CRADLES OF THE AMERICAN ABORIGINES.*

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Many questions in anthropology depend for their answer upon a correct knowledge of the manner in which the child passes the first year of its life.

It is commonly believed that the shape of the head and, indeed, of the whole frame is modified by the cradle. From time to time the National Museum at Washington has come into possession of cradles and cradle-frames from the farthest north of their limit to the farthest south. A description of these with accurate drawings is herein given in order to throw further light upon the problem.

Deformation of the head, as is well known, is both designed and undesigned. Among the Chinuks and other tribes near the mouth of the Columbia River and northward, flattening of the head was intentionally practiced in a manner to be hereafter described.

Undesigned head-shaping is believed to have resulted among the Mound people as well as among our modern Indians, especially in the occipital region, from the contact of the soft and pliable head of the infant with the cradle-board or frame, even with the downy pillow.

In both Americas the majority of aboriginal children were confined in some sort of cradle from their birth until they were able to walk about. The cradle during this period serves many purposes:

(1) It is a mere nest for the helpless infant.

(2) It is a bed so constructed and manipulated as to enable the child to sleep either in a vertical or a horizontal position.

(3) It is a vehicle in which the child is to be transported, chiefly on the mother's back by means of a strap over the forehead, but frequently dangling like a bundle at the saddle-bow. This function, of course, always modifies the structure of the cradle, and, indeed, may have determined its very existence among nomadic tribes.