatever came to their hand, but he remained unmoved by their prayers and sacrifices, until a comb was thrown to him, when he lowered down and the canoe moved off on the water. As they were congratulating

themselves with their escape a *toanwan* suddenly issued from the god—a whirlwind—and the Sac and his wife perished, but the Dakota escaped to the shore with his wife, and sat down among the thick bushes and leaves.

The Dakota man was now reminded that in a former state of existence he had been the companion of the Oanktayhee, and being now under the influence of the god who had appeared in a manner so terrific, his fears subsided, and he heard the god strike four blows upon the drum with a considerable space of time between the blows, as is done in the medicine dance before they commence to sing. The sound produced was like four loud peals of thunder. After which the blows fell lighter and quicker, and the god sang as follows:

Wakan de homniwaye.  
Wakan de homniwaye.  
Tipi de wankahewaye.  
Wakan de homniwaye.  
Tipi de wankahewaye.  
Wakan de homniwaye.

(TRANSLATION.)

I whirled this wakan.  
I whirled this wakan.  
I demolished this teepee.  
I whirled this wakan.  
I demolished this teepee.  
I whirled this wakan.

At the close of the song the man vowed that if the god would spare his life till the next summer, he would sacrifice to him four dogs with their noses and mouths adorned with red down. His wife of course did not hear, for the sounds were not heard with the natural ear. The man was honored with the name of Oanktayhee Duta, Red-Oanktayhee, and this song is still sung in the wakan dance. Another feature in the character of this object of Dakota worship is best exhibited by the following, which is also a song of the Oanktayhee:

Mde hdakinyan wakanyan munka, he ya.  
Mde hdakinyan wakanyan munka, he ya.  
He taku nagi luayeyä niyake wata nunwe, he ya.

Mde hdakinyan wakanyan munke do.  
Niyake wata nunwe, he ya.

(TRANSLATION.)

I lie mysteriously across the lake, he ya.  
I lie mysteriously across the lake, he ya.  
Decoying some soul let me eat him alive, he ya.  
I lie mysteriously across the lake.  
Let me eat him alive, he ya.

This song, it is said, is much used in the medicine or wakan feast.

Thus I have endeavored briefly to delineate the person and character of the most respectable being which the Dakotas worship, of which I have been able to obtain any information. This is the best if not the only foundation of their best religious institutions. Reader contrast the character of the object of your reverence with that of the benighted Dakota—your religious knowledge with his—the basis of your religious hopes with the basis of his religious hopes, and learn to sympathize with, and labor, and pray for, the blinded worshiper of the Oanktayhee.

The sun is a male deity of the Dakotas.

DAKOTA SINGULARITIES.—The Dakotas believe that rheumatism is caused by the medicine or wakan men who operate mysteriously through the medium of claws of birds or beasts, thus infusing the disease into the joints.—Coughs are caused in the same manner through the medium of the down of the swan or goose, and the hair of the buffalo.

The common boil is caused by the sheyaka, water-hen. If one eats the oil bag of the sheyaka, the fowl becomes offended and issues a *toanwan*, invisible arrow, which produces the sore which is called sheyakao. O, is a verb which signifies to wound by shooting. If a boil is exceedingly large, it is believed that it is caused by the swan in the same manner, and for the same reason.

For the Dakota Friend.

#### Ashamed to do Right.

(b) It will doubtless seem strange to many of the boys and girls, who read the above words, that there should be any person in the world, ashamed to do right. But I wish to tell them a few things.

A number of years ago, there lived a little boy in one of the eastern States, who lost his father when he was quite young. But he had a good mother, who loved him very much. She taught him what was right and good. For a while he obeyed her, and was on that account, usually happy. All the neighbors then called him a good boy. But when he grew older, and became acquainted with other boys, who often did wrong; he began to forsake the law of his mother, and did like them. Now, this boy did not love to do wrong at first. He did not love to deceive, use bad words, tell lies, and fight with other children. It made him feel very unhappy to do so. Yet he often did such things because he was afraid his companions would laugh at him for doing differently from them. He knew how to do right, but was ashamed to do it in the presence of the wicked. As he grew up to be a man, this shameful habit grew with him. When invited to drink strong liquor, he was ashamed to refuse.—When he saw other young men idle, he was ashamed to be seen at work. So he used to spend the most of his time in bar-rooms and drinking saloons. His bad ways hastened his mother's death. After she was gone, he went on from bad to worse, much faster than before. He was soon known as a drunken gambler, and a disgrace to the town where he lived. From being ashamed to work, he became too lazy to work. He commenced stealing, and finally was carried to the state's prison.

Such is the sad history of that once good boy. And there has been many others like him. Do you not think, that there are some boys and girls now, who often do what they know to be wrong, not because they love to do so; nor because they are obliged to do it; but, because they are ashamed to do right?

There are old men among the Dakotas, and some young men too; who know, that if they would forsake idleness, gluttony and drunkenness, by becoming industrious, temperate and sober, they might soon, be far more comfortable, respectable and happy. Yet they will not do this, because they are afraid others will laugh at them. They are ashamed to do right. My