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by Natalie Curtis (1875-1921)

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AMERICAN INDIAN CRADLE-SONGS

By NATALIE CURTIS¹

I HAVE often been asked if a realization of the responsibilities of parenthood dignifies the life of the American Indian. So important, so sacred even, is to the red man the sense of fatherhood and motherhood that the Indian expands the obvious human tie into a mystic, cosmic relation between man and the life-giving forces of Nature. "And man is blessed when in the holy songs the Mountain calls the man 'my son!'" say the Navajos. "Father!" cries the Indian of the Plains when praying before the sacred rock, symbol of the force on which the created universe is builded. "The Evening Star," say the Pawnees, "is the mother of the Pawnee people. In the garden of the Evening Star grew the first corn-plant, the Mother-Corn. And the Evening Star took her daughter, child of the Morning Star, and placed her on a cloud and gave into her hand the Mother-Corn saying 'plant this upon the earth.' And the maiden fell to the earth as falling rain." Thereafter, the division of human labor according to sex is poetically symbolized in terms of parenthood: "The bow and arrow is Father, for the father must defend and protect. But the corn is Mother; it feeds us and gives us life. Take a grain of corn and split it: within will be found mother's milk. So in old days the work of planting and tending the Mother-Corn fell to woman. For she, herself the bearer of seed, is the nourisher, the mother of us all." The woman it was who wove the baskets wherein the garnered corn was carried, who cooked and prepared the sustenance for man. "So," said a Pawnee, "we look upon woman as Mother, always. A man might almost call his own wife 'mother.' For we see in woman the giver of life."

To emphasize the human, intimate side of Indian parentage, the following little group of lullabies is offered as a glimpse into primitive motherhood; for civilization holds no essential human

¹All Indian songs quoted in this article were collected, translated and written down by the author on the Indian reservations and are copyrighted by her. The Pawnee, Kwakiutl, Cheyenne, Arapaho and Hopi lullabies were originally published in Miss Curtis' collection, "The Indians' Book," Harper and Bros., Publishers. The other songs are here printed for the first time.

In pronouncing Indian texts, vowels are given the continental sound: A=ah' E=ay; I=ee; O=o; U=oo.

ties deeper than those felt by early man. The melodies of these Indian "sleep-songs" are so potently sleep-giving that they may well be found acceptable to the white mother.

I once asked some school-children if they knew why the Indian mother carried her baby on her back. A hand flew up: "Because the Indian mother is always busy with her hands." When the toiling woman went about her many tasks, with her went her baby, bound securely on her back. How often have I seen the little Hopi women of arid Arizona, like burdened ants, climbing up the precipitous trail to their cliff-perched home, a heavy jar of fresh-fetched water on the back, and atop of the jar, the baby. Among some tribes the cradle-board to which the very young infant was often bound was highly ornamented with all the red man's age-old talent for conventionalized symbolic design. The buckskin covering might be richly embroidered with porcupine quill in geometrical cubes and angles of color, and the hood which shaded the baby's eyes festooned with soft feathers and dangling shells for the tiny hands to play with; or the board itself might be painted with protecting emblems of those cosmic forces with which the life of this nature-people is always linked. The Morning Star, clan-emblem of a Pawnee child, formed the chief design of the cradle-board on which were traced the arrow heads which tipped the arrows of the Morning Star for his journey across the sky. The rainbow enclosed the whole. Thus protected, the child might find strength and growth in sleep while the mother lulled it with the soft syllables, "Hau-wari."

Pawnee Lullaby

"Hau Wa'ri" "Sleep Rocking"

Not too fast: very legato
M.M. $\text{♩} = 80$ From Oklahoma

Ha - u - o ha - u - o ha - u - o Ha - u - wa - ri,

ha - u - wa - ri, ha - u - wa - ri, ha - u - wa - ri.

Even as the art of a people reflects—whether consciously or not—the land of which the race is the human expression, so does the very person of the individual suggest the environment which has played upon him. Man must even express Deity in terms of racial art. The Virgin Mother is an Italian, a Fleming, a German,

or even, as in the famous "black Madonna," a mother of dark-skinned men. On the Yuma desert, near the border of Mexico I came one day upon a young Indian girl who—had the American Indian been Christian—might have seemed to a native painter a fitting symbol of Divine motherhood, though she was utterly the child of the untamed land that stretched on every side of her in brilliant orange, red and gold. She was sitting bare-foot on the sand, the folds of her voluminous skirt spread about her like an inverted flower-cup while the desert wind lifted the purple *serape* that flowed from her shoulders. The baby, bound with bright trappings to the cradle-board, made a flash of red across the knee. Flamingo cactus-blossoms flamed behind her. Her loose heavy hair, cut straight across the shoulders with the severity of Egyptian bas-relief, blued and glittered in the sun like the wing of the black-bird on the cactus branch. The desert butterfly, with pattern-painted wing, had taught the mother the art of decoration which glowed in a round spot of red paint on each brown cheek. In a voice as low as the half-heard song of the Colorado (the "Red River" of which the Yuma Indians call themselves "the sons"), the mother was crooning. The rhythmic words "Kashmam," asow'-wa' ("sleep, child"), alternating with a cooing "loo-loo-loo-loo," were strung like colored beads upon a melody whose minor seventh, added to the five-toned scale, sounds a typical modal characteristic of many a Yuma song.

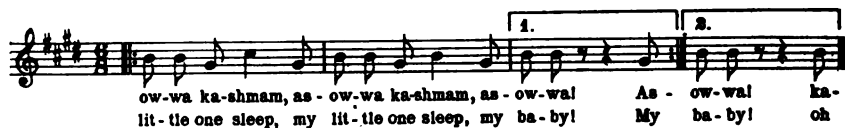
Yuma Lullaby

"Ash'var' Homar' Tashmatsk'" "Song for putting Child to sleep"

From Southern Arizona

With slow, swinging rhythm

M. M. J. 66



Loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo ka-oh

shmam, ka-shmam, ka-shmam, as-ow-wa, ka-shmam, as-ow-wal
sleep, oh sleep, oh sleep, my lit-tle ons sleep, my ba-by!

Loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo loo ka-oh

shmam, ka-shmam, ka-shmam, as-ow-wa, ka-shmam, as-ow-wal
sleep, oh sleep, oh sleep, my lit-tle one sleep, my ba-by!

* Meaningless syllables

In contrast to the rounded softness of the desert "sleep-song" sounds the lullaby of the Northwest coast—a single rectangular refrain of four notes cut against the rhythmic beat of the sea along whose shores cluster the villages of the Kwakiutl people of Vancouver Island. Within the wooden houses whose heraldic totem poles point skyward, the baby in its cradle hangs from a cross-beam in the corner. A cord is tied to the cradle, and the mother, her hand or arm within the loop of the cord, rocks the baby with gentle pull, singing. To me, her song seemed to echo the sea, the snatch of melody beating down and drawing back like the monotonous play of waves. For the subconscious influence of the ocean's steady music traces its reflection on the mind as the sea carves ripples on the sand; and one is quick to imagine the reverberation of the sea's voice in the memory of nature-people.

Kwakiutl Cradle-Song

Slow and crooning
M.M. $\text{♩} = 60$

From Vancouver Island

Swing of cradle

Ha o ha o ha o o Ha o
Sleep oh sleep oh sleep oh oh Sleep oh

ha o ha o o Ha o ha o
sleep oh sleep oh oh Sleep oh sleep oh



When the Indian child is taken from the cradle-board, the mother rubs and pulls the little legs and smooths the naked body from head to foot. The parents say that the back and limbs of the baby on the board grow straight. And the children seem happy; they are safe from harm even when the busy mother leans them up against the wall of the house or hangs them from a lodge pole; they cannot fall off of anything or crawl into mischief. Sometimes when the mother is at work outdoors the cradle-board sways from the branch of a tree ("Rockabye baby on the tree-top") and the Arapaho girls who taught me their Sleep-Song said that often just a push from the mother's hand would start the cradle swinging, and then the friendly wind would help, freeing the mother for her work. The word "Bé-hé-bé" (bébé) in the Arapaho language is undoubtedly from the French whose traders often mixed their blood with that of the people of the Plains in the old hunting and trapping days before the Louisiana Purchase.

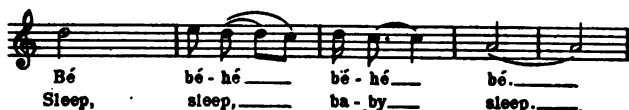
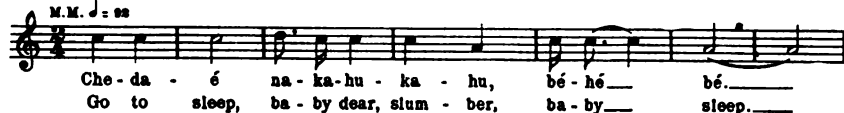
Arapaho Lullaby

"Nakahu Naad" "Sleep Song"

In moderate time

M.M. ♩ = 68

From Montana



É bé - hé bé.
Sleep, ba - by sleep.

Na - ka - hu - ka - hu, bé - hé bé.
Ba - by dear, slum - ber, ba - by sleep.

Cheyenne Lullaby

"Meshivotzi No-otz" "Baby Song"

From Oklahoma

Slow M.M. J. 50

Ah ha o ha o h'm

E ya h'm

E ya h'm

Me-shi - vo - tsi - o he ye
Lit-tle good ba - by he ye

Na - o - tzi - yo tsi - o
Sleep-y lit - tle ba - by

A ha h'm

On the steep, rocky trails that lead from the level Arizona desert to the *mesa* towns of the sedentary Hopi Indians, the "blind" beetles clamber in the hot sun, the little beetles sometimes sleeping on the backs of their elders—so the children say. The Hopi mother sitting in her stone doorway, swaying gently to and fro, herself a living cradle, tells the baby on her back to be blind like the beetles—to shut its eyes and see no more while she sings "pu'va, pu'va," the Hopi word for sleep.

Hopi Lullaby

"Pu'wuch' Táwi"

Not too fast
M.M. J. 52

From Northeastern Arizona

The musical score consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 2/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single line. Below the staff, the lyrics are: "Pu - va" followed by a long line, then "pu - va" followed by a long line, then "pu - va" followed by a long line, and finally "Ho - ho - ya - wu" followed by a long line. Below these, the English translation is: "In the trail the bee - ties". The second staff continues the melody. Below the staff, the lyrics are: "shuh - pö" followed by a long line, then "pa - ve - e" followed by a long line, then "Na - i - kwi - o kiang - o" followed by a long line. Below these, the English translation is: "on each oth - ers backs are sleep - ing So on mine my ba - by thou". The third staff continues the melody. Below the staff, the lyrics are: "Pu - va" followed by a long line, then "pu - va" followed by a long line, then "pu - va" followed by a long line, then "Pu - va" followed by a long line, then "pu - va" followed by a long line, and finally "pu - va" followed by a long line.

The devotion of Indian parents is recognized by all who have lived among them. Said a not too sympathetic trader, "Well, I will say *one* thing for the Injuns: if it's anything a man is plum crazy about, it's his kid!" The Indian fathers equal the mothers in their tenderness to the children. From the Indian house in which I lived I used to watch the baby toddle eagerly into the outstretched arms of the home-coming father who would then lift the child over his head with a laugh and dance it in the air to the strange, geometrical ever-changing rhythms of a Hopi Katzina dance-song. The baby on its father's knee was taught its first dance-gestures as the man sang and moved the tiny arms rhythmically, shaking an imaginary dance rattle, invoking rain, or spreading the water over the fields in the symbolic pantomime of the ancient dance-dramas whose traditions the child thus absorbed with its first consciousness.

As often from the voices of men as of women did I hear the soft down-slurring phrases of "pu'va" whose archaic melody had sung babies to sleep on the Hopi *mesas* for uncounted generations. It was a Hopi father—our next door neighbor—who sang the song for my recording phonograph. The "People of Peace" as these Indians call themselves, were friendly toward the "box that sang" and they were always entertained by the squeaky phonographic record of their own robust voices. At the recording of the lullaby there was present a white scholar who was making a study of the Hopi language for a museum. The Indian had scarcely finished singing the last "pu'va" into the phonograph's brass horn when

the scientist ran to the machine, and pushing the Indian aside he laughingly asked the horn in the Hopi language, "What happens, my good friend, when the baby doesn't go to sleep? The Indian stared before him non-plussed while the relentless machine whirled on. Then, too late, when the cylinder was exhausted and I was obliged to stop the wheels, the pondering Hopi tapped his forehead and said, "Why did I not think in time to tell that thing"—pointing to the horn—"My good friend, when that song is sung, the baby *always* goes to sleep!"

But there are times when even "pu'va" fails to lull the Hopi child. A "stop-crying song" for naughty children is supposed to be sung by the Owl-Katzina, a mythological being represented in Hopi ceremonials by a masked dancer. It was a knotted old grandmother, with the baby on her back, who first sang for me the Owl Song. Her cracked voice quavered quaintly, and with laughter wrinkling her eyes she pointed ominously at the imaginary children, crying as they lie awake on their cradle-boards. As she sang, the little black head of the baby on her back bobbed up and down over her shoulder to the rhythm of the sharp little movements with which she emphasized the song. When in the end we caught in the refrain the "mé" of bleating goats and the foreboding hoot of the Owl, we agreed with the little old grandmother that no child could long remain naughty who thus heard the terror of the flocks at the approach of the Owl-Katzina. A young mother was standing near with her baby in her arms. "Hopi children are not bad," I said, "you do not often have to frighten them with the Owl Song?" The girl looked down at the little bundle quietly sleeping against her breast and answered proudly, "*My* baby never even heard that song."

Hopi Owl Song

"Muñgwu Katziña Tawi" "Owl Katzina Song"

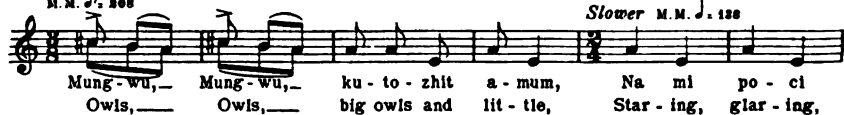
Free English translation

With sharp emphasis

M. M. ♩. 208

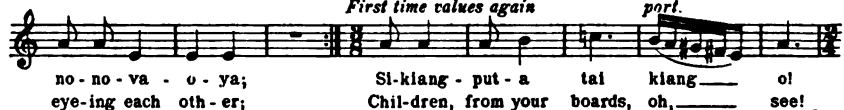
From Northeastern Arizona

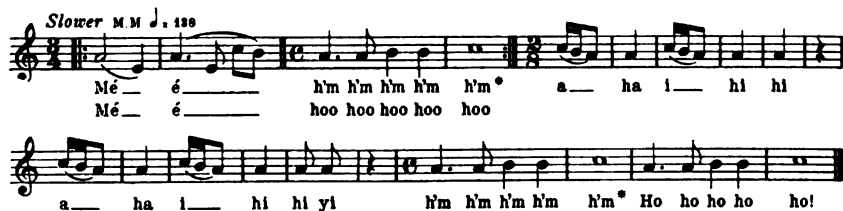
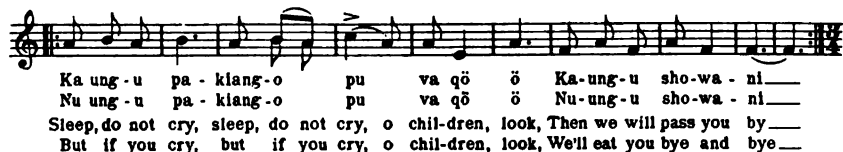
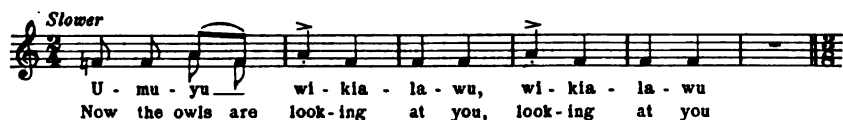
Slower M. M. ♩. 128



First time values again

port.





* Sung, with closed lips

The simple philosophy of the natives of our land, whose great teacher is Nature, sees throughout all creation the birth-giving power of two opposite yet mating forces, the male and female principles. Symbolized in nature-poetry these primal elements of existence become to the Indian the Earth-Mother, within whose potent heart lie hushed and unborn all the seeds of life, and the Sun-Father, awakener and fructifier. Man is the child of these cosmic parents behind whom lies the great life-principle itself, too vast and unknowable to be defined, a force impersonal and infinite—the "Great Mystery." At a Hopi name-giving ceremony which I witnessed, the new-born infant whose tender eyes had been kept within doors for the first days, was at last reverently carried at dawn to the edge of the cliff to behold its father, the Sun, whose first rays welcomed the child into the elemental world of which the new life was now a part. Solemnly the grandmother and aunts waved ears of corn, symbols of fertility and plenty, reciting a short prayer while pronouncing over the child its names. Slowly the sun rose, shining on the upheld infant and on the bronze women outlined on the austere summit of the cliff. Dawn flooded

the desert with swift waves of amethyst and gold. The morning air, pure, unbreathed, untainted, seemed the very breath of a life infinite and sublime. I forgot the devouring discord of the white man's towns. The figures at the edge of the upsweeping crags of rock were as yet the only human forms in a land whose vast horizon tossed against the sky in unbelievable color-splendor. The birth-throes of the coming day throbbed glory and promise and beauty unstained. Into such a world was the Indian baby born. I wonder, does many a white mother offer to her child a birth-gift meaningful as this? And yet the heritage of Nature is ours for the outstretched hand and the voice that asks.