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Caddo Customs of Childhood

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CADDO CUSTOMS OF CHILDHOOD.

THE following brief and imperfect notes on Caddo customs of childhood were obtained from an old man named White-Bread.

The lodge is always placed so that it faces the east. This is done that the sun, as it arises out of the east to shine upon another day and bless all things, may bless the inmates of the lodge. When a child is born it is carried to the door of the lodge and held there as the sun rises that it may see the child and bless it. Then, if the child be a boy, the father places a tiny bow and arrow in his hands that it may grow to a good hunter and ward off dangers. Before the child is born a bright fire is kindled and kept burning for ten days and nights after the birth to keep away evil. There is a great animal with wings who eats human beings, especially babies, but the animal cannot come near the light. A greater monster than this is the cannibal person. In every tribe there are some of these wicked people. They look like any one else, but at night, when it is dark, they set forth and steal human children to eat. Like the animal who eats human beings, they cannot go near the light, and so people keep the fire kindled to frighten them away. Then, too, the fire is related to the sun, because it gives heat and light, and so it gives a blessing to the child.

At the end of the tenth day the mother and father carry the child to the river, and all bathe. After that the fire is allowed to smoulder, but it is not put out entirely until after the child is two years old. From that time until the child is eight or ten it is allowed to play and grow in its own way. Then the grandmother, or some old person, calls the child into the lodge and, telling it to sit still and behave, she teaches it. If the child is a boy, she tells him how to take care of himself so that he will grow up to be a strong man. She tells him how to act that he will gain the good will of the tribe, and she tells him stories about boys who would not listen to the teachings of their grandmothers, and the trouble that they caused when they grew to be men. And she tells him about boys who have listened to their grandmothers, and how they grew up to be great and wonderful men. Then she tells the boy to go to the river every morning to swim and bathe, no matter how cold the water is. He is taught to say this prayer to the water: "Grandfather, make me strong to endure all things, that heat and cold, rain and snow may be as nothing to my body." As he returns to the lodge he is taught to pick up a stick and carry it to the fire, saying: "Grandfather, help me to live and become a good man, and to help others to live." To the rising sun he is taught to pray:

“Grandfather, protect me, keep me from dangers and give me a long life and success.”

At another time the boy is taught that there are many bad and dangerous places on the road leading to the spirit-land, and that he will be caught in some of these places if he does not heed what is taught him. She says, “There are six bad places on the way to the spirit-land. The first place is where the dogs stay. If you whip or mistreat or kill a dog, the dog, when it dies, goes to its people and tells what you have done. When you die, you have to pass the place of the dogs, and the chief of the dogs goes and sits by the road and waits for you. When you come he tells you to look for fleas on his head, and when you find one he tells you to bite it. When you bite it, you become a dog. Then he takes you to where the dogs stay, and there they mistreat you as you mistreated them on earth. They keep you there and never let you get away, so that you cannot continue your journey. For this reason we place a bead on the little finger of a dead person, so that he may bite it instead of the flea and so fool the dog and escape him. Along the road there is another place where you hear some one calling you. If you form the habit during life of standing about talking about people, you will turn your head and wait for the person who is calling. Then you will stand and say mean things about some one until you forget that you are going on a journey and become a tree by the roadside. If you learn to go through life attending to your own affairs, you will not pay any attention to the voice, but go straight ahead. Soon you will come to a place where there are two large rocks pounding each other. You will have to pass between these rocks. If you listen well to all that you are told, and remember that you were told about the rocks, you can pass through. If you forget what you have been told, you will be crushed by the pounding rocks. Next you will come to a stream of water that looks very small; but it is not small, for the banks stretch away, and it becomes a great river. If you are quick to do all that you are told in this world, you will reach the stream when the banks are close together and you can jump across; but if you are slow to do what you have to do on this earth, you will reach the river after the banks have spread and you will be too late to jump across, but will fall into the water and become a fish. As you journey on the other side of the river, should you get across, you will come to persimmon-trees. If in this world you want everything you see and always try to get things that you do not need, just because some one else has them, you will stop under a tree to gather persimmons. Then you will wander to the next tree and the next, until you lose your way and forget that you are on a journey. Then you will become a raccoon and live forever among the trees. Should you escape the per-

simmon-trees, you will soon meet a person along the road. He will ask you to help him to do some work. If you are forgetful in life and begin one thing and do not finish it, but go off about something else, you will forget that you are on a journey and you will stop and help this man. You will work until you are nothing but skin and bone. Then you will die, but you will soon come to life only to work yourself to death again. Then you will come to life again, and so on. There is no end. This is the last danger that you meet on the way."

After the boy has been taught about all the dangers that beset him on the way, and entreated to follow closely the teaching of his elders that he may escape those evils, he is taught what is in store for him when at last he reaches the end of his journey. All this is done to encourage him to lead a good life and grow up to be a good man.

George A. Dorsey.