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Jefferson Berryhill
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INDIAN RELIGION.

AN INTERVIEW WITH REV. SAMUEL CHECOTE

It is an established fact that the American Indians worshipped and praised some kind of Supreme Being from time immemorial. When the first white men set foot on the American soil, they found savages, who lived their daily lives so differently from their form of living inasmuch that the white men were quick to say that these red men were uncivilized. The next thing that arises in the mind is, what is civilization? Is it the life that we live today that we must take for an example? Were the people of Mesias days uncivilized when they would take their gains from the fields that they tilled and offer part of it as a sacrifice of praise to the Supreme Being? Then may say that where there is a group of inhabitants who, as they see the sun rise from the East and sink in the West, and when they observe the different seasons of the year come and go bringing them food to eat, because of these evidence they should worship the Invincible on earth as well as above, and though He may be invisible, always present, and caring for his people, that these people are intelligent, wise, charitable, neighborly, and religiously good.

The Indian race was the very example of that kind of life, they felt the presence of the Great Spirit. They thanked the Great Spirit as they marched out into the wood to seek the game they hunt for their food. They thanked the Great Spirit for their love, their enemies, their souls. Perhaps the Indians were not quite civilized, but they probably had less crime, less in everything that is propelled by the satanic spirit.

I remember very well when our elderly neighbors would meet with us, the younger ones, and caution us as to the kind of lives we should live if we were to live a life of noble character. There were laws and one was expected to abide by them. If one should err in his ways, he was surely punished for it. The Indians taught that it was very bad to repeat a mistake. One did not such a thing very often.

Perhaps I should have dwelt more on the Indian religion as many have inquired of me the difference between the present day Indian festivities than those of long ago. Many have come to me and asked of me if the present practice is similar to that of my fore-fathers, and sadly I have answered, "No, those days are gone forever." I shall try to point out why it is so.

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During the crop season it was an unwritten law that no one should partake of the roasting ear before a celebration or festival had been held. This ceremony was awe-inspiring as these, ironically speaking, uncivilized Indians were trying to make the Spirit behind these crop miracle happy by showing the Spirit their appreciation.

On the appointed day the Indians would assemble at the place of hilarity or the ceremonial ground. Beginning early in the morning before breakfast, the men would drink a liquid made up of different kinds of herbs, prepared by the medicine man of the grounds. By drinking the mixture they were cleaning out their system via vomiting. This would be kept up all day with interruptions now and then by games they played.

In the evening just about twilight, the men ran to the nearby stream for a bathing. After spending some time in the water, they return and it is then that they are ready to eat the meal cooked for them by the squaws.

After the evening meal, they are ready for the night frolic which last all night long, to be completed by the playing of Indian ball. Many phases of this celebration would make a topic of itself. In the night frolics, no one is allowed to go to bed, but there was no rule necessary to that effect as no one wished to do so.

Everybody wished to express thanks for the Great Spirit so that he shall always be good to the Indians.

Referring back to the inquiries I receive once in a while pertaining to the present Indian festivities. I have answered many times that there is nothing religious about the whole thing any more. Nowadays in these occasions you may find the bootlegger with his wares; the illicit romancers with their trysts; the peanut vendors and any other agent for that which is not good and is contrary to the characteristics of the Indians of yesterday. Now the celebration is called the stomp dance. The occasion is tantamount to a gambling place where the cards are stacked against you as far as the building of character is concerned. I tell the inquirers the whole thing is a very poor imitation of something that once was good.

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SABBATH DAY

We had a queer and weird looking paraphernalia in our house when I was an infant. It was a piece of carved wood with seven holes in it. This was a calendar and when a peg had descended from the top hole to rest and sent back up to the top, we knew then that day was the Sabbath day and we were told to do nothing of labor that day as it was a day that we must have the Creator and His love for us uppermost in our mind all that day. So on the Sabbath day we lived, as far as we knew, our love for one another and for our Lord predominant in our house.

I shall never forget my father cautioning me against even cutting a green dog wood on Sunday to make an arrow. He would say, "As you make your sojourn to the happy hunting ground, these same dog wood shall lie by the path and you'll gasp with sorrow as you see them bleed as if the wound were that on a human body"! So that is why one could not help but be a different sort of a person on the Sabbath Day.

Jefferson Berryhill

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THE CASE OF TIMMIE JACK

An interview with Rev. Samuel Checote

The execution of Timmie Jack, as the last to be subjected to the strict Creek laws, has been elaborately written and much exaggerated by many romancers heretofore. I say as account of the procedure of Timmie Jack's last few days on earth, written by an author who no doubt had been very badly misinformed. Among other fallacies in his story, he wished the public to believe that Timmie Jack stood in the same room in the shop that was employed in making a casket for him, that he would lie in the casket to see that the thing was built to his longitude and demensions. There was also statements that, after his conviction, he was allowed to go home, but on the day of his rendezvous with death, he was at the spot to pay to the society his debt.

Such account had been preparatory to a good story of the city of Okmulgee and its history of earlier days. I say it is very careless and a misrepresentation.

Timmie Jack was executed because he was a murderer.

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He murdered Jim Brown during a drunken brawl. Timmie Jack was an Tachee Indian.

The length of time of his trial could not have lasted more than ten days. After his conviction, he did not go home as alleged, but he was kept under the custody of the Light Horseman. Ironically enough was this so, as he had been once a Light Horseman too.

There is no need for reiteration that his execution was conducted by the Captain of the Light Horsemen, Duke Pleasant Berryhill. There is a marble monument standing now in the front yard of the Old Indian Council House in the city of Okmulgee about the spot the execution took place.

Timmie Jack was kept at my boarding house that was located at 5th and Morton, and was watched during the time of his conviction and until his execution. Only one privilege was allowed him that I recall. That was that he was allowed to be with his wife on the night of his last as mortal on earth.