Swan (Honesty) *Story of Porcupine*
by James Teit

This case is taken from a story entitled Story of Porcupine in James Teit, "The Shuswap" in Franz Boas, ed. The Jesup North Pacific Expedition: Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History

A large number of people lived together at one place. Their chief was Swan.

At another place, one long day's journey away and beyond a high range of mountains, lived another band of people, who were sometimes called the Deer People. They consisted of the Deer, Caribou, Moose, Goat, Sheep, and others, and their chief was the Elk.

The two groups of people had been enemies for a long time. Each tried to interfere with the other, and to make their means of procuring a living as difficult as possible. Each people had a different kind of government and lived and worked differently. What one did well, the other did badly. The birds acted in some ways like mammals, and the mammals like birds. The Swan wished to remedy the defects of both parties, and to enable them to live without continual interference. He believed that their troubles all arose from ignorance.

One day in the winter-time, when the snow lay very deep on the mountains, Swan assembled his people, and, after explaining his plans to them, he asked if any one of them would carry his message of invitation to Elk. Whoever would undertake the journey was to receive a large present of dentalia. Coyote volunteered to go, and prepared for the journey by putting on his finest clothes, embroidered moccasins, and all his dentalia and necklaces.

At dusk he left the house, but, not wanting to face the deep snow, he ran around the underground house all night, admiring himself. Coyote was still running in the morning, when the people awoke. The Swan asked him why he had not gone; and Coyote answered, “I was just playing and running around for practice. I will start to-night.”

When evening came, the people saw him leave, and watched him until he was out of sight. Coyote soon found the snow too deep, returned after dark, and lay down underneath the ladder where he fell asleep.

When the people awoke in the morning, they found him fast asleep, and Swan asked him why he had not gone. Coyote answered, “Oh! I was playing, became tired, and lay down to sleep. I will start to-night.” Then Swan asked the people which one of them was best able to undertake the journey, and they all agreed that Porcupine was the fittest person, for he was accustomed to walking in the high mountains where there was much deep snow. Porcupine was selected, and after sewing his moccasins all night, and dressing himself warmly, he left at daybreak. When Coyote saw him leave, he laughed, and said, “When even I could not go, how can such a poor, slow, short-legged creature be able to travel through the deep snow?”

That night Porcupine reached Elk’s house in an exhausted condition, and all covered with ice and snow. After warming himself, he delivered his message to Elk, and asked for sinew and awl with which to sew his moccasins. After he had done so, he left for home, bearing Elk’s reply. Elk promised to visit Swan on the following morning together with all his people.

When Elk and his people arrived, Swan feasted them and when the feast was over, he and all his people knelt down before Elk. Swan told him all he knew

of the affairs of both people and told him in what way he thought they did wrong. Swan gave Elk all his knowledge and all his advice. Then Elk and his people all knelt down before Swan, and Elk gave him all his ideas and knowledge.

Each people gained full knowledge of the other, and together became able to plan doing what was right. After this they lived much easier and happier than before and the methods of one party did not come into conflict with those of the other. The laws made at the council are those which govern animals and birds at the present day. Porcupine got his rich present of dentalia, and was much envied by Coyote.