PREHISTORIC MAN.

CHAPTER XVI.

NARCOTIC ARTS AND SUPERSTITIONS.

Among the native products of the American continent, there is none which so strikingly distinguishes it as the tobacco-plant, and the purposes to which its leaf is applied; for even could it be proved that the use of it as a narcotic, and the practice of smoking its burning leaf, had originated independently in the Old World, the sacred institution of the peace-pipe must still remain the peculiar characteristic of the Red Indian of America. Its name—derived by some from the Haîtian *tambaku*, and by others from *Tabaco*, a province of Yucatan, where the Spaniards are affirmed to have first met with it,—appears to have been the native term for the pipe, and not for the plant, which was variously called *kohiba*, *petun*, *qutschartai*, *uppówoc*, *apoorke*, and indeed had a different name from almost every ancient and modern tribe and nation. The *tabaco*, or implement originally used by the Indians of Hispaniola for inhaling the smoke of the *kohiba*, or tobacco-plant, is described by Oviedo as a hollow, forked cane like the letter Y, the double ends of which were inserted in the nostrils, while the single end was applied to the burning leaves

of the herb. This, however, was a peculiar insular custom, and a mere local name, though since brought into such universal use as the designation of the plant; while the pipe, which plays so prominent a part among the traces of the most ancient arts and rites of the continent, is now common to every quarter of the globe. Nothing, indeed, more clearly proves the antiquity and universality of the use of tobacco throughout the whole continent of America, than the totally distinct and diverse names by which it is designated in the various languages of the Indian tribes.

So far as we can now infer from the evidence furnished by native arts and relics connected with the use of the tobacco-plant, it seems to have been as familiar to most of the ancient tribes of the North-west, and the aborigines of the Canadian forests, as to those of the American tropics, of which the *Nicotiana tabacum* is believed to be a native. No such remarkable depositories indeed have been found to the north of the great chain of lakes as those disclosed to the explorers of the tumuli of "Mound City," in the Scioto Valley; but even now the tobacco-pipe monopolizes the ingenious art of many of the wild forest-tribes of the continent, and some of their most curious legends and superstitions are connected with the favourite national implement. Among them it retains the dignity of a time-honoured institution, the sacredness of which still survives with much of its ancient force; and to this accordingly the student of America's primeval antiquities is justified in turning, as an important link connecting the present with that ancient past. When referring to the miniature sculptures procured from the mounds of the Ohio and Scioto valleys, Messrs. Squier and Davis remark:—"From the appearance of these relics it is fairly inferable that among the Mound-Builders,

as among the tribes of North American Indians, the practice of smoking was very general, if not universal. The conjecture that it was also more or less interwoven with their civil and religious observances is not without its support. The use of tobacco was known to nearly all the American nations, and the pipe was their grand diplomatist. In making war and in concluding peace it performed an important part. Their deliberations, domestic as well as public, were conducted under its influences; and no treaty was ever made unsignalized by the passage of the calumet. The transfer of the pipe from the lips of one individual to those of another was the token of amity and friendship, a gage of honour with the chivalry of the forest which was seldom violated. In their religious ceremonies it was also introduced with various degrees of solemnity." But it is worthy of note that the form of the mound-pipes is altogether peculiar, and differs essentially from the endless varieties of form and pattern, wrought by Indian ingenuity from the most diverse materials pertaining to the native localities of tribes of the forest and prairie. Some consideration, therefore, of the arts of the modern pipe-sculptor, and of the native customs and traditions associated with the use of tobacco, is necessary, as a means of comparison between the ancient and the modern nations and tribes of the New World. Nor will it be out of place to consider here whether America was indeed the sole originator of the practice of smoking, and consequently how far its introduction into Europe and the Old World at large may be justly reckoned as one of the results of Columbus's adventurous daring.

In the Old World most of the ideas connected with the tobacco-pipe are homely and prosaic enough; and though we associate the chibouk with the poetical reveries of the oriental day-dreamer, and the hookah with

the pleasant fancies of the Anglo-Indian reposing in the shade of his bungalow, nevertheless, its seductive antique mystery, and all its symbolic significance, pertain alone to the New World. The tobacco-pipe, indeed, constitutes the peculiar and most characteristic symbol of America, intimately interwoven with the rites and superstitions, and with the relics of ancient customs and historical traditions of its aborigines. If Europe borrowed from it the first knowledge of its prized narcotic, the gift was received unaccompanied by any of the sacred or peculiar virtues which the Red Indian still attaches to it as the symbol of hospitality and amicable intercourse; and Longfellow, accordingly, with no less poetic vigour than fitness, opens his *Song of Hiawatha* with the institution of "the peace-pipe" by the Great Spirit. The Master of Life descends on the mountains of the prairie, breaks a fragment from the red stone of the quarry, and, fashioning it with curious art into a figured pipe-head, he fills it with the bark of the red willow, chafes the forest into flame with the tempest of his breath, and kindling it, smokes the calumet as a signal to the nations, and the tribes of the ancient aborigines gathering from river, lake, and prairie, assemble at the divine summons, listen to the warnings and promises with which the Great Spirit seeks to guide them; and this done, and the warriors having buried their war-clubs, they smoke their first peace-pipe, and depart:—

> "While the Master of Life, ascending,
> Through the opening of cloud-curtains,
> Through the doorways of the heaven,
> Vanished from before their faces,
> In the smoke that rolled around him,
> The pukwana of the peace-pipe!"

It is no mean triumph of the poet thus to redeem from associations, not only prosaic, but even offensive, a custom which so peculiarly pertains to the usages and

the rites of the American continent from the remotest times of which its historic memorials furnish any trace; and which was no sooner practically introduced to the knowledge of the Old World than that royal pedant, King James, directed against it his world-famous *Counterblast to Tobacco*, describing its use as "a custom loathesome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs, and in the black stinking fume thereof nearest resembling the horrible stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless!" In those, however, as in other passages of his national epic, the American poet has only embodied in forms of modern verse the cherished legends of the New World: placing the opening scene of *Hiawatha* on the heights of the great red pipe-stone quarry of Coteau des Prairies, between the Minnesota and Missouri rivers, in the Far West.

On the summit of the ridge between these two tributaries of the Mississippi rises a bold perpendicular cliff, beautifully marked with distinct horizontal layers of light grey and rose or flesh-coloured quartz. From the base of this a level prairie of about half a mile in width runs parallel to it, and here it is that the famous red pipe-stone is procured, at a depth of from four to five feet from the surface. Numerous traces of ancient and modern excavations indicate the resort of the Indian tribes of many successive generations to the locality. "That this place should have been visited," says Catlin, "for centuries past by all the neighbouring tribes, who have hidden the war-club as they approached it, and stayed the cruelties of the scalping-knife, under the fear of the vengeance of the Great Spirit who overlooks it, will not seem strange or unnatural when their superstitions are known. That such has been the custom there is not a shadow of doubt, and that even so recently as to have been witnessed by

hundreds and thousands of Indians of different tribes now living, and from many of whom I have personally drawn the information; and, as additional and still more conclusive evidence, here are to be seen the *totems* and *arms* of the different tribes who have visited this place for ages past, deeply engraven on the quartz rocks."[1] The enterprising traveller who narrates this, speaks elsewhere of the thousands of inscriptions and paintings observed by him on the neighbouring rocks; while the feeling in which they originate was thus illustrated by an Indian whose portrait he painted when in the Mandan country. "My brother," said the Mandan, "you have made my picture, and I like it much. My friends tell me they can see the eyes move, and it must be very good; it must be partly alive. I am glad it is done, though many of my people are afraid. I am a young man, but my heart is strong. I have jumped on to the Medicine Rock; I have placed my arrow on it, and no Mandan can take it away. The red stone is slippery, but my foot was true; it did not slip. My brother, this pipe which I give to you I brought from a high mountain; it is towards the rising sun. Many were the pipes we brought from thence, and we brought them away in peace. We left our totems on the rocks; we cut them deep in the stones, they are there now. The Great Spirit told all nations to meet there in peace, and all nations hid the war-club and the tomahawk. The Dahcotahs, who are our enemies, are very strong; they have taken up the tomahawk, and the blood of our warriors has run on the rocks. We want to visit our medicines. Our pipes are old and worn out."

The Medicine or Leaping-Rock, here referred to, is a detached column standing between seven and eight feet

[1] *Illustrations of the Manners, etc., of the North American Indians.* By Geo. Catlin. Eighth edition. Vol. ii. p. 167.

from the precipitous cliff; and the leap across this chasm is a daring feat which the young warriors are ambitious of performing. It was pointed out to Catlin by a Sioux chief, whose son had perished in the attempt. A conical mound marked the spot of his sepulture; and though the sanctity of this ancient neutral ground has been invaded, and the powerful nation of the Sioux now refuse to permit other tribes to have access to it, this is of quite recent occurrence. Alike by the evidence of the belief of many independent tribes, the memorials of their presence on the graven rocks, and the numerous excavations, sepulchral mounds, and other earthworks in the vicinity: the Indian tradition receives confirmation, that from time immemorial this has been the sacred neutral ground of all the tribes to the west, and of many of those to the east of the Mississippi, and the place whither they have made their regular pilgrimages to renew their pipes from the rock consecrated by the footprints of the Great Spirit. These marks of his footsteps are pointed out, deeply impressed in the rock, and resembling the track of a large bird! Nor is it without a special interest for us to note a Mandan tradition respecting this sacred spot; for the migrations of that once powerful Indian nation have been traced from the country lying between Cincinnati and Lake Erie, down the valley of the Ohio, over the graves of the ancient Mound-Builders, and thence up the great western branch of the Mississippi, until their utter extinction, chiefly by the frightful ravages of the small-pox in the year 1838, at their latest settlements on the Upper Missouri. The site of their last homes, and the place of their extinction, lies to the north of the Sioux's country, in whose possession the area of the pipe-stone quarries is now vested by the law of the strongest; and they, accordingly, may be considered as the guardians of the traditions of the locality. For, although they have thus

set at defiance its most sacred and universally recognised characteristic, and so slighted the mandate of the Great Spirit, they do not the less strongly hold by the other superstitious ideas associated with the spot.

One of these legends derives its form from some of the peculiar features of the scene. Near the base of the perpendicular cliff, already described, there lies on the level prairie, where the Indian pipe-stone quarries are opened, a group of five large granite boulders disposed in a row. The largest of them is about twenty-five feet in diameter, and the smallest from twelve to fifteen feet. These, as prominent objects on the level plain, have attracted the attention of the superstitious visitors of the spot, and are regarded with awful reverence by the Indians. Two holes under them are the abodes of the guardian spirits of the spot; and Catlin, who not only visited the quarry, but broke off and carried away with him fragments of these sacred boulders, remarks: "As for the poor Indian, his superstitious veneration of them is such, that not a spear of grass is broken or bent by his feet within three or four roods of them, where he stops, and, in humble supplication, by throwing plugs of tobacco to them, solicits permission to dig and carry away the red stone for his pipes." Here, according to the traditions of many independent tribes, not only took place the mysterious birth of the red pipe, but the postdiluvian creation of the human race.

The tradition of the institution of the peace-pipe varies among the different tribes, but its general form is that which Longfellow has embodied in his Indian epic. It is thus narrated by the Sioux of the Mississippi: "Many ages after the red men were made, when all the different tribes were at war, the Great Spirit called them all together at the Red Rocks. He stood on the top of the rocks, and the red nations were assembled in infinite numbers on the

plain below. He took out of the rock a piece of the red stone, and made a large pipe. He smoked it over them all; told them that it was part of their flesh; that though they were at war, they must meet at this place as friends; that it belonged to them all; that they must make their calumets from it, and smoke them to him whenever they wished to appease him or get his goodwill. The smoke from his big pipe rolled over them all, and he disappeared in its cloud. At the last whiff of his pipe a blaze of fire rolled over the rocks and melted their surface. At that moment two Indian maidens passed in a flame under the two medicine rocks, where they remain to this day. The voices of Tsomecostee and Tsomecostewondee, as they are named, are heard at times in answer to the invocations of the suppliants, and they must be propitiated before the pipe-stone is taken away."

An offering of tobacco is almost invariably the propitiatory gift, and it appears to have been used in similar acts of worship and sacrifice from the earliest period of intercourse with Europeans. In the narrative of the voyage of Drake, in 1572, it is noted that the natives brought a little basket made of rushes, and filled with an herb which they called *tobak*. This, which was the tobacco-plant, was regarded by the voyagers as a propitiatory offering; as the writer subsequently notes, they "came now the second time to us, bringing with them, as before had been done, feathers and bags of *tobak* for presents, or rather, indeed, for sacrifices, upon this persuasion that we were gods." In all probability, as already suggested, the practice of smoking originated in the use of the intoxicating fumes for purposes of divination, or other superstitious rites; and the universality of the later use of the plant has not entirely divested it of its sacred character. Harriot, who formed one of the voyagers by whom Virginia was discovered, tells, in his

"Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia," of a plant which has diverse names in the West Indies, according to the several places and countries where it is used. The Spaniards generally call it *tobacco*, but it is there named by the natives *uppówoc*. "This *uppówoc* is of so precious estimation among them, that they think their gods are marvellously delighted therewith, whereupon sometime they make halowed fires, and cast some of the powder therein for a sacrifice. Being in a storme upon the waters, to pacifie their gods they cast some up into the aire; and into the water; so a weare for fish being newly set up, they cast some therein and into the aire; also, after an escape of danger, they cast some into the aire likewise; but all done with strange gestures, stamping, sometime dancing, clapping of hands, holding up of hands, and staring up into the heavens, uttering therewithal and chattering strange words and noises." Such practices and ideas of propitiatory offerings among the more southern Indian tribes of the sixteenth century, abundantly prove that the offerings of tobacco still made by the Sioux to the spirits that haunt the pipe-stone quarry, are of no merely local origin, but were anciently as universal as the peace-pipe itself. Nor were such religious associations with the favourite narcotic confined to the northern continent. Among the Peruvians the cocoa plant took the place of tobacco in this as well as in other respects. Dr. Tschudi states that he found the cocoa still regarded by the Peruvian Indians as something sacred and mysterious. "In all ceremonies, whether religious or warlike, it was introduced for producing smoke at the great offerings, or as the sacrifice itself. During divine worship the priests chewed cocoa-leaves; and, unless they were supplied with them, it was believed that the favour of the gods could not be propitiated." Christianity, after an