

HICKS, SIAH

INTERVIEW

#12167

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"EAST"

An interview of Siah Hicks,
age 58, Creek, Mason, Okla.

Billie Byrd, Journalist
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The East was always a direction of respect to the early Indians---nothing was ever done, either in ceremonial or medicine, unless the East was faced. They believed that they were giving their respects to the East, as the old country in the East was a mother country and home to them and they never fully forgot their life there. They had first planted their customs and beliefs in the old Eastern country home where they were strictly observed and kept up and it was with this feeling of respect and the hope that their customs were or would be blessed and greater results could be expected. Always the number four would always be observed in all the rituals of their medicines and other observances--a thing was not completely done unless it had been done four times in succession, and the four times in succession had to be completed in four sets at a time.

Then, the rising of the sun in the East denoted the new day as well as the new sun which to them was

representative of the beginning of a life. It is believed, as the stories are told, that the old customs of the old country are being followed when the medicine of the tribe is taken when facing the East. The old country, in the talks of the older Indians, have been often referred to and to them has been, "Hus-see O-sa Le-cha" (Under the Rising of the sun). Their homes had been in their Eastern country where they had enjoyed their own hunting grounds, their life as they wished it lived and the other things that came dear to them.

During the fall when the leaves are falling from the trees, the older Indians have said that when each leaf fell to the ground, a turtle was shooting it from the trees. If the turtle did not fail in his shots it was an indication that it would exist through the winter.

The health of the early Indians was gained from their time spent in the open and all they did was always for their bodily good. They thought that it was essential to be long-winded as well as robust and tried to engage in environments that would be loved and enjoyed without being tiresome.

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To strengthen their immunity against the colds, a rite would be followed wherein the water into which the leaves had fallen, during autumn, and where the water was turning a dark color from the leaves maturing in it. Upon the steady falling of the leaves, they would remark, "Our medicine is being prepared." It is said they were always happy and glad to see this time of the year. At a certain time of the year when the water had become leaf flavored, they would begin the treatments. They would begin by drinking the water, facing towards the East, in four sips; they would then dip into the water four times. This was continued for four mornings, and when they had left the waters, they never dried themselves but the water was dried off by the body heat. The rising out of the water in this instance is said to have represented the rising of the sun. The older men and women went to the streams but the children and the real young were treated with water that had been taken from the streams.

It was always the custom that the men and women never bathed in the same flowing stream of water; as the flowing water is supposed to have

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washed away all and any impurities. Then, too, they would never bathe in any stream that did not flow.

Even during the birth of children, the East was always faced by the woman and a midwife was chosen following her good qualities with the belief that the child in maturity would have the same disposition as the midwife possessed during the birth.

The hair of the women of the early days was luxuriant and did not fall out so much because they took extreme good care of it. They would go out into the woods where there was their tonic in the thickets and all they had to do was to cut the wine of the wild grape. They would spread their hair under the cut so that the sap from the grape vine would drip into the hair---this was rubbed and anninted into the scalp. It was the belief that the hair grew long and luxuriant in similarity to the vines of the grape vine that grew to great lengths. The misty rainy weather was also a source of hair tonic for they claimed that the mist was pure water. They would rub the mist well into their hair and almost ~~bat~~ather their heads with it.

"The Indians will vanish" has been the talk of the older Indians ever since the white people first came to mingle among them. They seemed to prophecy that the coming of the white man would not be for their good and when the step towards their removal of a country to the West was just beginning, it was the older Indians that remarked and talked about themselves by saying, "Now, The Indian is now on the road to disappearance." This had reference to their leaving of their ways, their familiar surroundings where their customs were performed, their medicine, their hunting grounds and their friends.

When they had reached their new homes in the Indian Territory, their conversations were about their old homes and they said, "We have started on the road that leads to our disappearance and we are facing the evening of our existence and are nearly at the end of the trail that we trod when we were forced to leave our homes in Alabama and Georgia. In time, perhaps our own language will not be used but that will be after our days."

This talk had reference to their putting aside

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of their old customs and beliefs and it is told that there a number of those old customs that have never been used in the new country. Those that knew the use have died with the knowledge of the use of the customs and beliefs and from an uncivilized life they have become civilized with their progress in education and their way of living.

When those old men met, they would talk about their old days with tears in their eyes and cry for the children that were to come with the belief that they would be treated just as they had been treated.

(Note: Interviews reported by Billie Byrd are typically Indian and no change in diction is made.— Ed)