

## The Lesson of the Spring

By Priscilla Leonard

This is the lesson of the Spring,  
That all things change, that all things grow,  
That out of Death's most frozen woe  
Come life and joy and blossoming;  
That all things open and unfold  
Toward the new, from out the old,  
Till loss has gain for following;  
That Life, renewing out of Death,  
Onward forever traveleth  
Toward its divine perfectioning—  
This is the lesson of the Spring.



## Glimpses of Indian Child Life<sup>1</sup>

By Alice C. Fletcher

A generation ago the Indian child was born into a society of fixed forms, which, from his cradle to his grave, controlled his name, abode, avocations, and religious rites. Many of these forms are losing their ancient authority, but they are by no means obsolete, and the child of to-day is still more or less under their influence.

The first home of an Indian baby is his mother's arms; when he is not nestling close to her he is in his snug little cradle, out of which he cannot fall, and in which he can go wherever she goes, even on long horseback journeys, securely hung from her saddle-bow.

These cradles are familiar objects in our museums, and are popularly regarded as a savage contrivance for disposing of restless little ones, but the fact is that the baby's comfort and safety are the first object in their construction, and very securely and cozily he lies in these little nests. Different tribes have each their own style of cradle, but the general plan is the same. They are made in a conventional series suited to the changing growth and increasing strength of the child; that for the very youngest is made with the softest of skins, and the baby is wrapped in the finest clothing its parents can afford.

It is a mistaken notion that the child is kept tied up all the time. Every day the baby is bathed and placed on a robe or blanket near the fire, to kick and crow to his heart's content; but when family cares call away the mother, he is put into the cradle, with his arms free to play with the many bright beads that hang from the hoop that circles the head of his little portable bed. If he is sleepy, his arms are bound inside, and he is hung up or laid in some safe place to have his nap out. There are many good points to the Indian cradle, and many accidents that are common with us are avoided by its use.

It is not true that Indian babies do not cry; they do, most lustily; and Indian fathers and mothers are as willing to divert or walk with the baby to quiet it as are parents of our own race. There are no lullaby songs, as far as I can learn, but a strange weird noise is made by both men and women to soothe the child to sleep—a sound like the sighing of the winds through the pines, very sleep-compelling, as I have often found it when, lying in my hammock, I have listened to the old folk as they rocked the little ones in their arms.

If a child is very fretful and will not cease its wailing, then one who understands the language of babies is sent for, that the infant may tell what troubles it. Sometimes it is said that the child's name is not satisfactory, and then a new one is given.

Each gens in a tribe has its own distinct set of names. Among the Omahas one is bestowed upon the child at its birth and retained throughout life; women never have a second name, although men often take additional ones later in life, which are commemorative of some act or event. By the Indian's name—which always refers to some mythical being—a mysterious relationship is established with the special mythic being which dominates his gens and binds its people together in supernatural kinship.

In some tribes there are series of names, as, for instance, Konukaw, the Winnebago name for the first born, if a son; and Henukaw, if a girl. Among the Sioux, Winona designates the daughter first born. The second, third, etc., son and daughter have their particular names. Later, at maturity, another, belonging to the gens, is given with appropriate ceremony, to describe the elaborate details of which is at this time impossible. It is a custom not to duplicate names in a tribe, so that while an Indian is living his name will not be given to any child.

Indian names when translated into English lose their significance and take on a ridiculous form. Indian languages require a prefix or a suffix to a noun, which answers somewhat the purpose of our adjective; so we hear of "Standing Bear" and "Sitting Bull." Indian names should not be translated any more than our own. I recall an instance where, the Indians insisting upon the translation of the English name Hamson, it became in Indian vernacular The Son of a Leg of a Pig!

It is common in many tribes for the members of each gens to abstain from eating or touching some one particular thing that is representative of their mythic chief; for instance, in one of the Buffalo gentes of the Omahas, no one may touch the buffalo's head. The little child of this gens is taught from his earliest years that he must never use a spoon made from the buffalo horn, and that any disobedience will be followed by disease and lifelong suffering. A good old man, an elder in the church, called my attention to the peculiar mottled appearance of his hands, and told me that the white spots were caused by his once wearing, by mistake, a pair of moccasins made from the skin of the male elk—the male elk being taboo to his gens.

The indissoluble bond that binds the gens together with supernatural force is still further impressed upon the child by a ceremony that takes place when he is about three or four years old, or, as the Indians say, "when he can walk steadily." The rite is performed "when the grass is well up and the earth is green." The boy is taken by his mother to an old man, to whom belongs the hereditary right to perform this ceremony of "first cutting the hair." The child enters the old man's tent bearing his first little pair of moccasins in his hand, while his mother at the door says, "Venerable man, I desire that my child wear moccasins." The man thus addressed takes the child and gathers a lock from the top of his head, ties it together, then cuts it off and puts it away in a pack, where are preserved the similar locks of the first hair of all the children of the tribe. Then he puts the moccasins on the child's feet, and, lifting the boy by the shoulders, he turns him round, following the sun, letting his feet touch the earth at the four points of the compass. When the east is reached, the old man urges the child forward, saying, "Walk forth in the path of life." The mother now takes the child home, where the father cuts his remaining hair after the style of his gens, which symbolizes the mythic being that presides over it; as, for instance, the little boy who is born into the turtle gens has his hair all cut off close to his head except a little lock left hanging over his forehead, another at the nape of his neck, and two smaller ones on each side of his head. The bare pate represents the shell of the turtle; the lock on the forehead, the head; and the one at the nape, the tail; while the two locks on the sides are the little feet of the animal. Every spring the father cuts his son's hair in symbolic fashion until the child is seven years of age. Thus, by the object-lesson of the queerly barbered heads of his playmates, the child is so impressed that he never forgets the different gentes of his tribe, nor the religious significance of the names he and they bear.

No matter how wide the prairie upon which the tribe is camped, each gens is clustered by itself, its tents forming a segment of the tribal circle; and as each tent is always in the same relative position, the child continually has the same neighbors. As he grows older he learns that there are limits within the tribal inclosure which it is not safe for him to cross alone. Thus, among the Omahas, the tribe is divided into two parts, five gentes in each, and the imaginary line which divides the two is not crossed with impunity by the children. The boys of one side must be

<sup>1</sup>See also articles by Miss Fletcher in *The Outlook* for March 18 and April 11.

prepared to do battle if they enter the territory of the other; so, when a lad's father sends him on an errand across the line, the boy as he goes out gives his rallying whoop to call his reinforcements to help him fight his way. No harm ever comes, as the older men always check any serious disturbance, but good rough-and-tumble times often occur. The street limits of "gangs" of boys in our towns are a survival of the tribal days of our own race.

As with us, so among the Indians, there is a distinct child's lore. They have their traditional songs and games, with a sequence of observance—a season to play ball, and a time to spin the top—which top, by the by, is of the identical shape of those found in the pre-Columbian Peruvian graves and in the Egyptian tombs.

Little boys and girls play together, often accompanying their games with songs that have been composed and handed down by children through many generations. They also imitate in their plays the life of the older people; they go upon the hunt, when the girls harness up the boys as ponies, pack upon them the play-tent poles and cover, and all sorts of bundles. The ponies are fractious, they kick and run away, and many troubles beset the little house-mother, who must manage the ponies as well as her family affairs. Then there are the lurking enemies in the grass—grim warriors with trailing war-bonnets made of corn husks that bristle and fly in the breeze almost like real feathers; and the battles between the warriors who are defending the women and ponies, and those who have come to capture the horses and carry off the booty, are full of zest. Long spears of grass are shot back and forth, and they stick in the children's hair and clothing, so that it is quite a task to care for the wounded and straighten out things after the fight is over. Then a new scene opens, and the whilom enemies join in a peaceful hunt, or run races astride of ponies made of sunflower stalks, one flower being left near the end, to simulate the ornament usually hanging from the bridle of a warrior's horse.

When the frost and snow come, there are new opportunities for fun. Indian children cannot go to a store and buy nice sleds, but they show no little skill in their devices to secure the same results. They cut from the river great slabs of ice which they trim into proper shape, rounding them up in front, rubbing them off smoothly, and making holes for the rope in a most ingenious way. They procure a hollow reed, and, putting a little water into it, they blow through it upon the ice. The water rises and falls as the child blows or draws in his breath, and gradually bores a hole through the slab. But the ice sled would be cold and slippery, so water is poured upon it and a layer of grass, rubbed fine, pressed down and frozen into place, and the sled is ready; and, tucking their little robes around and under them, away the children go at a speed it would be hard to match by the sharp steel runners of our own boys and girls.

Near every lodge is a small tent pitched for the children to play in, and many a one will beg to be allowed to take its share of the family meal to give "a feast" within this child tent. There the little ones chatter and sing, but should a strange voice outside be heard, silence will follow, and a small head will peer cautiously up through the top of the tent to reconnoiter; then, the danger past, the children relapse into merry peals of laughter, as if there were no Indian problem for them.

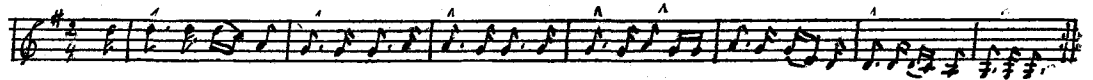
In these later days the schools have prolonged the period of childhood, in withdrawing the children from their share of the family burdens, which, under aboriginal conditions, were placed all too early upon their little shoulders.

Within the home circle there are merrymakings for the little ones, for the child is the open sesame of the Indian's heart. No one is too old or too dignified to show his affection and take part in amusing the children. They are privileged in many ways, but there are breaches of etiquette of which no well-bred child must be guilty. An older person must not be interrupted when speaking; a child may

not pass between any one and the fire; he must not stare at a stranger nor ask his name; and he must observe the proper manner of sitting. The girl must sit on her left side, with both feet drawn to the right, while the boys must squat on their heels. Snatching and quarreling are not allowed; exact truthfulness is carefully inculcated; and the breaking of a promise is taught to be the gravest of faults.

Winter is the time for story-telling—"in the summer snakes may listen and do mischief." The children sit on the ground about the lodge fire, or on the ends of the long logs that feed the flames, unwilling to go to bed, and teasing for a story, while the women clear away the remains of the evening meal, and the young mother dances her baby in her arms. Finally the grandfather yields to the children's importunities, and the little black eyes are propped wide open while he tells how the Muskrat lost his tail:

"Long ago the Muskrat had a long, broad tail. It was very useful, and gave the Muskrat much pleasure. The Beavers, who had no tails at that time, used to watch the Muskrat build dams, and they were filled with envy. They saw how the Muskrat enjoyed himself when he sat upon his tail and slid down the hills. So the Beavers lay in wait for the Muskrat. Suddenly they seized him. Some of the Beavers took the Muskrat by the head while others caught hold of his tail and pulled, until finally the broad part of the tail came out, and left the Muskrat with only a thin little stem of a tail. The victorious Beavers put on the broad tail and were able to do all that the Muskrat had done. But the Muskrat was desolate; he wandered over the country wailing for the loss of his tail. The animals he met offered him such tails as they had, but he despised their offers and gave them hard words in return. It was the Gopher that sang this song, and all the other animals repeated it to the Muskrat, as he went about crying:"



Ma - thin - ja the illa - thin - ja the, Ma - thin Ka-ha thin - de Ke ali the-sun- tha-the-she, ma-thin-ja the ma-thin-ja the!

—which is to say, "Ground-tail, Ground-tail, you who dragged your tail over the ground! Ground-tail, Ground-tail!"

As the grandfather sings, slapping his leg to keep the time, up jump the children and begin to dance, bending their knees and bringing down their brown feet with a thud on the ground. The baby crows and jumps, and the old man sings the song over and over again, until finally the dancers flag, and sleep comes easily to the tired children.

The old Indian life is rapidly passing away, and with it goes much picturesqueness and many varied pleasures which find no counterpart in the new. The mature man may not suffer in character, aside from the inevitable lowering which always follows the letting in of a stronger race, with its advance guard of demoralizing agents; but the child is in danger of greater loss from accepting a superficial interpretation of the teachings of our complex civilization, and by failing to discern that beneath a seeming inculcation of sordid motives there lie those fundamental ethics which have been instrumental in developing all that was noble in his ancestors, and which make possible the attainment of higher ideals than those his race has hitherto known.



### Answers to Puzzles

(See The Outlook for May 9)

CHARADE

Kat-ah-din.

HISTORICAL ACROSTIC

1. Cleopatra. 2. Hannibal. 3. Robespierre. 4. Isabella of Spain. 5. Socrates. 6. Theodoric, King of the Goths. 7. Oliver Cromwell. 8. Petrarch. 9. Henry VIII. 10. Edward, "The Black Prince." 11. Richelieu. 12. Charlotte Corday. 13. Orange. 14. Leander. 15. Undine. 16. Mary, Queen of Scots. 17. Boadicea. 18. Ulysses. 19. Savonarola.

Primals: Christopher Columbus.