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XVII.

Some mythic stories of the yuchi indians.

By *Alb. S. Gatschet*, honorary member of the Berne Geographical Society.

The myth explaining the origin of dry land is so widely disseminated in North America, that there was probably no tribe east of the Interior Basin which had no knowledge of it. This wide circulation caused it to be recounted in many different ways. I have obtained one of these relations, as modified by Yuchi story-tellers, from a pupil of the mission-school in 1885 at Wialaka, Creek Nation, on the banks of Arkansas River near the present settlements of the Yuchi. Here the Creator is introduced as agent, although he is scarcely in any way helpful in the creation of the land. The other land-creation story differs in some interesting particulars from the first one and omits the mention of a creator or great spirit, which is perfectly illogical in this connection. George W. Grayson of Eufaula, Ind. Ter., obtained it from Noah Gregory some years ago.

The Yuchis believe themselves to be the offspring of the sun which they consider to be a female. According to one myth, a couple of human beings were born from her monthly efflux, and from these the Yuchis afterwards originated. Another mythic story pretends that the of the sorcerer who tried to kill the sun at the time of sun-rise, was suspended to the cedar tree; the blood trickled from it to the ground and gave origin to the Yuchi people, while other particles of the blood fell upon the cedar itself and caused it to become red-grained. The history of the three or four hunters crossing the chasm, from which the sky is rising, at the peril of their lives, appears to be only a variant of the wizard losing his head. It is found among the Cherokees, Shawnees and other tribes of the Territory. See "*American Anthropologist*", 1893, pag. 64. The myth below in its Yuchi modified shape was obtained by me in the Yuchi language from a young man of that tribe at Wialaka, as stated previously. The purpose of the myth is twofold: it attempts to explain the quicker

motion of the sun in its morning path and the origin of the reddish or brown color of the cedar wood texture.

In the popular belief of the *hiki* or mysterious being is depicted sometimes as an ogre or other dangerous monster, at other times as an animal with human or rather superhuman faculties. The present story makes of the *hiki* an instructor of the people in the useful arts of life. Every Indian Nation has a culture-hero of this description, comparable to Quetzalcoatl, Bochika, Flint Boy, Apollo and others, and these culture-heroes are usually personifications of the *sun*. No doubt that the monster *hiki* is the sun personified in a manner to suit the belief of the Yuchi people.

The origin of dry Land.

When the Creator had resolved to make a home for the living beings he had no solid matter to start with and hence called a council of various animals to deliberate upon. Among those that he had gathered were the wolf, the racoon, the bear, the turkey-buzzard, the craw-fish, the loon and the ring-necked duck. They decided that earth should be taken up from the bottom of the waters, and selected the loon for the waters purpose, as he was known to be the best diver. The loon put white beads around his neck and plunged into the water. But the water was deep and its pressure forced the beads into the skin of his neck so that they could not be removed again and are now sticking there. As he returned to the surface without obtaining any earth or mud, the beaver was ordered to accomplish the task. He dived, but the water suffocated him and his dead body reappeared on the surface largely swelled up. This is the reason why all beavers now show a thick, swollen exterior. Another beast had to plunge down on the same errand; the crawfish took a dive and soon yellow dirt appeared on the water's surface. He came near being drowned, but on reappearing again he stretched up his claws which were examined by the animals assembled. They found some mud sticking on the inside of them between the extremities and handed it over to the creator. He rolled it out to a flat mass, spread it on the surface of the waters and it became land. The fish whose domain was the bottom of the water noticed the coming down of the crawfish and pursued him, for the theft, but the crawfish managed to escape to the surface.

The earth was all water; men, animals and all insects and created beings met and agreed to adopt some plan to enable them to inhabit the earth. They understood that underneath the water there was earth and the problem to be solved was how to get the earth or dirt up to the top and spread it out so as that it might become inhabitable.

They chose first one and then another animal, but none of them could hold their breath long enough to accomplish the work. Finally they selected the crawfish, who went down and after a long time brought up in his claws a ball of earth; this was kneaded, manipulated and spread out over the waters (the great deep). Thus the land was formed; at first it was in a half fluid state and not well habitable. Now the turkey-buzzard was sent out to inspect the work. He was directed to flop his wings while soaring over the lands and inspecting them. The turkey-buzzard on his tour of inspection obeyed orders very well, but when he had almost completed the inspection, he became so exhausted as to be forced to flop his wings, in order to support himself. The effect of this upon the almost fluid earth is to be seen to this day in the hills, mountains, and valleys of the earth.

Why the Cedar-Tree is red inside.

An unknown, mysterious being once came down upon the earth and met people there, who were the ancestors of the Yuchi Indians. This being (hiki or kala hiki) taught them many of the arts of life, and in matters of religion admonished them to call the sun their mother as a matter of worship. Every morning the sun after rising above the horizon makes short stops and then goes faster until it reaches the noon-point. So the „Unknown“ inquired of them what was the matter with the sun? They denied having any knowledge about it, and said: „somebody has to go there to see and examine.“ „Who could go there? and what could be done after he gets there?“ The people said: „We are afraid to go up there.“ But the „Unknown“ selected two men to make the ascent, gave to each a club and instructed them, that as soon as the wizard who was playing these tricks on the sun, was leaving his cavern in the earth and appeared on the surface, they should kill him on the spot. „It is the wizard who causes the sun to go so fast in the morning; at sunrise he makes dashes at it, and the sun being afraid of him, tries to flee from his

presence. The two brave men went to the rising place of the sun, watching the orifice where the sun is emerging from. The wizard appeared at the mouth of the cave and at the same time the sun arose from another orifice beyond it. The wizard watched the fiery globe and put himself in position to rush and jump at it at the moment of its appearance. When the wizard held up his head, the two men knocked it off from his body with their clubs, took it to their tribe and proclaimed that they had killed the sorcerer who had for so long a time urged the sun to a quicker motion. But the wizard's head was not dead yet. It was stirring and moving about, and to stop this, the man of mysterious origin advised the people to tie the head on the uppermost limbs of a tree. They did so, and on the next morning the head fell to the ground, but was not dead yet. He then ordered them to tie the head to another tree; it still lived and fell to the ground the next day again. To insure success, the „unknown“ then made them tie it to a redcedar tree; there it remained and its life became extinct. The blood of the head ran through it; henceforth the wooden grain of the tree assumed a reddish color and the cedar tree became a medicine tree.

