

ARIKARA GENESIS AND ITS TEACHINGS

Told by Four-Rings, an Old Man of the Arikara Tribe, and now Summarized in English

All the different kinds tribes of living beings, including the human race, the various mammals, all kinds of birds, of reptiles, fishes, all things which live and move in the water and upon and in the ground, and all the tribes of flowers and grasses, of trees and shrubs and every kind of plant, –all living things, –were first contained and took substance in the womb of Mother Earth. This closely restricted condition was grievous from the want of illumination and freedom. Little by little there came to all living things an apprehension of the imperfection of their state, and they felt more and more the urge to emerge from their condition of inertia, from darkness and restraint, and to come out into the light, and to attain liberty of movement over the surface of the earth.

At that time of beginnings there were none of the living creatures as we see them now. There was no vegetation; no fishes in the waters, nor any birds or insects in the air, or any animals, or any kind of living creature in the light of the sun on the lap of Mother Earth. All were still concealed beneath her bosom. All things were in embryo. But these living creatures were exerting themselves and making all endeavor, for they had strong aspiration to come up into the light and to attain freedom. So they constantly continued to pray and grope and to do their best to explore and find some way to accomplish the purpose.

All creatures were striving and doing their best, each in its own way; but they met many difficulties and obstacles which were hard to overcome. The mole tried to bore through the ground to the surface, and did succeed in doing so; but as he pushed his face into the light he was blinded by the brightness of the sun coming suddenly upon his sight. He drew back from the dazzling light, and so today the mole still lives just below the surface of the ground. Then the people, that is to say, living creatures of all kinds, began to come forth from the opening of the earth. But then the earth began to close upon them and to hold them in restriction before all had come out, so it is that badgers and gophers and all such animals, and the snakes, still have their dwelling in the ground.

Now the living beings which had come forth on the surface began to move and to travel westward.

In their journeying they came to a great water. Here was another difficulty to be overcome. All their powers must be exerted. Those which could fly exercised their powers, and so were able to reach the farther shore. Others tried by some means to open a way through the waters, but before all had overcome the difficulty the water closed upon part of them, and so we still have the people of the waters, such as the fishes of all kinds, and all other creatures which live in the water.

Now the free-moving beings which had succeeded in coming through or crossing over the great water, traveled again on their course. After a time they came to a great, dense forest. So here their way was again impeded. Here again, as always before, they prayed and called on all the elements of the universe, and tried their best to open a way to pass through this great forest which seemed impenetrable. And some made their way through this difficulty; but others, as in previous cases, did not win through, and these remained in the woods and still live there. These people are the deer, the moose, bears, porcupines, and all the forest-dwelling kind, large and small.

And then God blessed the people of the human race and showed them still greater favor. To those who sought earnestly with prayer and fasting to know His will he revealed mysteries and gave them power. He gave them a sacred bundle and the pipe to use in prayer, and taught religion and instructed them how to worship, and so we do even to this day. And He gave them roots of many kinds of plants from Mother Earth, that these should be medicines for the healing of wounds and the cure of sickness.

And God blessed all the living creatures on the earth, the trees and vines and flowers and grasses, all the growing, living things upon the lap of Mother Earth which look up to the Sun; all the animals on the earth and in the waters, and the fowls of the air. He blessed all the plants and animals, and said that they are all friends of human beings, and that we should not mistreat them, but that all creatures have their place in the universe, and should be treated with respect. It was taught that the pipe should be used to offer smoke to all things which God had blessed. And so it has been done from ancient time through all the ages till the present time.

Now here we have an allegory. It is said that there were two creatures, two dogs, which were

sleeping when smoke-offerings were made, and they were forgotten. So when they awoke they were grieved and angry because they had been neglected when smoke-offerings had been made to all other creatures. And they said to the people: "You neglected to make smoke-offerings to us. Therefore in punishment for your neglect of us we shall bite you. And yet we will not leave you. We still shall follow you forever." The names of the two dogs were Sickness and Death. "So," they said, "Sickness and Death shall be always among the people." And it is even so with all things in the world, Our powers increase and then diminish; we arise and go forth in fresh strength, and then we lie down in weariness; we rejoice in health, and then languish in sickness; the sun rises and shines in splendor, and then it declines and is overcome by darkness; the brightness of day is followed by the darkness of night; the moon waxes to fulness and then wanes away; the flowers bloom in the springtime, and are cut down by the frosts of autumn; the wind blows, and again there is calm; water is lifted in vapor and floats in the clouds of the sky above the earth, and again it falls in rain upon the ground; springs rise in the hills, and their waters flow down into the rivers. So changes come to all things; all die and are born anew.