



Drama: The Acorn-Planter (Annotated): A California Forest Play

Jack London

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ARGUMENT

In the morning of the world, while his tribe makes its camp for the night in a grove, Red Cloud, the first man of men, and the first man of the Nishinam, save in war, sings of the duty of life, which duty is to make life more abundant. The Shaman, or medicine man, sings of foreboding and prophecy. The War Chief, who commands in war, sings that war is the only way to life. This Red Cloud denies, affirming that the way of life is the way of the acornplanter, and that whoso slays one man slays the planter of many acorns. Red Cloud wins the Shaman and the people to his contention.

After the passage of thousands of years, again in the grove appear the Nishinam. In Red Cloud, the War Chief, the Shaman, and the Dew-Woman are repeated the eternal figures of the philosopher, the soldier, the priest, and the woman--types ever realizing themselves afresh in the social adventures of man. Red Cloud recognizes the wrecked explorers as planters and life-makers, and is for treating them with kindness. But the War Chief and the idea of war are dominant. The Shaman joins with the war party, and is privy to the massacre of the explorers.

A hundred years pass, when, on their seasonal migration, the Nishinam camp for the night in the grove. They still live, and the war formula for life seems vindicated, despite the imminence of the superior life-makers, the whites, who are flooding into California from north, south, east, and west--the English, the Americans, the Spaniards, and the Russians. The massacre by the white men follows, and Red Cloud, dying, recognizes the white men as brother acorn-planters, the possessors of the superior life-formula of which he had always been a protagonist.

In the Epilogue, or Apotheosis, occur the celebration of the death of war and the triumph of the acorn-planters.

PROLOGUE

Time. _In the morning of the world._

Scene. _A forest hillside where great trees stand with wide spaces between. A stream flows from a spring that bursts out of the hillside. It is a place of lush ferns and brakes, also, of thickets of such shrubs as inhabit a redwood forest floor. At the left, in the open level space at the foot of the hillside, extending out of sight among the trees, is visible a portion of a Nishinam Indian camp. It is a temporary camp for the night. Small cooking fires smoulder. Standing about are wither-woven baskets for the carrying of supplies and dunnage. Spears and bows and quivers of arrows lie about. Boys drag in dry branches for firewood. Young women fill gourds with water from the stream and proceed about their camp tasks. A number of older women are pounding acorns in stone mortars with stone pestles. An old man and a Shaman, or priest, look expectantly up the hillside. All wear moccasins and are skin-clad, primitive, in their garmenting. Neither iron nor woven cloth occurs in the weapons and gear._

{Shaman}?(Looking up hillside.)?Red Cloud is late.

{Old Man}?(After inspection of hillside.)?He has chased the deer far. He is patient.?In the chase he is patient like an old man.

{Shaman}?(His feet are as fleet as the deer's.

{Old Man}?(Nodding.)?And he is more patient than the deer.

{Shaman}?(Assertively, as if inculcating a lesson.)?He is a mighty chief.

{Old Man}?(Nodding.)?His father was a mighty chief. He is like to his father.

{Shaman}?(More assertively.)?He is his father. It is so spoken. He is his father's father. He is the first

man, the first Red Cloud, ever born, and born again, to chiefship of his people.

{Old Man} It is so spoken.

{Shaman} His father was the Coyote. His mother was the Moon. And he was the first man.

{Old Man} (Repeating.) His father was the Coyote. His mother was the Moon. And he was the first man.

{Shaman} He planted the first acorns, and he is very wise.

{Old Man} (Repeating.) He planted the first acorns, and he is very wise.

(Cries from the women and a turning of faces. Red Cloud appears among his hunters descending the hillside.

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