

Historical and Statistical Information respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States.
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THE MAGIC CIRCLE IN THE PRAIRIE

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A young hunter found a circular path one day in a prairie, without any trail leading to, or from it. It was smooth and well-beaten, and looked as if footsteps had trod in it recently. This puzzled and amazed him. He hid himself in the grass nearby, to see what this wonder should betoken. After waiting a short time, he thought he heard music in the air. He listened more attentively and could clearly distinguish the sound, but nothing could be seen but a mere speck, like something almost out of sight. In a short time it became plainer and plainer, and the music sweeter and sweeter. The object descended rapidly, and when it came near it proved to be a car or willow (osier) basket containing twelve beautiful girls, who each had a kind of little drum which was struck with the grace of an angel. It came down in the centre of the ring, and the instant it touched the ground they leapt out and began to dance in the circle, at the same time striking a shining ball.

The young hunter had seen many a dance, but none that equalled this. The music was sweeter than ever he had heard. But nothing could equal the beauty of the girls. He admired them all, but was most struck with the youngest. He determined to seize her, and after getting near the circle without giving alarm made the attempt; but the moment they spied a man, they all nimbly leapt into the basket and were drawn back to the skies.

Poor Algon the hunter was completely foiled. He stood gazing upward as they withdrew till there was nothing left, and then began to bewail his fate. "They are gone forever, and I shall see them no more." He returned to his lodge, but he could not forget this wonder. His mind preyed upon it all night, and the next day he went back to the prairie, but in order to conceal his design he turned himself into an opossum. He had not waited long when he saw the wicker car descend, and heard the same sweet music. They commenced the same sportive dance, and seemed even more beautiful and graceful than before. He crept slowly towards the ring, but the instant the sisters saw him they were startled, and sprang into their car. It rose but a short distance when one of the elder sisters spoke. "Perhaps," said she, "it is come to show us how the game is played by mortals." "Oh no!" the youngest replied, "quick, let us ascend." And all joining in a chant, they rose out of sight.

Algon returned to his own lodge again; but the night seemed a very long one, and he went back betimes the next day. He reflected upon the plan to follow to secure success. He found an old stump nearby in which there were a number of mice. He thought their small form would not create alarm, and accordingly assumed the shape of a mouse. He first brought the stump and set it up near the ring. The sisters came down and resumed their sport. "But see," cried youngest sister, "that stump was not there before." She ran affrighted towards the car. They only smiled, and gathering round the stump, struck it in jest, when out ran the mice, and Algon among the rest. They killed them all but one, which was pursued by the youngest sister; but just as she had raised her stick to kill it, the form of the hunter arose, and he clasped his prize in his arms. The other eleven sprang to their willow basket and were drawn up to the skies.

He exerted all his skill to please his bride and win her affections. He wiped the tears from her eyes. He related his adventures in the chase. He dwelt upon the charms of life on the earth. He was incessant in his attentions, and picked out the way for her to walk as he led her gently towards his lodge. He felt his heart glow with joy as she entered it, and from that moment he was one of the happiest of men. Winter and summer passed rapidly away, and their happiness was increased by the addition of a beautiful boy to their lodge circle. She was in truth the daughter of one of the stars, and as the scenes of earth began to pall upon her sight, she sighed to revisit her father. But she was obliged to hide these feelings from her husband. She remembered the charm that would carry her up, and took occasion while Algon was engaged in the chase to construct a wicker basket, which she kept concealed. In the meantime she collected such rarities from the earth as she thought would please her father as well as the most dainty kinds of food.

When all was in readiness, she went out one day while Algon was absent to the charmed ring, taking her little son with her. As soon as they got into the car, she commenced her song and the basket rose. As the song was wafted by the winds, it caught her husband's ear. It was a voice which he well knew, and he instantly ran to the prairie. But he could not reach the ring before he saw his wife and child ascend. He lifted up his voice in loud appeals, but they were unavailing. The basket still went up. He watched it till it became a small speck, and finally it vanished in the sky. He then bent his head down to the ground, and was miserable.

Algon bewailed his loss through a long winter and a long summer. But he found no relief. He mourned his wife's loss sorely, but his son's still more. In the meantime, his wife had reached her home in the stars, and almost forgot, in the blissful employments there, that she had left a husband on the earth. She was reminded of this by the presence of her son, who, as he grew up, became anxious to visit the scene of his birth. His grandfather said to his daughter one day, "Go, my child, and take your son down to his father, and ask him to come up and live with us. But tell him to bring along a specimen of each kind of bird and animal he kills in the chase." She accordingly took the boy and descended. Algon, who was ever near the enchanted spot, heard her voice as she came down the sky. His heart beat with impatience as he saw her form and that of his son, and they were soon clasped in his arms.

He heard the message of the Star, and began to hunt with the greatest activity, that he might collect the present. He spent whole nights, as well as days, in searching for every curious and beautiful bird or animal. He only preserved a tail, foot, or wing of each, to identify the species; and, when all was ready, they went to the circle and were carried up.

Great joy was manifested on their arrival at the starry plains. The star-chief invited all his people to a feast, and, when they had assembled, he proclaimed aloud, that each one might take of the earthly gifts such as he liked best. A very strange confusion immediately arose. Some chose a foot, some a wing, some a tail, and some a claw. Those who selected tails or claws were changed into animals, and ran off; the others assumed the form of birds, and flew away. Algon chose a white hawk's feather, which was his totem. His wife and son followed his example, when each one became a white hawk. He spread his wings, and, followed by his wife and son, descended to the earth, where his species are still to be found.