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THE ROYAL STORES LIMITED

Occultism Among the Indians.

STRANGE WORK OF MEDICINE MEN.

(By Arthur E. Bostwick, Ph.D., in the Springfield Republican.)

It is quite clear that the religion of the Indian is the last thing about him the white man will ever understand, and the whole attitude of the unseen world has been misunderstood. In common parlance and even in the works of ethnologists, everything that he held sacred is indiscriminately called "medicine" in the sense of mystery or magic. As a matter of fact, the Indian doctor had learned many of the secrets of legitimate medicine. He employed a tea or decoction of those herbs, roots and leaves with whose therapeutic properties he was familiar, and always used his remedies wisely. The sweatoven or internal bath was a valuable discovery of his, and the vapor, or Turkish bath was in general use. It is only a few years since he was condemned for taking the patient with pneumonia or consumption out of his home into a tent, now the practice has become a general one.

He was no surgeon, but could reduce a dislocation or set a broken bone with fair success. Finally, the medicine man—or woman, for women were among the most successful practitioners — possessed much personal magnetism and authority, and in his treatment often sought to re-establish the equilibrium of the patient through mental or spiritual influences, and there is no doubt that he was accomplished in hypnotism and suggestion. It is important to remember that in the old days the "medicine man" received no payment for his services, which were in the nature of an honorable function or office. When the idea of barter was introduced among us, and valuable presents or fees began to be demanded for treating the sick, the ensuing greed and rivalry led to many demoralizing practices, and, in time, to the rise of the modern "conjurer."

Ever seeking to establish a spiritual comradeship with the animal creation, the Indian adopted this or that animal as his "totem," the emblematic device of his society or clan. Learned books have been written, and far-fetched theories promulgated, as to the origin of this custom. It is my own belief that the totem represented the traditional ancestress, as we are told that the First Man had many wives among the animal people. The symbolic attributes of beaver, bear or tortoise, such as wisdom, cunning, courage, and the like, were supposed to be mysteriously conferred upon the wearer of the badge. The totem, or charm, used in medicine was ordinarily that of the "medicine lodge" to which the practitioner belonged, although there were some great men who boasted special revelation. It is fairly well known that the American Indian had somewhat developed occult power; and although in the latter days there have been many impostors, and, allowing for the vanity and weakness of human nature, it is fair to assume that there must have been some even in the old days, yet there are well-attested instances of remarkable prophecy and other mystic practice.

A Sioux prophet predicted the coming of the white man fully 50 years before the event, and even described accurately his garments and weapons. Before the steamboat was invented, another prophet of our race described the "fire boat" that would swim upon their mighty river, the Mississippi, and the date of this prophecy is attested by the name used, which is one long since obsolete. No doubt many predictions have been colored to suit the new age, and unquestionably false prophets, fakirs, and conjurers have become the pest of the tribes during the transition period. Nevertheless, even during this period there was here and there a man of the old type who was implicitly believed in to the last.

Notably among these was Ta-chank-pee Ho-tank-a (His-War-Club-Speaks-Loud), who foretold a year in advance the details of a great war party against the Ojibways. There were to be seven battles, all successful except the last, in which the Sioux were to be taken at a disadvantage and suffer crushing defeat. This prediction was fulfilled to the letter. Our people surprised and slew many of the Ojibways in six distinct skirmishes, but in turn were followed on their way home and led into an ambush from which but few came out alive. Another famous "medicine man" was born on the Rum river about 150 years ago, and lived to be over a century old. He was born during a desperate battle with the Ojibways, at a moment when, as it seemed, the band of Sioux engaged were to be annihilated. Therefore the child's grandmother exclaimed, "Since we are all to perish, let him die a warrior's death!" and she placed his cradle under fire, near the spot where his uncle and grandfathers were fighting, for he had no father. But when an old man discovered the new-born child, he commanded the woman to take care of him. "For," said he, "we know not how precious the strength of even one warrior may some day become to his nation!"

This child lived to become great among us, as was intimated to the superstitious by the circumstances of his birth. At the advanced age of 75 he saved his band from utter destruction at the hands of their ancestral enemies, by suddenly giving warning received in a dream, of the approach of a large war party. The men immediately sent out scouts, and fell trees for a stockade, barely in time to meet and repel the predicted attack. Several years later he repeated the service, and again saved his people from awful slaughter. There was no confusion of figures or omens as with lesser men, but in every incident that is told of him his interpretation of the sign, whenever I was proved singularly correct.

The father of Little Crow, the chief who led the "Minnesota massacre" of 1862, was another prophet of note. One of his characteristic prophecies was made only a few years before he died, when he declared that, although already an old man, he would go once more upon the warpath. At the final war feast before departure, he declared that three of the enemy would be slain, but evinced great distress and reluctance in foretelling that he would lose two of his own men. Three of the Ojibways were indeed slain, as he had said, but in the struggle the old war prophet lost both of his own sons.

There are many trustworthy men even men of Christian faith, so vouch for these and similar events occurring as foretold. I cannot pretend to explain them, but I know that our people possessed remarkable powers of concentration and abstraction, and I fancy that their nearness to nature kept the spirit sensitive to impressions not commonly felt, and in touch with the invisible powers. Certainly the Indian never doubted the immortal nature of the spirit or soul of man, but neither did he care to speculate upon its probable state or condition in a future life. The idea of a "happy hunting ground" is modern and probably borrowed from or invented from the white man. He apparently believed that after it is freed from the body the spirit pervades all Nature, yet often lingers near the grave, or "spirit bundle," for the consolation of friends, and is able to hear prayers. We had faith in apparitions and communications from the dead.

Some of us had a peculiar intuition for the locality of a grave. My own grandmother was one of these; and as far back as I can remember when camping in a strange country, my brother and I would search for and find human bones at the spot she had indicated to us as an ancient burial place, or the spot where a brave warrior had fallen. Of course the outward signs of burial had been long since obliterated. The Scotch would certainly have declared that this capable woman had the "second sight," for she had other remarkable premonitions or intuitions within my own recollection. I have heard her speak of a peculiar sensation in the breast, by which, as she said, she was advised of anything of importance concerning her absent children. Other native women have claimed a similar monitor, but I never heard of one who could interpret it with such accuracy.

We were once camping on Lake Huron when we received news that my uncle and his family had all been murdered several weeks before at a fort some 200 miles distant. While all our clan were wailing and mourning their loss, my grandmother calmly bade them cease, saying that her son was upcounting, and that they would see him soon. Although we had no other reason to doubt the ill tidings, it is a fact that my uncle came into camp two days after his reported death. At another time, when I was 14, we had just left Fort Ellis, on the Assiniboine river, and my youngest uncle had selected a fine spot for our night camp. It was already afternoon, but my grandmother became unaccountably nervous, and positively refused to pitch her tent. So we reluctantly went on down the river, and camped after dark in a secluded place. The next day we learned that a family who were following close behind had stopped at the first place selected, but were surprised in the night by a roving war party, and massacred to a man. This incident made a great impression upon our people.

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