

## AN ARIKARA HOUSEHOLD SHRINE TO MOTHER CORN

In July 1923, there was purchased from Mrs. Maud Gillette, widow of Marlowe Gillette, an Arikara on Ft. Berthold Reservation, North Dakota, an old shrine or sacred bundle pertaining to Mother Corn, which had long been an heirloom in the family of her late husband. The covering is a buffalo skin bag, dark brown from the countless incensings it has had in the long period of its use. This object was not one which was used in public religious ceremonies, but was for private household veneration. The only objects contained in this bag are a perfect ear of red flour corn and a braid of sweetgrass (*Savastana odorata*). Most commonly, the representative of Mother Corn in the sacred bundles is an ear of white flour corn; sometimes, as in this case, an ear of dark red flour corn, and sometimes an ear of yellow flour corn. In all cases which have come under the observation of the writer, flour corn was the type, whether the color was white, yellow, or red. And the ear must be perfect, no grains wanting, and entirely filled out over the tip.

The function of paying veneration to Mother Corn by means of this Shrine had no set time or season, but at any time the household felt like offering reverence to it, the Shrine was taken down, a sacred fire was kindled, the Shrine was opened, some of the braided sweetgrass was broken fine and offered to the powers and then sprinkled upon the fire. Prayers were offered, the ear of Mother Corn was brought out to view, and both the ear of Mother Corn and the bag which enveloped the sacred relic were incensed by being passed through the smoke of the sweetgrass. Members of the household also incensed themselves with the sweetgrass smoke, and blessed themselves from the sacred relic, drawing their hands toward themselves over it and placing their hands from the relic to their heads and down over their bodies. Thus by prayers and honest intentions, and by participation in the smoke together they sought to put themselves in accord with Mother Corn and to have her approval and blessing.

Mother Corn is connected with all events in the life of the individual of the Arikara nation from birth throughout the course of life, and at death. Mother Corn was at all times invoked; her aid, counsel and support were sought at all times.