

Indiana Hoosier Folklore

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FOLK CURES FROM INDIANA

By VIOLETTA HALPERT

The infinite number of ills that man is heir to is matched only, it seems, by the infinite number of beliefs about preventing, alleviating, and curing them. A collection of folklore made by several freshman composition classes at Indiana University in 1940-41¹ contains a part of the latter infinity: a number of folks cures (the term here includes all preventives, medicines, and cures) believed and practiced in Indiana. Noted by amateur collectors in a very brief period, after only a skeleton introduction to folklore, these cures can not be considered completely representative of the body of traditional medical belief in Indiana. So few folk cures from Indiana have been published, however,² that even an incomplete collection incorporating material from various sections of the state is worth analysis. In order to present these beliefs as a homogeneous group, cures which are of different provenience (e.g., those from recent immigrants from Europe) have been omitted.

The folk cures considered in this article are classified according to the kinds of ills to which they apply: respiratory

¹ This collection is classified and on deposit in the Murray State College Folklore Archive, Murray, Kentucky. Herbert Halpert, the instructor of the classes, has published folktales and legends from the collection in HFB 1: 3-34, 85-97; 2: 9-10.

² For an unusual group of Indiana cures, and references to other collections of folk cures both here and abroad, see Paul Brewster's article, "Folk Cures and Preventives from Southern Indiana," SFQ III: 1, 33-43.

ailments, disorders of the digestive and excretory systems, aches and pains, wounds, sores, burns, and bleeding. A miscellaneous category includes remedies for other illnesses or physical infirmities which are reported only a few times in this collection. Within each of the general categories above, traditional treatments of three kinds are distinguished: preventives, medicines (taken internally), and cures (externally applied or worn). The preventives are either physical (natural) or physio-magical. Medicines, physical remedies by reason of their nature, are sometimes believed to cure and sometimes only to alleviate. The cures proper may be entirely physical, entirely magical, or physio-magical. There is considerable overlapping in actual practice between preventives and cures. The most obvious example of this duplication is the homely buckeye, which is widely reported as a preventive for rheumatism, and just as often believed a cure for it.

Respiratory Ailments

The common cold and sore throats of every description are generally conceded to be the most frequent afflictions of the respiratory system; cures for them are reported, but not so many as one would expect from the incidence of the complaints. The cold defeats most efforts to prevent it, but there are those who swear that asafetida sewed in a bag and worn around the neck will ward one off (possibly, one student surmises, "because of the obnoxious odor"). An informant from Putnam County says, "Despite the fact that this belief is almost extinct now, it once was so active that many children went throughout the entire winter with asafetida around their necks." A much more pleasant preventive is reported from Starke County, though the man who believed it was thought to be a "bit crazy" for saying, "You'll never have a head cold through the whole year if you get your head wet in the first spring rain."

For persons who feel that colds can not be prevented in such fashion there are certain remedies, internally administered, which can be counted upon to relieve the misery. Three which are several times recommended are onions, sage leaf tea ("good to drink before going to bed at night") and a sugar and coal oil mixture. The proverb "Feed a cold and starve a fever" is often taken as good medical advice. If

such remedies fail, one can try a magical cure: wear around the neck either an old sock or a buckeye tied in a sack.

Only one preventive for sore throat appears in this archive. A string of amber beads worn about the neck was a charm very active in New Albany about 1907. Amber beads placed around a child's throat are also reported to ward off croup. In Rockville and Connersville, informants said a black ribbon, rather than beads, was worn around the neck for prevention against throat infection. In another town a black silk thread was so used. (The student collector who reports the last of these beliefs calls it "a pointless superstition" because "no examples have ever been found to prove it" effective.)

The only medicine mentioned for sore throat is "tea made from sassafras roots." The cures for a sore throat call for applications from without. In Arcola, about 1883-1885, a dirty sock or a piece of meat rind was placed about the throat. Another informant said that the cure current about 1910 in Gary was to skin a cat and wrap the skin around the throat.

For pneumonia, a far more serious affair than a mere cold, only two folk cures are reported in this collection. Vinegar taken internally is recommended as a medicine by one informant. Another informant believes that the inner hide of a skunk bound on the chest is a cure. There is no preventive against pneumonia in this archive, but pepper is believed to be an effective protection against "flu." The collector does not specify how the pepper is used.

Digestive and Excretory Disorders

Spring tonics and blood thinners act primarily as preventives for sicknesses in this category. Sulphur and molasses to purify or thin the blood in the spring was reported from Madison County, Putnam County, New Market, Gary, and Indianapolis. This tonic seems to have been the general preventive against "summer sickness" as asafetida was the general preventive against winter infections. An informant from New Market said that tea made with yellow dock was also used to thin the blood. The only other tonic in the collection sounds more attractive, although it was probably as bitter as the rest: wild cherry bark and slippery elm bark in whiskey. Bile, secreted by the liver, is ordinarily a digestive aid, but the presence of its pigments in the blood results in

jaundice, for which the most impressive tonic in this collection is said to be the cure. Certain quantities of sarsaparilla roots, red sumac, and bitter root, and bark from wild cherry and wild poplar roots are cooked together. This brew is then mixed with hard cider and a little water. "Take one half tea cup of this three times a day," said the informant, "and if this wouldn't change your color nothing would."

Herb teas seem to be the standard folk medicine for stomach disorders. Catnip tea (good for "stomach ache" and colic in babies) is reported most often. "Sheep mane" tea is believed by one informant to be effective for all stomach troubles. Several informants in Shoals believe that a tea made with the herb yellow root will cure "a stomach ulcer or about any pain in the stomach." The same persons recommend chewing spearmint weed to relieve a stomach ache. If one believes in magical prevention, a match placed over the right ear will prevent heartburn. The only magical cure for stomach ache, in this collection, is the wearing of a metal ring. The informant indicated that this belief was current half a century ago in Michigan City and is still used to some extent.

Herb teas are also prominent among the medicines prescribed for kidney trouble and diarrhea. Tea made from white sassafras roots is a remedy known in Crawford County for kidney trouble. Informants from Oaktown, Knox County, say that one should eat "the kernels out of pumpkin seeds" for worms or kidney trouble. The same informants believe that muletail weed tea will stop diarrhea, and that wormroot tea is good for worms in human beings and animals. In the same community there is a belief that smart weed tea will remedy diarrhea, and that eating grapes with the hull on will prevent flux.

Aches and Pains

Aches and pains not connected with the digestive system are curable in various ways. For earache, one can either pull a back tooth or have someone blow tobacco smoke into the ear. "Rub some camphor across the forehead and count to twenty" say informants from Shoals, "and a headache will be gone." A toothache can be relieved by placing a raisin in the cavity or by killing the nerve in the aching tooth with a red hot needle.

Many people, writes a collector from Gary, "use angle worm oil for pains in their joints." After the oil is applied the joint is covered with a red flannel. The method of obtaining the angle worm oil is not given. A cure for side ache was learned in 1891 in Greene County: "If you are walking down the road and your side begins to hurt you, turn over three rocks, spit on them, and turn them back over and the pain will leave." Leg ache can be prevented by the simple expedient of leaning one's shoes against the wall at night.

Neuralgia, according to an Oaktown informant, can be prevented by drilling "a tiny hole in the shell of a live nutmeg" and tying the nutmeg "so that it will lie in the hollow of your neck." Sun pains can be prevented in the same way.

Rheumatism

The most infernal ache of all—rheumatism—can apparently often be prevented and cured by the same method. In almost every case reported, the prevention or cure is effected by an object with magical properties which is worn or carried on the person afflicted. The most popular charm against rheumatism is carrying a buckeye in one's pocket. This is also known in Indiana as a cure. A potato carried in the pocket is reported as a preventive and also as a cure "which draws poison out of the system."

Wearing a copper band on the wrist is widely believed to ward off rheumatism, according to reports from Indiana; and a copper wire or band worn around the leg, wrist, or waist is said to effect a cure. One informant from Kimmel specifies a woolen string "placed around the neck sometimes but usually around the ankle" as a cure. A more specific account of this charm, used as a preventive, comes from Monroe County: "A lady in my grandmother's neighborhood ties a piece of white yarn around her leg just below her knee to prevent having rheumatism."

A cure which is mentioned only once is a hot brick in one's pillow; a preventive mentioned once is a teaspoon of sulphur in each shoe. Only two medicines for rheumatism occur in this collection: Indian herbs and Jempson (!) weeds. Methods for using them are not given. The most unusual preventive for rheumatism, believed by an Oaktown informant, is "a wasp's nest tied to a little white cloth and pinned to one's clothing next to the skin." The collector notes that the in-

formant's mother "from 1875 until her death in 1935 wore a wasp's nest in such a manner. When she died they buried her with a wasp's nest pinned to her clothes."

Wounds, Sores, and Burns

The folk remedies for all lesions of the skin are remarkably similar throughout the state, according to the beliefs reported in this archive. Tobacco is in high favor for treating all wounds. Tobacco juice is recommended by one person for all cuts and sores and snake bite as well. Another informant prescribes chewed tobacco as an antiseptic agent on a fresh wound; another says specifically, "If you have mashed a toenail and it has come off, a chaw of tobacco" will keep it from getting sore. One collector says that around Knox, Indiana, it is believed that enough dirt applied in or around a wound will keep away infection. She adds a case history of a doctor who was called to attend a man unconscious from a concussion. The man's head was caked with dirt placed there by his family in the belief that it would help.

For infected wounds on finger or toe, specific remedies current in Thornton, Indiana, in 1910 were a bread and tea poultice placed on the affected part or a piece of salt pork applied to the infection. When blood poisoning has set in, a Michigan City informant prescribes as a cure the application of a dead rat over the cut or wound.

A sore can be cured by letting a dog lick it, or by applying "shell of egg." One informant's grandmother checked the growth of ringworm by rubbing a carrot over the sore. For a fever blister, a proper application is ear wax or a corn meal poultice. The latter is also effective for boils. About 1900 in Greene County it was believed that the seventh son of a seventh son could cause a gathering like a carbuncle or boil not to come to a head by laying his hands over it.

Styes (inflammatory swellings like small boils, on the edge of the eye) seem to respond only to magic; no specific remedies are reported from this group of students. Four informants say that the cure is a ring rubbed or passed over the stye. In three of these reports the ring must be gold; in another a gold thimble may be substituted. One student, whose grandmother took off his stye by this method, adds that she said "a few words under her breath." A girl whose grandmother

"believes it and actually practices it" in Logansport writes that the cure is a silver knife rubbed over the infected eye.

Burns have always been fairly common among housewives, and when not serious have been treated largely with traditional home remedies. Limewater, sliced Irish potatoes, butter, and plain grease are specific applications mentioned in this collection for taking the pain out of burns. One informant says it is believed that a burn should be treated before a fire to draw out the inflammation.

Many people, according to a collector from Adams County, prefer to rely on individuals with the power of lessening the pain of burns by rubbing their hands over them and saying certain mysterious words. A neighbor of this collector's grandmother always called in a particular woman to take the pain out of burns, and said that his treatment was sufficient. The belief in such cures is reported to have been widespread in Adams County about fifty or sixty years ago. The father of another collector remembers that about 1885-1895 "a certain lady in Warsaw, Indiana, was supposed to stop burning by mumbling a few secret words." An incomplete report from Harrison County indicates that the secret quotation used is passed down from male to female in alternating generations, and that the healer needs the following information about the one who has suffered the burn: age on next birthday, full name, part of body burned, and how it was burned (water, steam, open fire, etc.).

Bleeding

When wounds involve bleeding, there are special cures to stop the loss of blood. Only one of these is an actual remedy—the application of cobweb. The other five blood-stopping cures in this group from Indiana, like the burn cures above, involve some magic, primarily a verbal charm. One woman stops blood by saying "a few words to herself": the informant has seen it done. A collector was told of a boy and his mother who are "able to stop blood" if they know about it "even if they are at home. People have seen it done by them."

There are three reports of stopping blood by reading from the *Bible*. One informant (who believes it because he saw it happen) knew an old man about eighty years old who "would

read a few words out of the *Bible* and cause the blood to stop." A Washington, Indiana, version of the cure calls for the recitation of "a certain verse from the *Bible*," and states that "a woman cannot tell a woman or a man cannot tell a man what this verse is." The fullest report of this cure says that power to use it has passed "from a man to a woman to another man through many generations of one family long in Monroe County." The student informant is next in line to learn it, from the husband of her mother's sister. The cure consists "principally of the recitation of Biblical quotations and other sentences, chiefly about faith." It is a sort of "absent treatment," since the student's mother, who has the power to do it, has been known to stop a boy's nosebleed fifteen minutes after he was taken home.

There are several possible cures for simple nose-bleeds which do not involve "word magic." The father of one student from Thornton gave the following remedies, which were current around 1910: pressure on the upper lip; a cold key or a piece of ice down the neck; a toad on the head of the victim; brown paper placed against the nose; placing the hands in cold water. Other informants recommend tying a piece of red yarn around the victim's neck, or a string around his index finger.

Miscellaneous Cures

Hiccoughs are mentioned only seven times in this collection of folk cures, and four of the seven remedies are from one informant. These are a sudden scare, counting fast to 25, holding the breath for the longest period possible, and placing a pencil between the teeth horizontally while swallowing water. Two other water cures are more specific, recommending nine sups and seven swallows, respectively, without taking breath. These practical measures failing, one can "think of the last white horse" he saw. This cure came from the collector's grandmother, who had it from her Irish father.

Cures for afflictions of the senses are apparently not very common. One cure for a stammerer or stutterer comes from Eminence: "put a spool between his teeth, then take him out and make him stand under the rainpipe." An eighty-five year old woman in Vincennes reported that a cure for failing eyesight was dampened cow manure applied to the eyes.

It was believed some thirty years ago that cancer could be avoided by taking good care of the teeth, and avoiding excessive quantities of hot or iced foods and drinks. The informant also noted that arsenic salves were used in treating cancer.

One student reported the belief that a person with a goiter can cure it by rubbing a dead man's hand on his throat, but dismissed the idea as only "a pointless superstition." Another student cited an actual instance (Putnam County, 1910) in which a boy who had suffered for two months with an enlarged gland in the neck was cured by a visiting old lady who prescribed a "crab-apple pol'lus."

Thrash, a fungous infection of the mouth and throat, is believed to be curable in only one way, according to the two reports from this archive. Informants from Bloomington and Highland Township say that "a person born after his father's death has the power to cure throat and mouth disease by blowing in the person's mouth."

A Bloomington informant said that the belief that a posthumous child can also cure someone with anemia, simply by touching him, is "at least a hundred years old."

Only one informant mentions rabies, and the belief that they can be cured by using a madstone. No details of the cure are given.

Cures for the communicable children's diseases are strangely missing, except for two remedies for measles. Sassafras tea is believed to "bring out" the measles, and tea brewed from sheep dung is mentioned as a cure.

The external signs of measles are known, of course, to be indications of disease present in the body. Three external phenomena which are not the sign or result of illness, in this sense, are warts, freckles, and baldness. The wart cures so far outnumbered all the rest that they have been treated in a separate article.³

The freckle cures reported by this group of students all involve washing the freckles in dew or counting them in some way. "Wash freckles away on the first day of May" is the most common and most abbreviated belief. One informant adds, "Early in the morning, and without anyone seeing you,

³ See Violetta Halpert, "Indiana Wart Cures," *Hoosier Folklore*, VIII (1949), 37-43.

you must get some dew on your face." A more complicated process of removal comes from an informant whose memory of it goes back to 1885.

Dip your hand in dew the first three mornings in May and wipe the freckles off your face. They are supposed to be in your hand but they have to be put back on the body somewhere. Most people put them where they can't be seen. All this must be done before sunrise and without speaking to anyone before it is done.

From Howard County comes the belief that freckles will leave if you count them correctly the first time. The same informant also says that if the owner of the freckles will touch each one with the head of a common pin, they will disappear.

All but one of the freckle cures, like most of the wart cures, involve the application of some natural substance in an unnatural way. In these examples, however, only the possessor has power to dispose of the freckles, and there is no mention of transferring the unwanted spots to another person. Warts are frequently removed by others and often transferred to others. A casual reference to other printed collections of folk cures shows that in general wart and freckle cures resemble each other more often and more closely than the few examples in this article would indicate.

The desired end, in the case of the preceding cures, is the removal or loss of an illness or nuisance. Cures for baldness are designed to the opposite end of retaining something desirable. Two cures current in Thornton about 1910 are reported. "Falling hair" could be stopped, it was believed, by rubbing the head with "the marrow of bone." Far more interesting is the idea that a man with a tendency to baldness ought to shave off his beard, "thus allowing more nourishment to go to his head." In this beardless age, it is unlikely that such a cure remains current. The common belief that baldness can be stopped by saving all the fallen hair in a box is reported from Madison County.

Summary and Analysis

A large number of the cures in this article depend upon the internal or external application of some substance in the folk pharmacopoeia which is known or believed to have a therapeutic effect. All the herb, root, and bark teas and tonics

are included in this group of folk medicines; so is asafetida, obtained from roots; so are unguents, tobacco, and poultices of various kinds. In this collection, the ills of the digestive and excretory systems, with only two exceptions, are treated with teas and tonics. Burns, wounds, and sores are treated with unguents, tobacco, and poultices respectively. All of the cures so far mentioned here are considered physical.

For almost all other illnesses and injuries, the majority of cures reported here are physio-magical or magical in character. The physio-magical cure is one brought about simply by wearing or applying to the body in a certain way and/or in a certain place an object believed to have curative properties. The magic lies not in the object alone, but in the proper application of it to the body. A copper wire, for instance, carried in a pocket would be just a copper wire; tied about the wrist or waist it would be a potent cure for rheumatism.

Many of the physio-magical cures in this collection apply to just two kinds of illness: respiratory infections and pains (muscular, rheumatic, and neuralgic). The magical object used in such cures seems to fall into one of three categories: animal or insect parts or products; beads, ribbons, threads, and wires; buckeyes, nutmegs, and potatoes. A curative object from the first category is applied directly to the part of the body affected by the illness; for instance, the inner skin of a skunk is bound to the chest to cure pneumonia. Objects in the other two categories are sometimes applied in this fashion, but in most cases are simply worn or carried in any convenient place specified by the charm.

Other physio-magical cures in this collection are concentrated upon the removal of freckles, warts and styes. These cures lean heavily upon their magical elements, which are more important and more numerous than in the preceding group. Instead of being worn or carried, the curative agent in most of these cures must be actively applied, directly to the blemish. A pinhead must be touched to each freckle; warts must be rubbed with a dishcloth and styes with a gold ring. The cures here depend upon momentary treatment rather than upon contact with a curative object over a period of time. These cures also, as a group, have important magical elements (charms and taboos) not found in the respiratory and pain cures. Some cures must be done at a certain time ("early in the morning"); others involve a magical

number ("on the first three mornings of May"). Here one finds the taboos against telling the curative process which become positive injunctions to secrecy in the purely magical cures. The use of verbal charms as aids in the application of the magical agent anticipates in another way the last kind of cure to be considered here.

For some illnesses, the verbal charm, used by a person with proper power, becomes the whole cure, which is then properly identified as entirely magical. The pain or blood stopper, who has magical power (as a legacy rather than a birthright) depends entirely on a potent verbal charm, which is indicated in several reports to be a family treasure. Notice the vagueness of the informants on such charms: the healer mutters "a few secret words" or "a certain verse from the *Bible*"; another may "mumble" her charm. The informant who is next in line to learn a blood-stopping cure remarks that "it wouldn't be cricket to tell someone outside the family." The potency of the verbal magic which cures burns or bleeding obviously depends upon its exclusiveness (power possessed only by a chosen few) and the secrecy with which it is used.

It is evident from even this limited collection of folk cures that in currency and usage they form a kind of pyramid, with the commonly known folk pharmacopoeia at its base, the physio-magical cures in the middle, and the magical cures at its peak. The folk remedies are more or less generally known and used without secrecy; knowledge of them seems to be freely communicated. The physio-magical cures are also widely known and passed on, but secrecy is usually necessary for the successful performance of the cure. The magical cures which can be taught to others are known only to a select few, are passed on in a rigidly restricted manner, and rely in general for their potency upon the secrecy with which they are used. Looking at the cures themselves, one finds at the base of the pyramid natural substances used for their inherent value as drugs and medicines; in the middle, natural substances used as charms according to some magic formula; at the top, words and touch alone used as healing charms. In the physical cures, the power of the cure lies in the substance itself; in the physio-magical group, in the procedure for the curative use of the object; in the magical group, in the healer.

Murray, Kentucky

THE POPULAR CONCEPTION OF THE DEVIL IN CHAUCER'S DAY

By JOSEPH RABEN

Despite the vast literature of demonology that has been produced by both social historians and latter-day devil-worshippers, it is almost impossible to derive a clear-cut picture of the devil as he existed in the minds of the common folk of Chaucer's day. Historians of witchcraft in England find much more fertile fields in the great witch scares of later centuries, while other writers are so devoted to the comparative methods of the anthropologists that we may learn more from them about devils in Tibet or Timbuctu than about our English devil as he was known in Lancashire or Devonshire in the fourteenth century.

One of the most feasible hypotheses about devil-worship in medieval England that these investigators have produced rests upon the assumption that Christianity has lain but lightly upon the spiritual lives of the lower strata of English society. Although firmly established as the official religion, this theory argues, Christianity has never completely destroyed the popular faith in the power of the pagan gods. Since all non-Christian faiths were considered in the middle ages as false and idolatrous, any beliefs which did not accept Christ as the agent of God were obviously inspired by the anti-Christ, called either "Satan" in his Hebrew character, or "the Devil" in his new Anglo-Saxon role. The validity of this hypothesis may be substantiated by the fact that any such illegal worship would naturally have been performed under the most mysterious circumstances of secrecy, at night probably, and in hidden places or out in the fields.

But whether or not he was actually worshipped in Chaucer's day, as was purportedly the case later when the great witch-burnings took place, the devil certainly was a real enough being to a people who still had memories of Celtic elves and fairies. His agency was readily seen in cream that would not churn, rain that ruined ungathered hay, horses that kicked their masters, and all the other misfortunes of daily life. In the city of London in the fourteenth century, witch-craft and sorcery were common and were prohibited

as black magic, derived from the devil.¹ We have records of trials for witchcraft in both ecclesiastical and secular courts on the Continent in Chaucer's lifetime.² But to the common folk, apparently, the devil was not the anti-Christ of the divines; among the unlearned, he walked as one of them, dressing as they dressed when he wished to, playing little tricks when he was in a blithe mood, and enjoying a joke as well as any of them. In "The Friar's Tale," the devil is more of a Till Eulenspiegel than a Satan.

In order to learn a little more about the specific appearance and nature of the devil, we must fall back upon the internal evidence of Chaucer's own writings. Here we are confronted with the problem of discriminating between the popular tradition and the learned. "The Parson's Tale," for example, contains at least thirty occurrences of the word *devil*, almost all of which reflect only the Biblical heritage. Other uses of the word throughout the Chaucer canon tell us nothing, as in imprecations.

When, however, the Parson speaks of "the develes fourneys, that is eschawfed with the fir of helle,"³ he may be recalling Scripture, but certainly he cannot escape the image of the hell-mouth in the morality plays. An echo of the motif of "The Friar's Tale" is heard when the Parson declares: "And over all thyng men oughten eschewe to cursen hire children, and yeven to the devel hire engendrure, as ferforth as in hem is."⁴ In another place, the Parson speaks of the murmurings of disgruntled servants, which words, he says, "men clepen the develes *Pater noster*, though so be that the devel ne hadde nevere *Pater noster*, but that lewed folk yeven it swich a name."⁵ Have we here an allusion to the infamous Black Mass?

According to "The Friar's Tale," the devil is "blak and rough of hewe"⁶ in his natural state. There is nothing here of the red color, the tail, the horns, the pitchfork, or the cloven hoof that were to be imported from the Continent in

¹ Kittredge, George Lyman, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, pp. 50ff.

² Lea, Henry Charles, *Materials toward a History of Witchcraft*, pp. 230ff., 245ff.

³ "The Parson's Tale," 545-50.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 620-25.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 505-10.

⁶ "The Friar's Tale," 1622.

after years. But one attribute which he did already have was that he entered men's mouths to gain access to their bodies, according to Robinson's gloss on the line in "The Manciple's Tale": "The devel of helle sette his foot therein!"⁷

"The Friar's Tale" itself is an indication of the folk attitude toward the devil. Popular narratives in which the devil is either the perpetrator or the butt of some simple (albeit often painful) prank are found all over Europe. Archer Taylor reports three of these in *Sources and Analogues*,⁸ and lists twenty in a *PMLA* article.⁹ H. C. Lea, in his comprehensive survey of witchcraft, reports that the motif of the devil carrying off a person if invited to do so was known on the Continent at this time.¹⁰

But reflections of actual devil-worship are not numerous in Chaucer, and are doubtful at best. Note, first of all, that the wife in "The Friar's Tale" is nowhere suspected of being in league with the devil, *i.e.*, of being a witch. But there may be some allusion to diabolic rituals when the parson says:

Looke how that vertuouse wordes and hooly conforten hem
that travaillen in the service of Crist, right so conforten the
vileyns wordes and knakkes of japeris hem that travaillen in
the service of the devel.¹¹

And are we to take the opening lines of "The Pardoner's Tale" as an indication that there were, or were thought to be, actual temples dedicated to the devil?

In Flaundres was a compaignye
Of yonge folk that haunteden folye,
As riot, hasard, stywes, and tavernes,
Where as with harpes, lutes, and gyternes
They daunce and pleyen at the dees both day and nyght,
And eten also and drynken over hir might,
Thurgh which they doon the devel sacrificise,
Withinne that devels temple, in cursed wise,
By superfluytee abhomynable.

It is axiomatic that Chaucer was familiar with both the oral and the literary traditions of his day. Perhaps the fact that he has blended the two so completely in *The Canterbury Tales*

⁷ "The Manciple's Tale," 38.

⁸ Bryan, William Frank, and Dempster, Germaine, (eds.), *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, pp. 296ff.

⁹ Taylor, Archer, "The Devil and the Advocate," *PMLA*, XXXVI (1921), 35-59.

¹⁰ Lea, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-4.

¹¹ "The Parson's Tale," 650-5.

is evidence that he did not himself distinguish between the devil of the *Bible* and the devil of the people. The green-clad yeoman, derived from no known source, certainly typifies Chaucer's genius in synthesizing all the elements of his society in his writing. And yet, the tale is put into the mouth of a simple friar.

Indiana University

Bloomington, Indiana

Dues for the year 1950 are now payable to the treasurer of the Hoosier Folklore Society, Mrs. W. Edson Richmond, 716 South Park Avenue, Bloomington, Indiana. Because we now have to pay at least part of the printing costs of our journal, it is necessary that dues be paid as quickly as possible.

NOTES, QUERIES, AND REPLIES

With this present issue of *HOOSIER FOLKLORE* your editor has worked his way through the backlog of materials bequeathed to him by the previous editor. The situation is disquieting, for deadlines come around with startling rapidity and we can see little point to the possible eventual edition of the journal written in large part if not in its entirety by the editor himself. *HOOSIER FOLKLORE*, after all, has as its primary purpose the publication of materials collected by members of the *Hoosier Folklore Society* whose members should be more than merely passive recipients of the materials published in the journal. Manuscripts, whether they represent collections of folk materials or organized articles commenting upon such materials, will receive careful attention as soon as they are received. If at all possible, they should be typed, double spaced on 8½ x 11 paper, with a title and the name of the author at the head of the article. We reserve the right to make minor changes in articles and to supply notes to collections of materials without consulting the author; major changes, of course, will be made only with the author's permission.

A CHEREMIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY, WITH
REMARKS ON OTHER FINNO-UGRIC
PERSONAL DOCUMENTS¹

By THOMAS A. SEBEOK

In looking over the very extensive text collections from the various Finno-Ugric languages, we are struck by the almost total absence of personal documents of any sort.² Because of the dearth of such materials—and because we are convinced of their value³ in the investigation of the ethnography of Eastern Europe and Northwestern Asia—we propose to refer to the few personal documents available to us and to communicate a brief but revealing Cheremis autobiography, hitherto unpublished.

Among the Finno-Ugric groups in Siberia, we get a few glimpses from the life of an Ostyak from Lochtotkurt (Sherkaly dialect), one K. I. Maremjanin.⁴ He speaks of his father and his mother, describes an accident, tells about going to work, the Revolution, his first squirrel hunt, of hunting elk and bear.

¹ My research in Cheremis began in 1947 during a field trip to Helsinki sponsored by the American-Scandinavian Foundation; in 1948, I went both to Budapest and to Helsinki, under a fellowship granted by the Viking Fund. To these foundations I offer my most grateful acknowledgment. This paper was presented in substance at the 47th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, in Toronto, Canada.

² The three Finno-Ugric languages, namely, Hungarian, Finnish, and Estonian, possessing a conscious tradition nourished upon the literary trends of the various Indo-European languages will not be considered below. The earliest texts in Hungarian date from the 13th, in Finnish and Estonian from the 16th centuries, respectively.

³ The following works served to focus our attention upon the use of personal documents: Clyde Kluckhohn, *The Personal Document in Anthropological Science* (In *The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology, and Sociology, Bulletin, Social Science Research Council*, no. 53, pp. 79-173 [1945]); Clyde Kluckhohn, "A Navaho Personal Document With a Brief Paretian Analysis," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 1, pp. 260-83 (1945); and A. L. Kroeber, "A Yurok War Reminiscence: The Use of Autobiographical Evidence," *ibid.*, pp. 318-32 (1945).

⁴ W. Steinitz, *Ostjakische Chrestomathie . . .* (Stockholm, 1942). The texts referred to are on pp. 46-50.

Among the European Finno-Ugric groups, the most numerous and perhaps the most interesting personal documents were recorded among the Lapps. Certainly the best known Finno-Ugric personal document is the story of Johan Turi. Since this book has been so widely studied, the following concise statement about it by Kluckhohn will suffice here: "For richness of detail, vividness of description, and integrity of presentation, the story of Turi, the Lapp . . ., can be regarded as a minor classic. The method of obtaining the material is specified as fully as in some of the more recent materials published by anthropologists, and the annotation, although inadequate by contemporary professional standards, is highly informative and scrupulous."⁵

Turi's book is not, however, the only, or even the most extensive, Lapp autobiography. It is surpassed by the personal document collected from a nomadic Lapp, Anta Pirak,⁶ who comes from the community of Tuorpo in Jokkmokk district, Sweden. His book constitutes not only the story of his life from his childhood to our days, but is also a veritable encyclopedia concerning the ways of the nomadic Lapps of his district, on the methods of reindeer breeding, and its hardships. In his youth, Pirak studied in a seminary for two years and became a sort of itinerant teacher among his fellows in Tuorpo. But his attachment to the reindeer culture he knew from his childhood soon made him throw up his job; he left the school and returned to the nomadic way of life, having first acquired, by skillful economy, a sizeable herd of reindeer. He later achieved considerable authority among his fellows and became so famous that even the Swedo-Norwegian commission on reindeer breeding turned to him for advice. Many of his chapter headings read like those in an ethnographic monograph might. He describes fishing and hunting activi-

⁵ The Personal Document . . ., p. 84. See also, Johan Turi, *Turi's Book of Lappland*. Edited and translated into Danish by Emilie Demant Hatt. Translated from the Danish by E. Gee Nash. London, 1931.

⁶ Jåhttee Saamee Viessoom [The Life of a Nomad Lapp], *Skrifter utgivna av K. Humanistiska Vetenskaps-Samfundet i Uppsala* 31:2 (Uppsala, 1937). An earlier edition appeared in Swedish (1933); the original Lapp was published because of its extraordinary linguistic interest. The document was taken down and published by H. Grundstroöm, who also prepared a Lapp-Swedish-German dictionary to accompany it (*ibid.*, 31:3 [1939]). Cf. also Sebeok, *Language* 24.244-50 (1948).

ties, the handling of animal skin, Christmas and wedding feasts and the several annual dwelling sites, the "summer place" and the "winter place" of the reindeer Lapps. He discusses the problem of diminishing herds: because of the burden of taxation, the fall in the price of reindeer, and the heavy compensation Lapps must pay—often unjustly—for damages caused by their reindeer, they are forced to kill or sell ever more and ever younger reindeer. The herds are also depleted by wolves and by disease, and the author complains that he no longer can be counted among the wealthy Lapps, since his reindeer are but a third of their former number.

In addition to Pirak's comprehensive work, we find satirical biographies and very partial autobiographic fragments among other Lapp texts collected by Björn Collinder in Härjedalen from five different informants.⁷ One of the informants, a man of nearly seventy at the time, told two satirical biographies, one entitled, "Of an old Lapp—how he had lived," the other, "Of a bachelor who moved over from another mountain." The first is the story of an old Lapp who refused to adopt new customs and who is otherwise described as foolish; this is illustrated by a series of anecdotes. For example, he carried three caps with him every day; one against the sun, another against the wind, a third against the rain. He always had all three along just in case the weather changed. In the last anecdote, he himself realizes his foolishness. As for the bachelor, he was a miser who buried his money in a box sunk into the mountain. These two satirical biographies are strongly reminiscent of the "Character," that form of the essay so popular during the whole of the seventeenth century all over Europe, and which, of course, came from Theophrastus.

There are also some genuine autobiographic glimpses in this text collection. The same informant contributes two reminiscences from his school days, and another man tells the story of a Christmas Eve adventure from his youth. These are followed by three hunting reminiscences, and the story of two close shaves—one in a snow drift, and another in which the informant tells of the time he nearly drowned.

⁷ Lappische Sprachproben aus Härjedalen . . . , Arbeten utgivna med understöd av Vilhelm Ekmans Universitetsfond, Uppsala 50 (1942).

Finally, we have a woman relating the story of the mysterious murder of her uncle.

An additional comprehensive and ethnographically valuable Lapp document was recorded by Knut Bergsland from a Norwegian Lapp dialect in Røeros,⁸ largely from a woman, Julie Axmann, but also from some half a dozen other informants.

Turning now to the Balto-Finnic group, we find autobiographies collected in at least three languages: Vepse, Votic, and Livonian.

There are three fragments from Vepse, recorded by Lauri Kettunen.⁹ The first of these, entitled "Marja About Herself," is the pathetic story of a pretty girl, living happily in her father's house, whose life changes when she gets married, which she does repeatedly. She lived a hard life, marked by poverty and jail. In the second fragment, Sasku speaks of his dog and, in the third, Sasku, one of five brothers, tells of his experiences in the army, his marriage, and how he raised his brother's son, who finally left him.

There are likewise three fragments from Votic, as published by Kettunen and Lauri Posti.¹⁰ The speaker in the first of these tells of his "sad life," the life of a reformed drunkard, interlarded with moralistic comments upon the evils of drinking. In another short fragment, the speaker tells of his experiences in school, especially his troubles trying to learn Russian. A document of some twenty pages records the life of a Vote in his own words, covering his childhood, with special references to his dog and family orchard; he describes Easter customs; tells of his proposal and marriage, his job as a hired man, and of an incident involving a gipsy fortune teller.

In the first of two Livonian texts, recorded by Kettunen,¹¹ we learn of the impact of the beginning of the first World War, how the Livonians reacted to it, and how they were evacuated. The second continues the story, telling how the Livonians were evacuated into Estonia by boat and how they eventually returned. Their life in Estonia is described in some detail, and also German destruction wrought in their absence.

⁸ Røeros-Samiske Tekster, Nordnorske Samlinger Utgitt av Etnografisk Museum 2.163-340 (Oslo, 1943).

⁹ Näytteitä Etelävepsästä 1.7-14 (1920), 2.96-7, 105-11 (1925).

¹⁰ Näytteitä Vatjan Kielestä, MSFOu 63.40-6, 69-88, 96-7 (1932).

¹¹ Untersuchung über die livische Sprache (Tartu, 1925), pp. 54-63.

From among the Cheremis, only one autobiography appeared in print, in Ernst Lewy's collection,¹² recorded from a war prisoner, one Jegorow. We reproduce this in English here:

"When I was still a little boy of seven—since then I have always lived in fear and mourning. Then my older brothers drove me to school. I was always afraid. Then slowly I got used to it and began to enjoy reading and writing. Thus my parents and brothers loved me too. When, at the age of twelve, I finished school, I had a sorrow again. My good, cheerful mother died. I grew up and always lived sadly. When I became of draft age, they took me among the soldiers. I served for three years. It was also very hard. I had to follow the imperial discipline. When I finished service, I went back home. The family and neighbors took me in very well. After a short time they married me. After that it was good to live for two and a half years; I didn't even notice how my life was. Comrades! Only this time is good for a young man to live. One more great calamity came. War came. They took me to war. The early years were all lost. I spent four months at the front. Every day, every hour I thought, to die or to live. Then once there was a great battle. They were continually shooting. The ground trembled. Hurrah sounded. The Germans captured us. Comrades, you all know how we live. We live, we are very sad. It is a torment to live, and very far from home. For four years we have lived in foreign hands. Only God knows what's ahead. Let there be good luck to all."

Among the vast Cheremis manuscript collections,¹³ there is only a single autobiography. It comes from the village of Otjugowo, District of Jaransk, Province of Vjatka. It was recorded by Odön Beke in Budapest, from a Cheremis war prisoner.¹⁴ It reads as follows, in our English translation:

The Story of My Life

When I became sixteen years old, I liked very much to

¹² Tscheremissische Texte (Hannover, 1926); text in 1.62-3, German translation in 2.72-3.

¹³ On Cheremis text collections in general, cf. the Introduction to my forthcoming book *Cheremis Folklore*.

¹⁴ *Finnisch-Ugrische Sprachstudien in ungarischen Kriegsgefangenenlagern*, JSFOu 49/5.1-16 (1938).

wander. My parents were wealthy and many people know them; they are well-to-do people. My father was a merchant. He scolded me very much on account of my wandering and didn't have any clothes made for me. During these years, people started to dress very nicely among us and I didn't have anything. Sometimes my father takes me to a church village to the market and tells everybody: "My sons are good for nothing." I was very much ashamed then, and then I thought and thought where to go, what to do. My father didn't love me; my mother loved me very much and secretly bought me all kinds of clothes. And I played the harmonica very nicely, and for this reason the girls liked me very much. And my lover was in the village. I used to go to this girl day and night all the time. For this reason my father didn't love me. He broke many of my harmonicas. But I just stood it. Then, one summer, after the completion of the work, I wanted to go to Siberia; my father gave me a document, a passport; of money, he gave me only ten rubles. He said, "My son, go where you can! When you were small, I fed you and gave you to drink; now you are big and know your own mind." My mother gave me secretly, without the knowledge of my father, twenty rubles more, and then I started off. My lover heard that I am going away and quietly, secretly, she told me: "Come," she said, "to me! Today my parents aren't [at home]." Then I went to her. She prepared for me brandy and [things] to eat. I ate a little, drank, kissed her, and started off for Siberia.

First I arrived in a big town, Sorbisci. From there I then traveled by water to the town of Vjatka. I was still young then. I was very scared. I still didn't see anything. Then I sat on a train in Vjatka, and they took me to a lake named Bajkal. I traveled on the train continuously for twenty-one days. I arrived at a station. I got out. But their people are not like us. I was very scared of them. Then I worked for these people. Then I wasn't afraid any more. And then I went to serve a rich Jew; I lived with him for an eleven month period. He was a very good master; he didn't like to let me go at all. From there I even sent my father ten rubles. I paid my father the loan, and to my lover I sent home my photograph. Then from there I came homewards to a big town: I arrived in Irkutsk. There I went around for two days looking for work. I was unable to find work. From

there I sat on a train again and went homewards. I got to a big station. I got off the train and began to look for work. I found work quickly: I took employment with a rich Czech in a sausage factory. I lived for a year with this Czech. Fifteen rubles [was] one month[ly pay]. But the money was never enough. I was young then, I liked to drink a little, go to the girls. Then I left there. I took my passport and fifty-five rubles of my money, and again came homewards. Then I arrived in a town, Krasnajarsk. I got off the train and went to look for work. Then I found work, making crossties; I started to work with an ax. Then I found a friend there, from around us. We always worked together. Then I got one hundred and forty rubles there and started homeward. I arrived in our town Vjatka and got out. I went to the market and bought everything that I needed. I bought gloves, I bought a nice coat, pants, cap, handkerchief, and felt shoe with rubbers, a watch, all sorts of nice clothes. And I spent one hundred and ten rubles for purchases. I was left with only thirty rubles of money. I still have a long way to go. In Vjatka I boarded a ship. I paid twenty rubles and then arrived in our town, in Sorbisci. From there I still have to go a hundred and five versts. Then I found a man and hired him for seven rubles to take me to my home. He took me. And I also bought cake, and spent all my money.

I arrived on the feast day of Michel. My father was not at home, he had gone to town. My mother saw me and was very glad. She immediately put the tea [water] on, and brought [things] to eat. I drank, ate, and then secretly told my mother, saying: "I haven't got a kopek of money." Then my mother gave me secretly thirty rubles. Evening came, my father arrived. I immediately fell at my father's feet. My father told me: "Wait my son," he said, "Don't fall down [yet]! I will ask you something," he said. "Where have you been my son?" he said. "What good have you achieved for yourself? You were gone for two and a half years, you didn't send me a kopek of money, and I always worked for you here. Well, go back! Where you have been, go back there! You didn't do me any good," he said. Then I didn't think much but immediately started to put on my clothes. My mother started crying. "Where are you going?" she said. "Your older brother was drafted as a soldier and you too are going away. Who will work? We are old." Then the