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DEER'S EARS AND COON'S TAIL

Many and varied are the Indian stories and legends which reach us. And yet, in the very nature of things, it must be true that many of these stories will never be known by the general public. In nearly all of these stories the miraculous, super-natural and mysterious features are exploited, and all teem with faith in an all-powerful creator.

The following is told by Joseph T. Mandy in The North American Indian Weekly:

British Columbia coast Indians have some very whimsical legends concerning peculiar features of animals. In them there is the germ of a story of creation, perhaps even a primitive conception of some form of evolution.

Most of the Kwakiutl-Nootkan legends of this type are connected with Kaanakheelah, a great divine character in the lore of these people. Kaanakheelah may even be classified as the Kwakiutl equivalent of our Creator. It was he who regulated the things of the world and created the creatures of the sea, forest and air.

Several of Kaanakheelah's animal creations were executed as a punishment to people who mistrusted his motives at the time his work was being accomplished around the shores of Vancouver Island.

Word has been carried ahead of the wonder worker of the great things he was doing. Many doubting Thomases and evil-thinking people attached a bad intent to Kaanakheelah's activity and set about preparing a warm reception for him.

At one of the villages Kaanakheelah was soon expected to reach, the chief began the manufacture of very sharp knives from the large mussel shells generally used for this purpose. With these he intended to kill Kaanakheelah. One knife was completed and the chief had nearly finished another when the great divine suddenly appeared before him.

"That is a very nice thing you are making," said Kaanakheelah to the chief. "Why are you making them?"

"To kill the Kaanakheelah," answered the chief. "He is an evil-doer and we expect him here soon."

"They surely will serve your purpose," encouraged the Divine quietly; "they are wonderfully made, you

are very skilled. May I examine them?"

Not suspecting the identity of his visitor the chief pridefully handed over his beautifully fashioned mussel-shell knives. Kaanakheelah examined them with great interest. He seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Yes, this is perfect workmanship," said the Divine at last; "but for a tool of such exquisite curves and symmetry can you not think of some better use than killing?"

"No!" persisted the chief, "that is what they are made for, and even in their very perfection is certain death."

"If that is so, then they will look well on you as ears," retorted Kaanakheelah. With a quick motion he thrust the two shells on the chief's head. "There! You are a deer. Always will your ears inquire of the sounds they hear so that you will follow them to their source. The slightest sound will not escape them. Eternally they will lead you into danger. Even in their very perfection is certain death. You have spoken! I have decreed!"

The deer skipped away to the edge of the forest, its beautiful, sensitive ears fascinated by the tiny and strange sounds heard issuing from the shadows.

Kaanakheelah clapped his hands sharply. Immediately the deer stopped in its tracks and turned its head in the direction of the sound. "Come back here," shouted Kaanakheelah, "you've got no gall!" "I don't need any gall; and don't want any," answered the deer.

"All right then, run away you crazy thing," answered Kaanakheelah. With that the Divine picked up some of the mussel-shell dust that had accumulated from the making of the knives and threw it at the deer. The dust hit the animal on the rump and formed a large white patch.

"There! Now everybody will be able to see you. You're a crazy thing and all people will want to eat you. Danger will always beset you and you will not be wise enough to escape it."

And so, according to this Kwakiutl-Nootkan legend, the deer has always been inquisitive and easy prey.

It was in similar manner that the beaver and raccoon

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