

## NOTES FROM INFORMATION ON CEREMONIES OF MOTHER CORN\*

Patrick Star is the custodian of the *Awahu* village bundle of the Arikara. This is the Sacred Bundle which was opened on the occasion of Mother Corn ceremonies in July, wherefore Star was the master of ceremonies on that occasion, and as I, representing the Museum, had asked for the ceremony and provided the required offerings, he was bound according to custom, to give me instruction in the meaning of the ceremony when I asked. This was all understood and agreed upon in the meeting at the Holy Lodge at the time of the ceremonies. It was understood at that time that I would return in August and he would then give me the instructions. Meantime he had in some way become displeased with the distribution of the gifts made in connection with the ceremony, a matter which lay altogether among themselves, and for which I was not responsible. So, on account on his displeasure, he balked in the matter of giving me instruction when I returned to receive it.

In this awkward situation, I followed ancient custom and "carried the pipe" to Star. This is an ancient ceremony to which recourse is had in order to reconcile a person who is estranged, or to persuade or, in a sense, to compel one who is reluctant to fulfill a duty, or to yield a point in controversy. Ordinarily a man thus approached will not dare to "walk over the pipe." He will consider very seriously before refusing the request of the one who comes to him "bearing the pipe." As an instance of the practical working of this custom, I might mention a case, which occurred a few years ago. A man named Enemy-heart had become embittered because of gossip concerning a member of his family. Because of this Enemy-heart withdrew himself from meeting with the people in community gatherings and would have no part in any public concerns. Many people were grieved at this state of affairs, and certain ones decided to "carry the pipe" to Enemy-heart to set his heart and mind right again with the people and to bring him again into accord and participation in tribal and neighborhood affairs. So the pipe was presented to him in the formal way according to custom. But, he felt so bitterly that he was unwilling to accept this peace offering, and so did not take it up. On his way home from the place where this occurred he fainted and was found unconscious

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\* Patrick Star, informant, Albert Simpson, interpreter. August 27, 1924.

by someone who was passing that way. This person picked him up and revived him, and then helped him home. But just as he reached home he again fell in a faint. When he again recovered consciousness and was able to go about he was frightened and subdued, and expressed the wish to set himself right for the insult he had offered the pipe in refusing to accept it when offered. So he reported to the custodian of a Sacred Bundle and made an offering and stood all day before the Sacred Bundle fasting and praying and crying for his fault and vowing to be reconciled to the people. He recovered his usual health and spirits and thereafter took part again with the people in all neighborhood affairs as he had been used to doing.

So now in this difficulty with Patrick Star I “carried the pipe” to him. I provided myself with a regulation catlinite red pipe with ash stem, together with a quantity of the sacred tobacco (*Nicotiana quadrivalvis*) mixed with dried leaves of bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), and dried inner bark of the red dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*). I also took along the provisions for a dinner. Taking with me these required things, and with Albert Simpson as interpreter, I went to Star’s house. He and Simpson went inside, and after a few minutes, I entered, carrying in my hands the pipe, already filled with the mixture for smoking. I approached him and laid down the pipe before him in the prescribed way, the bowl in my right hand and the stem in my left, was laid on the floor before him with the bowl at his left hand and mouthpiece at his right. He gravely regarded me and the pipe, not saying a word for some time. Then he asked in the prescribed way what this was for, and in the customary way, I replied, giving the reason and purpose of the action. He sat a while silent, considering the matter. Then he reached out his hand and took up the pipe. He lighted it and made the usual smoke-offerings, and then we all smoked together. When the pipe was smoked out, he emptied and cleaned it in the accustomed manner and laid it aside. Then he spoke of the difficulty, which had arisen, and said that nevertheless he was now prepared and willing to carry out his agreement to instruct me.

I neglected to say before that I had brought along an old man of the name of Plenty-Fox, as my second. Plenty-Fox made a speech exhorting Star to go on with the teaching as he had already promised to do. He said, “The Sacred Bundle is the thing which binds the people together. It did so in the ancient time, and it does so now. The people depended upon the keeper of the Sacred Bundle for light and for

leadership. By its light and under its leadership the people walked in the right way, and they were strong. They were not weak and ailing. In the ancient days, the keepers of the Sacred Bundles were zealous in imparting the teachings to those who earnestly sought them, and the people were faithful to the teaching. Then they were strong and of good heart and in good health. And so, should it be with us now. You must not allow bitter feelings from any misunderstanding to cause you to walk apart from the people. The people look to you to carry out the agreement with *Pahok* to teach him the mysteries of Mother Corn as he has asked, and as he has made the necessary offerings according to the ancient custom. He has done his part, and now you must not fail on your part to pass on the teaching so that Mother Corn shall be duly honored.”

Then Star began the story of Mother Corn. He said: “After the Creator, the Chief Above, had placed human beings upon the earth they multiplied in numbers, and they become proud and arrogant and disobedient to the will of the Chief Above. The demoralization and great wickedness and hardness of heart of the people, their injustice and violence toward each other, and their impiety and irreverence for all good things greatly grieved the Chief Above, and he considered how he might provide some way to lead the people aright and bring them to better ways of living. As he thought on these things he rubbed his hands on his sides and out of his mouth came a grain of corn. He rubbed the grain of corn in his hands with earth and it became an ear of corn. Then he breathed his breath upon the ear of corn and it took the form of a woman. Because of this we call corn Mother. You know yourself that there is a milk in the grains of corn. In other particulars also corn is like a woman. Because of these likenesses we regard corn as a woman and call her Mother Corn.

After Mother Corn appeared in the person of a woman, the Chief Above directed her to press upon her sides above the ribs as he had done. When she did so there issued from her mouth six kinds of seeds. These seeds were beans of three kinds, white beans, black beans, and spotted beans; one kind of squash and one kind of pumpkin. The sixth kind of seed, which came, was tobacco of the kind which our people have cultivated ever since, and which they still cultivate. You know that it is different from the kind, which is sold in the stores of the white men nowadays. This tobacco, which came from Mother Corn, is the kind,

which must be used in making smoke for all ceremonies.

When Mother Corn had done as she was directed by the Chief Above, and these different kinds of seeds, the beans, squash, pumpkin and tobacco had been produced, she asked what she should do with them. So then the Chief Above instructed her how they should be planted. He said, "Thus you shall plant the corn. First, you shall make a mound of earth formed like a human dwelling (the earthlodge of the Arikara and Pawnee). You shall make the soil of this mound very fine by working it with the hands. You shall first place four grains of corn in the mound in the position of the four main posts of a house, and one grain in the center of the mound in the place corresponding to the fireplace in a house, then five more grains circled about the outer rim of the mound like the outer circle of posts in the structure of an earthlodge. Then in the four spaces between each two of the first four grains, which are placed like the four posts of an earth lodge, you shall plant two beans, so that in all there shall be ten grains of corn and eight beans planted in the mound." Then Star indicated on the ground a diagram of a mound planted with corn and beans. In profile, the mound would be like "a"; the position of the seeds is shown in "b". (picture shown) The mounds in which pumpkins and squashes are planted were made between the rows of mounds where corn and beans are planted. In order to hasten the growth of the squashes and pumpkins, the direction was given that sods should be cut from the prairie and brought into the lodge where they could be kept warm. Here they were inverted and the soil was made fine in the center of each sod. In this bed the pumpkin or squash seeds were placed, and kept warm and moist until they began to sprout. Then the sods, containing the germinating seeds, were taken out to the field and set in the mounds prepared for them. Thus was the teaching given at the beginning for the planting of the corn, the beans, and the squashes and pumpkins."

"It is said that in the beginning the different varieties of corn were one white soft corn (flour corn), one white hard corn (flint corn), one variegated soft corn (flour corn), one blue hard corn (flint corn), one blue soft corn (flour corn), and one blue-black soft corn (flour corn)."

"We know that all these wonderful gifts have come to use from Above. You know that when a child is born it is delicate and helpless, and that it must be nourished and nurtured and brought up with love and tender care and watchfulness, and must be guarded and set in the right way. Mother Corn taught us

that we are to be likewise careful for our crops.”

“So this is the way in which the wonderful gifts of corn and our other cultivated crops came to us Arikara. You can understand that no human being could have produced the corn, but it was a divine gift to us. This is something, which I wish to impress strongly upon your mind. It is by the favor of the Chief Above that these great gifts came to us through the mediation of Mother Corn.”

At the west side of Star’s room there hung on the wall an ear of white flour corn, Mother Corn, dressed like a woman, much as a crucifix is hung on the wall of a Christian’s room. Two Sacred Bundles which are in Star’s custody, also hung on the west wall, one on each side of Mother Corn, together with gourd rattles and braids of sweetgrass.