



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

SOME CHITIMACHA MYTHS AND BELIEFS.¹

BY JOHN R. SWANTON.

WHEN Louisiana was settled by the French, the Chitimacha Indians were found living between the Mississippi River and Bayou Teche. There were several bands occupying different parts of this area, but the last to maintain a separate existence was that in the Indian Bend of Bayou Teche, where is now the village of Charenton. About a dozen families of mixed-bloods are still to be found there. One industry, the making of cane baskets, is kept up; and for this the tribe is justly famous, their work being vastly superior to that of any other Southern Indians. Unfortunately but four individuals have a speaking knowledge of the old tongue; and, still more unfortunately, only a very few texts may be obtained from these, the greater part of the features of the language being accessible only by a painful system of cross-questioning, which must be in large measure blind. During a recent visit to these Indians, and while securing additional linguistic information in this way, I obtained fragments of a few myths. These are of interest, owing to the very paucity of Chitimacha material, and also because most of them are different from the stories I have obtained from other Southern tribes. The European connection of some, if not all, of them, is apparent; but I shall not attempt any classification. The only other Chitimacha myths with which I am acquainted are those recorded by me and printed in Bulletin 43 of the publications of the Bureau of American Ethnology, and some fragments secured through Martin Duralde and published in the same place. My new fragments are as follows:—

BUZZARD AND WOLF.

Buzzard once went to Wolf and persuaded him to kill a cow, so that both could have something to eat. Wolf did so, and he drank the animal's blood on the spot; but he does not like raw meat, so he left his share to soften. While he was gone, however, Buzzard, who eats flesh in any condition, devoured not only his own portion, but Wolf's as well; and when Wolf came back, there was nothing left.

MAN, BEAR, AND TIGER-CAT.²

An old Indian used to spend all of his time hunting, and there was a Bear that also spent all of his time rambling about in the woods.

¹ Published by permission of the Smithsonian Institution.

² It is claimed that the tiger-cat is bigger than the panther. See Bolte und Polfvka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, 2 : 96.

One time the Indian shot a Tiger-Cat. Then the Tiger-Cat went to the Bear, and said, "You do not know how an Indian can knock you over." — "I should like to see the creature that can knock me over," said Bear. "He can do it, all right," said Tiger-Cat. Then Bear said he would like very much to meet this being, and Tiger-Cat agreed to guide him to the Indian. They travelled on, and by and by came to where a child was playing. Bear wanted to run upon it; but Tiger-Cat laughed at him, and said, "Do you think that is a man? We have not found a man yet." So they went on, and presently they came to a youth bringing in fire-wood. Bear wanted to run upon him also; but Tiger-Cat said, "That is not a man, either." At last, however, they came in sight of the old Indian. Then Tiger-Cat said, "While you run in upon him, I will hide here; and if you run away, don't pass near me." Bear assured him he would not, and then he rushed at the Indian. The Indian was too quick for him, however, and shot him; whereupon he turned about, and ran off as fast as he could go, in his haste passing right by the place where Tiger-Cat was concealed. Then the Indian caught sight of Tiger-Cat, and shot him too, so that both of the animals rushed off through the woods with the utmost speed. Said Tiger-Cat, "Didn't I tell you not to run near my hiding-place?"

THE LABORS OF RABBIT.

One time Rabbit went to God and asked him for more power; but God said, "You have power enough already," and to prove it he set Rabbit various tasks. One of these was to bring him the canine teeth of Alligator. So Rabbit hunted about until he found Alligator. Alligator was awake, however, and told Rabbit that he would devour him. Rabbit said that he could not do it, and they disputed for some time. By and by, however, Rabbit went away; and when he came upon Alligator next time, Alligator was fast asleep. Then Rabbit took a cord and tied Alligator's great canine teeth firmly to a tree. That done, he set the grass on fire all about. Alligator began to feel the heat, woke up suddenly, and gave such a jerk that he pulled his teeth out, which Rabbit took back to God.¹

For a second task God sent Rabbit to bring one of the tusks of Elephant. So Rabbit went to a place near Elephant's home and began cutting hay. Elephant came along, and asked what he was doing; and Rabbit said, "I am cutting hay, and, if you will take it home, I will go shares with you." Elephant thought this was a good bargain, so he agreed and let Rabbit pile the hay upon his back. Then Rabbit tied a rope to one of Elephant's tusks, in order, as he said, to lead him, and they started along. Presently a rain came up; and Rabbit said, "Let us go in under that live-oak tree yonder, so

¹ Compare Harris, *Nights with Uncle Remus*, No. XXVI.

that we can keep dry!" When they got there, he tied the rope with which he was leading Elephant securely to a limb. Then, unnoticed by Elephant, he set fire to the hay which the latter was carrying. Of a sudden Elephant began to feel the burning: he sprang quickly to one side to get out from under the hay, and his tusk was broken off. "Give this to me," said Rabbit. "Why, what do you want of it? Still, as it isn't of any more use to me, you may have it." So Rabbit seized it and went back to God.

Again, God sent Rabbit to bring Rattlesnake to him. Rabbit took a stick and hunted about until he found Rattlesnake lying asleep, and he laid the stick down beside him. Forthwith Rattlesnake woke up, and said, "Why do you do that?" — "I want to see how long you are," answered Rabbit, and he began to measure him. Presently Rabbit said, "Let me tie you to the stick." Rattlesnake refused at first; but Rabbit said, "I must tie you in order to get your measure, because you are so crooked." Finally Rattlesnake let him have his way; and Rabbit tied him firmly to the stick, and carried him back to God.

After Rabbit had performed the last of his tasks, of which there were many more than my informant could remember, God said, "You see that you are clever enough, and do not need any more power."

THE ORIGIN OF DEATH.¹

Anciently there was no death in the world; but finally a man fell sick, and the people sent Rabbit to God to inquire whether he would die. God said, "No, he will not die, he will get well." Rabbit started back with this answer; but in his haste he stumbled and fell on his face, and in doing so split his nose in the manner in which it is seen to this day. And unfortunately this caused him to forget the message he had received, so he retraced his steps and asked the question over again. This time, however, God was angry at being disturbed a second time, and he said, "Tell them he will have to die." Since then there has been death on earth.

THE PUNISHMENT OF RABBIT.

Rabbit fooled the people so much, that finally they wanted to kill him. So he said to them, "All right, then, since I have to stay somewhere, I will go to live with God." When God saw him, however, he said, "Go back! your place is in the brush and weeds." But when Rabbit got back to the place where men were living, he told them that God had said their place was to be in the brush and weeds. The Indians, therefore, all went in among the brush and weeds; and that is how they came to have their homes there. Finally, however, God

¹ Leonhard Schultze, *Aus Namaland und Kalahari*, p. 448; W. H. I. Bleek, *Reynard the Fox in South Africa*, p. 69; O. Dähnhardt, *Natursagen* 3 : 22.

heard of the new deception Rabbit had practised; and he punished him by depriving him of speech and sending him also into the brush and weeds, where he had told him his place was to be.

COMMENTS.

The last of the three tasks recorded in the story of "The Labors of Rabbit" I have taken down before, as have other students; and the motive for these tasks, proof of Rabbit's all-sufficient cleverness, recurs frequently. This is, however, so far as I can remember, the first time in which several tasks have been mentioned; i.e., it is the first time that the "labors of Hercules" idea has been found grafted on this story. All Louisiana Indians have much to say of Elephant, who is inconsistently represented as a man-eater. It is probable that the name has been associated with a monster which played a great part in true Indian stories, but the two have been almost inextricably confounded. The bear mentioned in stories is said not to be the common black bear, but a brown bear found more often toward Texas.

A more truly Indian story of the origin of death was given by the same informant, and is incorporated into Bulletin 43 (see p. 358).

ADDITIONAL NOTES.

A few additional notes regarding Chitimacha beliefs and medical practices may be given.

The Chitimacha thought that if in youth a man killed a lizard, when he grew up he would get lost in the woods. Anciently one of the professional doctors or shamans called *Hēkx-atxkô'n*, and his entire family, turned into bears, and for this reason a doctor could not eat bear-meat without becoming sick.

It was believed that if one took a sharp splinter obtained from a cypress that had been struck by lightning, and with it drew blood by cutting about a decayed tooth which was causing trouble, the tooth would come out of itself in pieces. All of the old doctors kept such splinters, but not in their houses, lest lightning be drawn to them. Sometimes they used them in bleeding a person. If such a splinter were in a person's body, it would not heal; and I suppose that they were made use of in witchcraft, but of this I am not sure. It is to be noted that the Natchez had somewhat similar ideas regarding trees that had been struck by lightning. There was also a vine called "toothache medicine" or "toothache grass" (*i tékxnic po*) which was used for an ulcerated tooth. It has a white flower, and, when taken into the mouth, burns like pepper. *Kimükun atxki'n* was the name of a plant used to heal sores. The bark was mashed up and laid upon the sore. The leaves of two distinct kinds of sumac

were smoked, one commonly, mixed with tobacco, the other by those practising witchcraft. The former was called *kacū'* or *baçuklâ*; the latter, *kiteka'ñk cuc*. The bark of this last is rougher than that of the other.

There are a few plants, besides, for which I have only the native names and the uses. Such were the *nă'xte po* ("striking medicine or plant"), used when one had been struck by lightning; *wa'p'tin po* ("knife medicine"), used to cure knife-wounds; *tuská'n katsí' po*, used when one ran a nail into his foot; *kq'na po* ("eye medicine"); *mo'xmoxman*, a bitter herb, like quinine in taste, and good for fevers, such as malaria; *pō'xkô'ñk*, used as an emetic; *cump*, formerly employed in yellow-fever. Still another medicine was called *tcō'ta'kopu'*, which seems to contain the word *tcō'ta* ("crawfish"). It has a red flower, and a root like that of an onion. Plants that will counteract the poison of snakes are said to be identified by following a king snake after it has had an encounter with a venomous serpent. It is claimed that it will go to a particular plant after having been stung by a copper-head, another after having been stung by a water-moccasin, and so for the other poisonous serpents, including the several varieties of rattlesnake. My informant claimed that both ash and cane were poisonous to a rattlesnake, and that if cane were run through any part of a rattlesnake's body, it seemed to paralyze the whole.

BUREAU OF AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY,
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION,
WASHINGTON, D.C.