Decoration of Negro Graves

Ernest Ingersoll


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impossible to describe; up they rush to where the devil is being beaten, back they dance to the fire, around and around they fly, leaping and yelling, the spirit of the great chief (the small boy) rivaling all in feats of agility and endurance, the whole making night one hideous dream. Then, and only then, can one appreciate the novel sight witnessed on the banks of the Gila."

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NOTES AND QUERIES.

"INJUN-GIVING." — If an American child, who has made a small gift to a playmate, is indiscreet enough to ask that the gift be returned, he (or she) is immediately accused of being an Indian-giver, or as it is commonly pronounced Injun-giver. The child so unwise as to regret his gift is regarded with great disdain by his playmates, who always treat "Injun-givers" with scornful looks and sometimes with wordy derision as having committed a great offence to child-etiquette.

Can any reader of the Journal of American Folk-Lore explain the origin of this expression. Are Indians (red-skins) prone to this habit?

In England, the children who feel aggrieved cry out: —

Give a thing and take a thing
Is a bad man's plaything.

But so far as I could learn, English children do not use the term "Injun-giving."

H. Carrington Bolton.

DECORATION OF NEGRO GRAVES. — The note by Dr. H. Carrington Bolton (vol. iv. p. 267, July—September, 1891) recalls to my mind with interest my own observation ten years ago in the Negro cemetery at Columbia, S. C., to which he refers. I made the matter then the subject of remark in a letter to the New York "Evening Post" (February 24, 1881). The paragraphs which apply are those following, and they give more in detail what Dr. Bolton has made note of, showing that the custom is not yet obsolete: —

"I saw at Columbia, S. C., a practice in vogue among the blacks which exists nowhere else so far as I can learn, and is savage or childlike in its simplicity of idea. When a negro dies, some article or utensil, or more than one, is thrown upon his grave; moreover it is broken. If you go through a dilapidated weed-grown graveyard which stragglies in and out of the hollows on a side hill covering the high bluffs along the river, you will see some very strange examples of this mortuary custom. Nearly every grave has bordering or thrown upon it a few bleached sea-shells of a dozen different kinds, such as are found along the south Atlantic coast. Mingled with these is a most curious collection of broken crockery and glassware. On the large graves are laid broken pitchers, soap-dishes, lamp chimneys, tureens, coffee-cups, sirup jugs, all sorts of ornamental vases, cigar boxes, gun-locks, tomato cans, teapots, flower-pots, bits of stucco, plaster images,
pieces of carved stone-work from one of the public buildings destroyed during the war, glass lamps and tumblers in great number, and forty other kitchen articles. Chief of all these, however, are large water pitchers; very few graves lack them. The children's graves were really pathetic. There you could see doll's heads, little china wash-bowls and pitchers, toy images of animals, china vases, and pewter dishes, indeed everything of that sort that would interest a child.

"The negroes themselves hardly know how to account for this custom. They say it is an 'old fashion.' In the case of the children, and partly in respect to adults, the articles thrown upon the grave are those of which the deceased person was especially fond — the baby's playthings for example. As for the shells, stone-work, stucco and that sort of thing, they are purely ornamental, as perhaps is all the rest. What the significance of so many cracked pitchers and jugs may be I do not know. They are found upon graves of all ages. Surely the negro of Columbia does not regard this particular form of earthenware with special admiration or affection. Can it have any allusion to the proverb that the pitcher that goes often to the well shall at last be broken? or better, be in memory of the prophet's line, 'and the golden bowl shall be broken'?"

Ernest Ingersoll.

Quilt Patterns. — In view of the large amount of time that was spent in colonial days, even down through much of the first half of the present century, in the manufacture of patchwork quilts, it seems to me worth while to preserve some particulars of this most elementary form of art needlework. The task is still possible, in view of the fact that many of the masterpieces of this class still survive, and that in some of the more provincial parts of the central States at least their manufacture is still carried on. Hoping to be able to describe, with adequate illustrations, some of the more characteristic kinds of patchwork, I am engaged in collecting the names and descriptions (with examples if possible) of the patterns both of patchwork and of quilting. And I trust that the local branch of our folk-lore society may be able to add somewhat to my collections. The names themselves are not without interest, and I subjoin a list: —

Diamond, straight-work, feather and shell patterns are those with which I am familiar as used for quilting. Among patchwork patterns I know or have means of learning the mode of piecing the "album-quilt," "nine-patch," "log cabin," "star," "tea-leaf," "tumbler," and "state-house steps." I hope to learn the mysteries of the "goose-chase," "pine-apple," "Irish chain," "double Irish chain," "brick work," "rising sun."

I may add in conclusion that the interest which attaches to these old quilts is not only due to the light that they throw on the degree of artistic advancement (or lack of it) that characterized the household industries of our grandmothers, but the needlework itself is often extraordinarily beautiful, fine, and intricate, approaching in these respects the finest of the old tapestries.

Fanny D. Bergen.