

The Feasts of the Aborigines

Written for the CANADIAN HOME
JOURNAL by

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IN all ages among the Indian nations of our continent, festivals at certain seasons of the year have been celebrated with great pomp and ceremony. Our Christmas festival, which we are now approaching, is commemorated only by the Christian Indian, and is not purely a feast of the aborigines. The religion of the red man does not teach of a Christ. Their one God is a great and all-powerful spirit who watches and guards the Indians, and when life on earth is ended, takes him away to a "happy hunting-ground," to live and hunt throughout eternity.

The ceremonies of the ancient Indian festivals were as regular as in our own Christian churches; but, unlike our festivals, they consisted entirely of sports, games, dances and amusements. One of the greatest feasts was celebrated at New Year's, when there was the killing of the white dog, and dancing and feasting was kept up for nine days. This festival is still celebrated among the Six Nation Indians of the Grand River Reserve.

During the Indian year there were originally six national festivals, and they were of a decided religious character, and were looked forward to as a season of joy and rejoicing. The first festival was held in the spring when the corn, beans and squash had ripened, and the maple syrup had begun to flow. It was called the "Green Corn Festival." The Indians gathered beneath the green boughs and made preparations for the feast, which was conducted with the utmost order and solemnity. This was a feast which was particularly pleasing to Ha-wen-ne-yu. The ceremony was opened by some appropriate addresses, and one of their number exercised a general supervision during the celebrations, and presided at the feast. All the tribes of Indians gathered and took part in the amusements and religious instruction.

The Hunter's Feast was celebrated after the Indians had returned from an expedition, and was a sort of a thanksgiving festival for the game they had obtained in the hunt and for their safe return to their families.

The Harvest Feast among the Indians was regulated by the forwardness and backwardness of the harvest, and it was observed as a very solemn occasion. It was celebrated by the offering up of the first-fruits of the harvest at the beginning of the first new moon in which the corn became full eared. The chief arranged a time for beginning the festival, which lasted three days, and was spent in feasting and sports. Every family contributed something to this feast, such as melons, maize and beans. There was a feast of Daily Sacrifice, and a Feast of Love, which latter consisted of a renewal of old friendships. The Indians ate and drank together, walked together with arms entwined. The young men and women danced together in circles from morning until evening, to make light their hearts and unite them in love before the "All-powerful Spirit."

The Indian worship originally consisted of two parts, sacrifice and cantico. The cantico was performed by a round of dances, songs and shouts. The feast consisted of hot cakes made of new corn which had previously been wrapped in leaves and then baked in ashes.

At these festivals there were many forms of dances indulged in, and every dance had its peculiar step, and every step its meaning. There was the buffalo dance, the scalp dance, the beggar's dance, the boasting dance, the bull dance, the bear dance, eagle dance, dog dance, slave dance, discovery dance, and the dance of the braves. There were in all thirty-two distinct dances, and none like the dances of civilized society: not the graceful maze or easy movement of cotillion or quadrille. The Indian dances were brisk and noisy; they were a form of worship or an appeal to the Great Spirit.

The discovery dance was exceedingly droll. Without music or song it was conducted. The only sound was the patting of the feet, which came simultaneously to the ground in perfect time. The Indians stepped forward in a skulking posture overlooking the country, and professed to announce the approach of animals or enemies.

The slave dance was a picturesque scene, danced by young braves of the best families of the tribes, who volunteered to be slaves for two years, and subject to perform any menial service that the chief might order, no matter how humiliating or degrading. But after serving the two years they were exempt ever after from all labor or degrading occupation.

The dog dance consisted of the killing of two dogs in the presence of the assembled audience, and it was then eaten uncooked. A spirited dance followed.

The scalp dance was given after a feast to celebrate a victory won. It was danced in the dead of night by the dim light of torches by the chiefs alone, after the return of a war party with the scalps obtained in battle. This dance was kept up for fifteen nights in succession. The chiefs brandished the scalps and war weapons above their heads, barking, screaming, and all jumping together on both feet at the same time, with a simultaneous slap and blow. During these frantic leaps and yelps, every man distorted his face and snapped his teeth. No description could convey to the readers the frightful effect of these scenes, enacted as they were in the dead and darkness of night.

The beggar's dance was a very spirited dance performed in order to gain favors. The young men were beautifully equipped in breech clouts or kilts made of eagle's or raven's quills, and with lances and pipes and rattles they stepped out in time to the beating of a drum.

During the bear dance the entire skin of the bear was worn, and every dancer imitated the notions of the bear.

The eagle dance was celebrated in honor of that bird, for which the Indian has a religious regard. The twelve or sixteen Indians who took part in it were painted over with white clay, and each held in his hand the tail of an eagle.

The bull dance continued for fifteen minutes. Perfect time was kept, and when music and dancing stopped, which was always perfectly simultaneous, the whole nation raised the huzza, and a deafening shout of approbation. The master of cere-

monies, or the O-Ru-pah, danced back to the sacred wigwam; and so ended the "Festival of the Aborigines."

For the CANADIAN HOME JOURNAL.

Christmas.

WHAT hallowed thoughts round Christmas cling!
How sweet the merry joy-bells ring!
All-telling of a Saviour's birth,
Good-will to man, and peace on earth.

We hail Thee, heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Thy glorious reign shall never cease!
Thou King of Kings, Emmanuel,
Didst come to earth with man to dwell.

Hosannas loud, the children sing,
For Jesus is the children's king;
He was a babe, a boy, a man—
How wondrous was redemption's plan!

Yes, sweet are Christmas thoughts to me,
Thou blessed Lamb of Calvary;
Thou faithful Shepherd of the sheep,
Dost all thy lambs in safety keep.

When Christmas days on earth are o'er,
And we have left this mortal shore,
He'll take His ransomed ones above,
To share with Him His Father's love.

Among His many mansions of air,
Which He has promised to prepare,
When all life's burden are laid down,
He'll give each faithful one a crown.
JENNIE A. PEACOCK.

"How do you like your new quarters?" asked the landlord, pleasantly. The new tenant in the modern apartment house looked the rooms over and sadly rejoined: "These aren't quarters. These are cighths."

Is THE world all grown up? Is childhood dead? Or is there not in the bosom of the wisest and the best of the child's heart left, to respond to its earliest enchantments?—
Charles Lamb.

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