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MEDICINE MEN. 13335

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Pete W. Cole,
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ORIGIN OF THE WORD MEDICINE MAN.

We have read much from history and in conversation of the old-time Choctaws, as well as all other tribes of the North American Indians, the topic and subject that was talked more about and less understood--the Medicine Man. We note from old records that on November 14, 1605, when the French settlement was made in America on the coast of Nova Scotia they gave the name Acadia to the country. The character of "Medicine Man" had its origin, according to the tradition of the French Colonists, from a corrupted word "Meda", a language of one of the Indian tribes which signifies chief, into Medicine Man also called the religious ceremonies of the Indian making medicine, which was adopted among them and has so continued.

The religious ceremony for the propitiation of invisible spirits was practiced by all of the North American Indians, with scarcely an exception; the ancient Choctaws and Chickasaws had their Medicine Man. There were two kinds of religious ceremonies among the Choctaws and the Chickasaws

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yet somewhat different among the other tribes and the different ingredients which composed the medicine no one knew or tried to know, as it was held sacred to the man who was in charge. If the sacred and secret articles that composed the contents of the tribal medicine bag should become known to others than the one who collected and placed them therein, the mystic bag at once became powerless and was of no value to the patient.

The philosophy of these ancient Indians ever taught them to consecrate their mind upon the spirit land and that the influences which surrounded them in Nature, above, beneath and around are sent direct by the spirits that dwell in an invisible world above; that there are two kinds of spirits, the good and the bad, who are continually at war with each other over them, the good directing all things for their prosperity and happiness, the bad directing all things against prosperity and happiness and that they themselves can do nothing as they are helpless in the mighty contest that is waged over them by the good and bad spirits. It is upon this ground that the Indians used to believe in

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witchcraft; like a candidate to be a medicine man who put himself in direct communication with the Great Spirit, a candidate for witchcraft must subject himself to a severe test by retiring alone into a forest and there engaging in meditation, self examination, fasting and prayer during the coming and going of many weary days and even weeks, that he might receive the supernatural power to gratify his ambition in playing tyrant over his people and to protect himself through the Evil Spirit from seen and unseen dangers and to be successful in all of his accomplishment of all his earthly wishes.

Peculiar may it be, but among several other kinds of disease among them, with nature's herbs and roots furnishing them remedies, the Medicine Man also had a specific cure for a bite of the rattlesnake (sintillo). They relied much on dry-cupping, by means of using their mouth alone in all such cases. Often it has been witnessed that by stretching the sufferer on a quilt or blanket on the ground, he kneeled beside him and began a process of sucking that part of the body of which the patient complained, or in his own

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judgment the disease was located, at different intervals raising his head a few inches and pretending to deposit into his hands, alternately in the one and the other, an invisible something which he had drawn from his patient which was known only to himself. After suckin or biting for a sufficient length of time to fill both hands from the frequent deposits therein made, he would step up to the nearest tree or fence, wipe the secret contents of his apparently full hands thereon, then with an air of marked importance walk away, while the sufferer acknowledged relief by ceasing to complain and turned over for sleep. Patients fancied relief from these biting doctors of their healing powers but like the words of Tennyson of the Running Waters, men may come and men may go, but the ways and traditions of the once so-called Indian doctors must go on forever as a forgotten mystery.