

AN AMERICAN TRIBE AND ITS BUFFALO AND AN ASIATIC TRIBE AND ITS FISH.¹

I.

Mr. Ellsworth Huntington, in his "Pulse of Asia"², attaches a good deal of importance to his, what is called, "Bread and Butter Theory" about the spread of mankind in different parts of the world at different times. In fact, that theory may be said to be the cause of many wars, ancient and modern. The physical and intellectual condition of people depends, to a certain extent, upon their environments. This question of environment is associated with the question of the "Heritage of Food" and "Heritage of Dress." Again, these questions are related to the geographic theory of the history of nations. Now, the subject of this brief paper has been suggested to me by the Bulletin, No. 77, of the Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology (pp. 3 et seq.), in which there is an interesting article entitled "Villages of the Algonquian, Siouan and Cadoan Tribes, west of the Mississippi" by Mr. David I. Bushnell. This article reminds us of the above questions of environment and of dress and food. I propose speaking in this paper of an Asiatic tribe similarly affected.

II.

Speaking of the above Mississippi Tribes and their Habitat, our author says: "During the past two or three centuries great changes have taken place in the locations of the tribes which were discovered occupying the region west of the Mississippi by the first Europeans to penetrate the vast wilderness.

¹ This paper was read before the Anthropological Section of the eleventh Indian Science Congress held at Bangalore in January 1924. (Jour. Anthropol. Sty. of Bombay, Vol. XIII No. 5. pp. 433-37.)

² The Pulse of Asia. A Journey in Central Asia, illustrating the Geographic basis of History by Ellsworth Huntington, (1907)

Thus the general movement of many Siouan tribes has been westward, that of some Algonquian groups southward, from their earlier habits, and the Caddoan appear to have gradually gone northward. It resulted in the converging of the tribes in the direction of the great prairies occupied by the vast herds of buffalo which served to attract the Indian. Until the beginning of this tribal movement it would seem that a great region eastward from the base of the Rocky Mountains, the rolling prairie lands, was not the home of any tribes but was solely the range of the buffalo and other wild beasts, which existed in numbers now difficult to conceive."

We thus see that the vast hordes of buffalo have to some extent affected the habitat of tribes. Some of the tribes lived upon, and, as it were, lived in, the buffalo. Our author says :

"With the practical extermination of the buffalo in recent years, and the rapid changes which have taken place in the general appearance of the country, it is difficult to picture it as it was two or more centuries ago. While the country continued to be the home of the native tribes game was abundant, and the buffalo, in prodigious numbers, roamed over the wide region from the Rocky Mountains to near the Atlantic. It is quite evident, and easily conceivable, that wherever that buffalo was to be found it was hunted by the people of the neighbouring villages, principally to serve as food. But the different parts of the animal were made use of for many purposes. In an early Spanish narrative, one prepared nearly four centuries ago, the author refers to the oxen of Quivira and says that they "their master have no other riches nor substance." of them eat, they drink, they apparel, they shooe themselves and of their hides they make many things, as houses, shooes, apparel and ropes : of their bones they make bodkins ; of their sinews and hair, thread : of their hornes, maws, and bladders, vessels : of their dung, fire : and of their calves-skinnes, budgets, wherein they drawe and keepe water. To bee short, they make so many •

things of them as they neede of, or, as many as suffice them in the use of this life. (Gomara, (1) p. 382).

III.

Some Classical writers present a similar example of a tribe, called the Ichthiophagi, living on the south of ancient Gedrosia in the country of modern Mekran.¹ Just as the American tribes lived on the flesh of the buffalo, and dwelt in huts made of their skins, so, the Mekran tribe lived on the flesh of fish, dwelt in huts made of their bones and scales, and dressed themselves in their skins. Strabo thus speaks of this tribe and their country :

“The greater part of the country inhabited by the Ichthyophagi is on a level with the sea. No trees, except palms and a kind of thorn, and the tamarisk, grow there. There is also a scarcity of water and of food produced by cultivation. Both they and their cattle subsist upon fish, and are supplied by rain-water and wells. The flesh of the animals has the smell of fish. Their dwellings are built with the bones of large whales and shells, the ribs furnishing beams and supports, and the jaw-bones, door-ways. The vertebral bones serve as mortars in which fish, which have been previously dried in the sun, are pounded. Of this, with the addition of flour, cakes are made ; for they have grinding mills (for corn), although they have no iron. This however is not so surprising, because it is possible for them to import it from other parts. But how do they hollow out the mills again, when worn away ? with the same stones, they say, with which their arrows and javelins, which are hardened in the fire, are sharpened. Some fish are dressed in ovens, but the greater is eaten raw. The fish are taken in nets made of the bark of the palm.²

¹ For an account of Mekran, *vide* my Gujarati Dnyân Prasârak Essays, Part II, pp. 96-134.

² The Geography of Strabo, Bk. XV, Ch. II, 2. Hamilton and Falconer's Translation (1857), Vol. III, pp. 120-121.

The word Ichthiophagi is Greek and means "fish-eater." According to Arrian, who lived in the second century B. C. and who wrote upon the authority of Greek officers, who accompanied Alexander the Great in his invasion of India and passed through the country of Mekran on their return journey, the tribe was called Ichthiophagi, because they lived on fish. They ate small fish uncooked. They dried large fish and then grinding them prepared bread from the flesh so pounded. There is, owing to want of water, very little cultivation of grain in their country, and what little grain was produced was eaten more as a relish with fish-bread than as staple food.¹ Arrian, further on, says on the authority of Nearchus, the admiral of Alexander, that even the sheep in the country lived upon fish, and so, their mutton also was fishy.² Arrian also refers to their dress being made from the skins of fish.³

Curtius Rufus, a Roman historian of Alexander the Great, who is believed to have lived in the time of Emperor Vespasian (70-79 A. C.), also says, that large whales and other sea-monsters are often driven to the shores of the country and they supply materials for food, dress and dwelling.⁴ Diodorus Siculus⁵ and Plutarch⁶ also refer to the abundance of fish in the country. Strabo⁷ thus refers to the process of collecting the fish: "The Ichthyophagi, on the ebbing of the tide, collect fish, which they cast upon rocks and dry in the sun. When they have well broiled them, the bones are piled in heaps,

¹ Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander and Indica*, (Chap. XXIX), translated by Dr. Chinnock (1893), p. 435.

² *Ibid.*, p. 431, Chap. XXVI.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 429, Chap. XXIV.

⁴ *History of Alexander the Great*, 9th Bk., Chap. X, translated by McCrindle in his "Invasion of India by Alexander the Great," (1890) p. 263.

⁵ *Bibliotheca Historica of Diodorus Seculus*, 18th Bk., Ch. CV. *Vide* McCrindle's above book, p. 298.

⁶ *Plutarch's Life of Alexander*. *Vide* *Plutarch's Lives*, translated by John and William Langhorne (1813), Vol. II, p. 508.

⁷ *The Geography of Strabo*, Bk. XVI, Ch. IV, 13, Hamilton and Falconer's Translation (1857), Vol. III, pp. 198-199.

and the flesh trodden with the feet is made into cakes, which, are again exposed to the sun and used as food. In bad weather, when fish cannot be procured, the bones of which they have made heaps are pounded, made into cakes and eaten, but they suck the fresh bones. Some also live upon the shell-fish, when they are fattened, which is done by throwing them into holes and standing pools of the sea, where they are supplied with small fish, and used as food when other fish are scarce. They have various kinds of places for preserving and feeding fish, from whence they derive their supply. Some of the inhabitants of that part of the coast which is without water go inland every five days, accompanied by all their families, with songs and rejoicings to the watering places, where, throwing themselves on their faces, they drink as beasts until their stomachs are distended like a drum. They then return again to the sea-coast. They dwell in caves or cabins, with roofs consisting of beams and rafters made of the bones and spines of whales, and covered with branches of the olive tree."¹

Arrian² also refers to the fact of their houses being made from the bones of the fish. He says that the length of some bones were 25 fathoms *i.e.*, about 152 ft.³ Curtius Rufus also refers to their houses as made of the bones of fish.⁴ According to Diodorus Siculus, some of the bones which formed beams were 18 cubits in length *i. e.*, about 27 ft. According to him, the big scales of the fish served as tiles of houses.⁵

Firdousi, in his *Shah-nameh*, refers to the gigantic size and strange features of the sea-monsters on this coast of the Arabian

¹ The Geography of Strabo, Bk. XVI, Ch. IV, 13, Hamilton and Falconer's Translation (1857), Vol. III, pp. 198-199.

² Arrian's *Anabases of Alexander and Indica*, Chaps. XXIX, & XXX, Dr. Chinnock's, Translation, pp. 435-36. Vide also, Bk. VI, Chap. XXIII, Dr. Chinnock's Translation, p. 328.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 436, Chap. XXX.

⁴ McCrindle's *Invasion of India by Alexander*, p. 262.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

sea. He represents the army of king Kaikhosru absorbed in wonder on seeing the big fish (shigaft andarûn âb mândeh sepâh)¹. The fish looked big like lions and cows and they fought with each other. Some had the features of men and had long hair (Hamân mardûm va mûihâ chûn kamand).² Some had their face like that of tigers and some looked like the buffalo. The soldiers struck with wonder, showed to each other these big fish and invoked God.

Namûd hamî in badân ân badin.

Hamîn Khândandi Jehân Afrin¹.

We learn from Diodorus Siculus, that the army of Alexander was as much alarmed at the enormous size of the fish as the army of Kaikhosru who lived long before Alexander. Diodorus says on the authority of Nearchus: "But the strangest part of their story was that they had encountered a great many whales and these of an incredible size. They were in great dread of these monsters, and at first gave up all hopes, thinking they might at any moment be consigned—boats and all—to destruction; but on recovering from their panic, they raised a simultaneous shout, which they increased by rattling their arms and sounding the trumpets, the creatures took alarm at the strange noise and sunk to the depths below".³

Mekran, the modern name of the country, also points to the above fact of the country abounding with fish. Mr. Hughes⁴ and Dr. Bellew very properly take the name to be a corruption of Mâhi khurân *i.e.*, fish-eaters.

1 J. A. Vuller's Text, Vol. III, p. 1374, couplet 1987.

2 *Ibid.*, couplet 1989.

3 McCrindle's "Invasion of India by Alexander the Great", p. 300.

4 The Country of Balochistan, by A. W. Hughes, p. 152. Lord Curzon (Persia II, p. 281, note) derives the name from Mokara, a tribe mentioned in a Hindu book as living on the West coast of India.