

O-KEE-PA:

A RELIGIOUS CEREMONY OF THE MANDANS.

IN a narrative of fourteen years' travels and residence amongst the native tribes of North and South America, entitled '*Life amongst the Indians,*' and published in London and in Paris, several years since, I gave an account of the tribe of Mandans,—their personal appearance, character, and habits; and briefly alluded to the singular and unique custom which is now to be described, and was then omitted, as was alleged, for want of sufficient space for its insertion,—the "O-kee-pa," an annual religious ceremony, to the strict observance of which those ignorant and superstitious people attributed not only their enjoyment in life, but their very existence; for traditions, their only history, instructed them in the belief that the singular forms of this ceremony produced the buffalos for their supply of food, and that the omission of this annual ceremony, with its sacrifices made to the waters, would bring upon them a repetition of the calamity which their traditions say once befell them, destroying the whole human race, excepting one man, who landed from his canoe on a high mountain in the West.

This tradition, however, was not peculiar to the Mandan tribe, for amongst one hundred and twenty different tribes that I have visited in