

## Young People's Department.

### INDIAN "MEDICINE MEN."

BY REV. W. A. BURMAN.

**H** E Indian medicine man is the representative of a class of men to be found among almost all heathen races, and especially amongst the more degraded. He combines within himself the powers of a seer, wizard, physician and counsellor. As such he is usually a man of great influence and importance in his own little community. He seems to supply, and his particular calling depends upon a felt want, which is almost universal. That craving is for a mediator or intercessor—one who, because of superior wisdom or goodness, or power, is able to stand between the ordinary man and the "Great Unseen," by which he sees himself environed.

The accompanying picture is a portrait of one of these men among the Dakota or Sioux Indians of our Northwest. His name, pronounced Shunkamakomani, means "dog walking on the ground." The sticks before him are his crutches. Three or four years ago, while acting as guide on the western plains, his horse tripped and fell at a badger hole, and rolling upon him, crushed his hip, and crippled him for life. Though suffering a good deal at times he manages with the assistance of his wife to get about and make a scanty living by preparing and selling medical preparations to Indians, and occasionally to settlers. His remedies are chiefly prepared from herbs, of which he has a very respectable knowledge, and some are undoubtedly of value. His curious head-dress consists of two buffalo horns, attached to a cap of buffalo skin. In one hand he holds a fan, probably the wing of an eagle or "wavy," in the other the unfailing Indian pipe. The feathers attached to his cap denote that he has been a war-

rior of note, and the numerous trinkets are made of shells, claws and beads, such as Indians delight in. When I visited him last fall I found him living in a miserable dark tent hidden away in a clump of willows, in a most wretched condition. Yet poor as he is he has adopted two tiny orphan children, a proof only that even he, ignorant and heathen as he is, has yet within his heart some measure of the precious grace of charity.

There is much that is both interesting and instructive in the position, character and work of the medicine men among the Indian tribes, and many writers have gone more or less fully into the subject. Few, however, have seemingly thor-

oughly understood it, partly no doubt because of the disinclination of the Indians to converse on the subject. In a brief article the matter cannot be thoroughly discussed, but the following notes may interest our readers.

The medicine men are not as a rule isolated and independent dabblers in the "black art," but are members of an exclusive organization of a semi-religious and mystic character. In the case of a tribe widely scattered it is usual to have an annual gathering at least, at which the various rites of the society are performed, and new members initiated. This is usually held by our western In-

dians in the spring. A large tent is prepared, with a sort of passage leading to it, and made usually of canvas stretched on poles. At the entrance are stationed guards, decked out in gaudy attire with clubs, spears and other weapons, to keep out all non-members. Large quantities of food are prepared, the leading members prepare themselves by fasting and a series of rude baths in the "mitipi," or sweating-tent, as the Sioux call it, while those to be initiated as new members fast and sleep alone in the woods for several days and nights. At the appointed time the proceedings commence with a great amount of singing, to the accompan-



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