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An Indian Secret Society.

By the Rev. J. Owen Dorsey.

When the writer visited the Indian Terr. in the winter of 1882-3, he learned of the existence of a secret society of seven degrees among the Osages. He obtained a partial account of it by questioning several of the Indians. A full study of the organization would have required at least a hundred days, a longer period than he was then able to devote to the Osages. He has received pressing invitations from members of the tribe to return and study the question in its details, but the opportunity for such a trip has not yet been found. Consequently the following account is fragmentary, though based on the testimony of members of the secret society.

Though the writer was never initiated, he gained the confidence of the members by ^{telling them what he} ~~his~~ acquaintance ^{with} ~~these~~ dialects and customs of cognate tribes, ~~which he gave to the Osages in exchange for what they told him.~~ He also paid them in cash for their services, though the latter alone would ^{not} have been a sufficient inducement to members of such a wealthy tribe.

The writer was at first doubtful of the value of what he gained from his first Osage informant, who could read and write English, but sundry

undesigned coincidences have been discovered, and he is no longer sceptical. For instance, this society exists not only among the Osages, but also among the Kansas and Ponkas; and there are reasons for inferring that two or more of the Omaha dancing societies are now, or have been, parts of it. For in each tribe there are secret observances for three days and nights followed on the fourth and last day by public exhibitions, which ^{last} even some white men have been allowed to attend. In each tribe do we find that the female dancers or members are tattooed on the forehead and body. In each do we find the mystic names, and the songs which the common people are ~~not~~ ^{not} allowed to sing, ~~not~~ ^{nor} to have explained to them. I had several of these coincidences in mind when I ~~prepared~~ ^{wrote} Omaha Sociology and the student may obtain them by a careful examination of the cross-references in that paper. Reference should also be made to "Indian Personal Names" read at the Ann Arbor meeting of this Association, as well as to "Osage War Customs," published in the Amer. Naturalist for Feb., 1884.

There are seven degrees in the secret society. The 1st. is called "Ni k'ü' wa'ü", Songs of the giving of Life. The others are as follows: Songs of the Bird or Dove, Songs of the Rushes, Songs of the Sacred bag, Songs of the Pack-strap, the sixth whose name is forgotten, and lastly, Songs of the Return from war.

When a woman ~~is~~ ^{is} initiated, she ~~is~~ ^{is} received by the of-

ficiating man of her gens or family, who ~~gave~~^{makes} ~~her four most~~ ^{her take} four sips of water, emblematic of the river flowing by the tree of life.

Cedar twigs, symbolizing the tree of life, ~~are~~ then rubbed between his hands, after which he stroked the woman from head to foot twelve times, that is thrice in the direction of each of the four winds, pronouncing the sacred name of a higher power each time that he rubbed ~~her~~^{her} with the cedar. When the woman belonged ~~to~~^{is} to a gens that camped on the right side of the Osage tribal circle, the officiating priest begins on the right side of her head, thence he goes to her forehead, her left side, and ends with the back. ~~The reverse order was followed~~ When the woman ~~is~~^{is} a member of a gens on the left side of the tribal circle, the priest begins on the left side of her head, thence in reverse order to the back of her head.

Such a candidate ~~is~~^{is} tattooed with two round spots on the forehead among the Osages, but one such spot ~~is given~~^{is given} among the Omahas and Ponkas. These spots referred to the sun.

The woman ~~is~~^{is} also tattooed on her wrists, arms, chest, and back.

The Osages admitted only the middle-aged and aged men and women to the degrees, saying that the young people could not appreciate them. ^{In order} To join this Society, the applicant is obliged to pay as an initiation fee, a dozen horses, two copper kettles, several hogs, and a bountiful supply of beef for a feast, of which all the members partake. What food remains is divided among the members, who take it to their respective homes.

There are twenty-one gentes or families in the Ojage tribe. Each gens has a ^{mythical} tradition of its ~~mythical~~ origin, which is chanted by the old man who acts as its priest or mysterious man. It takes four days and nights to chant the entire tradition of any one gens, hence the traditions of all the gentes would require eighty-four days and nights; and the explanation of them all a much longer period.

Only parts of two of these traditions have been ~~reduced to writing~~ recorded by the writer. Of the first ^{belonging to a Pawnee gens} there are 107 lines, and 63 lines of the second, a bald-eagle sub-gens. These traditions are preserved in the ~~Secret~~ Society, but it was not stated whether three belong to each degree, or whether each of the twenty-one is divided among the seven degrees.

The fragmentary texts ~~which~~ will be published in their original language in the Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, with interlinear translations, critical notes, free English translations, and an introduction to the whole. A few lines of the first tradition are given as a specimen.

- 1 Ciñka wehakiñe: apintau Tsika!
- 2 Ha, wisuñka, ciñka cuiñka waññe, éki añka': apintau Tsika!
- 3 Ciñka cuiñka añkukitse tatse:
- 4 Ha, wisuñka, itanpeñe' tatse:
- 5 Máxe jusakipa wiñtsi étsi hi' naciñ:
- 6 Étsiñtsi níkakika-ñe:
- 7 same as 2
- 8 same as 3

are the pipe and hatchet, symbols of peace and war. A bird is seen, hovering over an arch (perhaps intended for a rainbow), under which are the four upper worlds. These worlds are represented by parallel horizontal lines, each of which, except the lowest one, is supported by two pillars or ladders. The lowest world rests upon a red oak tree.

The journey of the people began at a point below the lowest upper world, on the left side of the chart. Then the people existed in some unknown manner, though without human bodies and souls. They ascended from the lowest upper world to the fourth. There, according to one authority, they obtained human souls in the bodies of birds. Another Osage said that there they met a male red bird to which they applied for aid. He was distinct from the other red bird ^{a female} that gave them human bodies.

^{Body fr. the female; soul fr. the male.} They descended through the upper worlds, and after leaving the lowest they came to this world, alighting on a red oak tree on a beautiful day, when the ground was covered with grass and other kinds of vegetation. Then ~~the path of~~ the people separated. Some of them ~~and~~ marched on the left, being the peace gentes that could not take life of any kind. They subsisted at first on roots, etc., while the war gentes on the right killed animals. By and by, the gentes exchanged commodities.

The small figures on the left ^{of the line of march} on the right when facing the chart) show the heavenly bodies or spirits to whom the Black bear went for help. Those on the right of the line of march (on the left when facing the top of the chart) show similar beings to whom the war gentes

If we disregard the refrain, *apintau Tsita*, which may be translated, "He really said, O Grandfather", and is a sort of an address to the *Wakanta* or higher power, we may translate the rest thus:

- 1 The first of the race
- 2 Was saying, "Ho, younger brother! the children have no bodies. 3 We shall seek bodies for our children.
- 4 Ho, younger brother! you shall attend to it."
- 5 They stood for the first time on the first upper world.
- 6 There they were not human beings.
7. One was saying, "Ho, younger brother! the children have no bodies.
- 8 We must seek bodies for our children."

I found that several of the old men, members of this society, had parts of the accompanying symbolic Chart tattooed on their throats and chests. This chart, or rather a section of a chart, is a fac-simile of one drawn for me by Red Corn of the Hawk sub-gens. At the top we see a tree near a river. This tree is a cedar, and is called the tree of life. It has six roots. Nothing is said about this tree till the speaker nearly reaches the end of the tradition. Then follows what is termed "the ceremony of the cedar." Next is given an account of the river and its branches. Just under the river, at the left, is a large star, the Red or Morning star, next to which are the six stars called the Three Deer. These are followed by the Evening Star, and the Small Star. Under these four are the Pleiades or seven gentes of stars, between the Moon on the left, and the Sun on the right. Beneath these

or Wacá_x applied for assistance. These are unknown to members of the Tsicu or gentes on the left.

The Black bear was the servant or messenger of his elder brothers, the Bird people. He applied for aid to the male star, ~~then to the Female~~, the Sun, the Moon, the Pleiades, the Three Deer, the Morning Star, and the Small Star, without success. At last he came to the Female Red bird who was brooding on her nest. This grandmother or mysterious being granted to the people human bodies which were derived from her own body, saying at the end of her speech, "You shall continue to exist without any ~~cause~~ thing that can destroy your race." After this the Black bear found seven skins of animals, which were used for tents.

Subsequently the people discovered four kinds of rocks: the black, the blue or green, the red, and the white. This differs from the Omaha list of the sacred stones: black, red, yellow, and blue.

It was after finding the rocks, according to Saucy Chief, that four buffaloes approached the people. When the first buffalo arose from rolling on the ground, an ear of red corn, and a red pumpkin fell from his left hind leg. The leader of the Tsicu Wactake noticed it, and asked his younger brother, the chief of the Bald-eagle sub-gens to pick ^{them} up, and taste them. These were pronounced good food for the children. From the left hind leg of the second buffalo dropped an ear of spotted corn and a spotted pumpkin. From the

leg of the third, an ear of dark corn and a dark pumpkin; from the leg of the fourth, an ear of white corn, and a white pumpkin. These were all tasted, and declared good for the children, and so, when a child is named in the Tsicu gens, Saucy Chief says that he, as the head of that gens, takes a grain of each species of corn, and a slice of each variety of pumpkin, ^{and after} chewing them, he passes them between the lips of the infant. Red Corn knew that the four kinds of rocks were found, but he could not say in what part of the tradition the account belonged. He stated that subsequently the Wacace and Tsicu gentes came to the village of the Hañka utapantse, a warlike people, who then dwelt in earth lodges.

The Hañka utapantse subsisted on animals, and bodies of various kinds lay around their village, rendering the air very offensive. Finally, they made peace with the Tsicu and Wacace.

Next comes part of Saucy Chief's account. After the council between the Tsicu, Wacace and Hañka two old men were sent forth to seek a land in which all might dwell. One of these was a Tsicu wactake or Tsicu Peacemaker, the other belonged to the Pañka wactake gens, on the right side of the circle. Each received a pipe and was told to go 7 days without food and drink. He carried a staff to aid him in walking. Thrice a day he wept, at in the morning, at noon, and near sunset. At the end of 7 days they returned to the people, being considerably emaciated. The report of

the Tsicu man was accepted, so that gens is superior to all the gentes in the tribe, including the Pan^xka wa^xtaka or Wa^xtsetei, which ranks next.

A Wa^xace man was crier, and told the people about their new home. All the old men decorated their faces with clay. The next morning, the two who had gone in search of the new home, led their respective sides of the nation, which marched in parallel roads. When they reached the land, the policemen ran around in a circle, just as they did previous to starting for war: the Wa^xace man ran around from right to left, and the Cu^xge man from left to right. At different stations the two leaders addressed the people. Finally, the men took sharp-pointed sticks, which they stuck into the ground, each one saying, "I wish my lodge to be here."

The next day the messenger of the Tsicu old man went to summon the crier of the Elk gens. The latter was told to proclaim as follows to the people: They say that you must remove to-day! Wakanta has made good weather! They say that you must remove to-day to a good land! In those days, the Osages used dogs ~~instead~~ as beasts of burden, as it was before the introduction of horses. When the old Tsicu man spoke, he went into details about every part of the lodge, the fire-place, building materials, utensils, &c.

In the fireplace were placed four sticks, the first pointing to the West. When this was laid down, the Tsicu man spoke of the west wind, and also of a young buffalo bull, repeating the name Wan^xie ska.

On laying down the stick at the N., he spoke of Gray Buffalo horns, i.e., a buffalo bull. He mentioned a large buffalo bull on laying down the stick at the East; and that at the S., was associated with a buffalo cow. At the same time, a similar ceremony was performed by the aged Pawka leader on the right side of the tribal circle. It is probable that he began at the East, as he must use the right hand & foot first. In ~~speaking~~ laying down the stick towards the down-stream or E. wind, he mentioned the Dark Horned Deer. The Deer with Gray Horns was named when the stick was laid down towards the Wind at the Pines or N. Wind. Other deer names were mentioned on laying down the sticks at the West & South. No more of the tradition was obtained.

In the 2d tradition, that of the Bald-eagle subgens, there are four revolutions, gyrations, or circles of upper worlds. In other accounts, as on the right side of the tribe there are seven upper worlds. When the ancestors of the Bald-eagle people reached this earth, they alighted as birds on a pycamore tree, as all of the surrounding country was under water. This water was dried up by the Elk people according to the tradition of that gens; but the claim is disputed by the Kansas or Wind people, who say that their ancestors blew away the water, drying it, and causing the growth of vegetation. Fire was brought down by the Black bear people. As soon as the water had gone, the Bald-eagle people flew to the ground. Then they

met the Black bear, who offered to act as the servant of the Tsicu wactake people. So he was sent to the different heavenly bodies, to obtain human bodies for the people. After ~~gave~~ becoming human beings the people continued their journey. First they met Young Hañka, the ancestor of agens, then Real Hañka after whom another gens is named. On reaching the village of the Hañka utadantse, they made peace with the inhabitants, after several failures. Then the leader of the Hañka utadantse said, "Some people have come to us. Let us make them our chiefs."

So the two peace-makers were made chiefs, and were sent to ~~search~~ ^{find} a land in which all might dwell, as the village of the Hañka ut. was filthy and offensive. This council was the first one of the whole nation. (Consolidation) The two chiefs went out as mourners for seven days. The Hañka or Ponka chief returned first, but the council decided to occupy the land found by the Tsicu chief. Four standards were made by members of the Wacace gens, two for each side of the tribe. These were the standards made of the skins of geese, and they were carried on the hunting road as well as on the war path. But the otter skin standards were always retained by the Wacace gens.

In this latter tradition, the appeals to the heavenly beings and the female red bird were made before the journey to the four revolutions of upper worlds. After the council respecting the new home, followed the account of the female beaver, who was the ancestor of the Osages according to an account published in

Long's Exp. to the Rocky Mts. Unfortunately all
that was obtained by ^{the present writer} me was a line and two words
of another line making an abrupt
ending for the Bald Eagle tradition.

Remarks. 1. Could not have been taught them
by the Jesuit missionaries.

(2) Symbolic. Wawik^xeskaiye

(3) Love of the children.

Speech of the Hañka ut. leader:

"Ho! some persons have come. Ixiu and
Wateetsi have come." They thought of what was
good for the children. They decided that two
should continue as chiefs for the children. They
decided that two should continue without any
thing which might be fatal to the children.
And they said, "There shall be an assembly of the
children. You two shall seek a land in which
the children may become men" The two arranged
for the location of the land in which the children
might become men.

Even the names of gentes, sub-gentes, and phratries, as well as their taboos, and personal names of men, women, and children, are objects of reverence as connected with the secret society. None of these names are ever mentioned in a profane manner, and Indians of several tribes were at first averse to communicating them to the author, who was obliged to proceed very cautiously in order to obtain them. (2) On observing that he had an inkling of the matter, a Kansas man told him part of the tradition of his people explaining the origin of the names and taboos of several Kansas gentes. The ancestors of these gentes were said to be birds that came down from an upper world. The phratries called "wáiyū" mī'dūn," or "Sing together," referring to sacred songs, point to this secret society among the Kansas. As one phratry is composed of the Haŋga taŋga and the Haŋga jīŋga, who have the exclusive right to sing the war songs, further investigation may show that these songs, which, with their pictographs, are also used by the Osages, are equivalent to those of the seventh degree in the Osage society. See the author's paper in the American Naturalist of 1885, entitled "Kansas Mourning and War Customs," with which was published a part of the pictographic chart mentioned above.



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