

tance with the gods, indeed, to have been almost one of themselves.

Part of his work in this capacity is to instruct new members of the "wakan" circle in the various duties and ceremonies imposed upon them, to teach in short the myth, ritual, and religion of his forefathers. The lively imagination of these men, mingling with self-interest, cunning, and possibly a good deal of real faith in some parts of their creed, has led to the imposition of burdens, almost as grievous to be borne as those of the Pharisees of old. It is his work to show the novice the colour of the paint wherewith to adorn himself, and the pattern to be used; to reveal to him, or help him to discover, what creature, either animal or bird, is to be sacred to him, and what part of it he must never eat. He is the counsellor and guide of his ignorant brethren.

To-day, the influence of these men is greatly on the wane, except, perhaps, in the small wandering bands that have, as yet, heard but little of the Gospel.

But thirty, or even twenty years ago it was very different. The people were entirely under their control. All alike were taught from earliest infancy to regard the medicine man as the incarnation of wisdom and power. He could, they believed, talk with the gods, call down their wrath, or even dare to defy such as tried to thwart his purposes. All, from aged man or woman to the little child, were made to do him reverence and obey his commands.

The Rev. G. H. Pond, who laboured amongst the Dakota's tribes, wrote in 1866:—

"Much as the savage loves ease and self-indulgence, he will cheerfully subject himself to almost any privation, discomfort and toil, for days, weeks, or even months together, in order to procure the necessary provisions for a sacrifice, which the priests assure him the gods demand. If he fails, he fully believes that the penalty may be the infliction of any or all the evils to which an Indian is exposed. A man made a trip on foot from the "Little Rapids" on the Minnesota River, to Big Stone Lake, and purchased and brought on his back, a pack of dried buffalo meat, weighing probably, sixty or seventy pounds, a distance of nearly two hundred miles, to be used in the medicine dance—a sacrifice to the Onkteki, and to the souls of the dead. This he did, because the priest assured him it was the will of the Taku-Wakan."

During my nine years' residence amongst the Dakotas, I have witnessed many such incidents of self-denial; and have seen men and women barter almost all their possessions, to make a feast in memory of some dead relative, or to provide for the worshippers at some great medicine dance. In the spring of last year I saw a band of Sioux, or Dakotas, indulge in a feast to such an extent that in two days they were absolutely destitute.

But the medicine man is also the *prophet* of his tribe. In the past when tribal wars and foraging, or horse stealing raids were common, a seer, or diviner, was an absolute necessity in every band. He it was who enlisted the young braves, who gave him his sacred armour, which had been constructed on a plan or model revealed by the gods, and surcharged with the mysterious power—the "tonwan" of the God of thunder or of war.

A Sioux of my acquaintance, had a wonderful war shield which was supposed to be unusually full of supernatural power—the spirit of Waki-nyan the thunder-god having entered it and made it positively bullet and arrow proof. When there was thunder in the air it was customary to place this particular shield outside the tipi—hanging upon a tripod, that so it might receive a further infusion of the spirit's power. Such was the superstitious reverence in which it was held, that nothing could induce its owner to part with it.

The "armour feast," at which these magic weapons were distributed was a very important ceremony, being generally practised before starting out upon the warpath, or when the young men were to be admitted to the status of manhood.

The weapons at that time distributed, whether of war or of the chase, are not necessarily used by their owners. Indeed, it seems that only the spear was actually used, possibly because in former days a real spear was too valuable to remain neglected. But all or any of these weapons, whether spear, arrow, shield, tomahawk or bow, or even the sacred war-paint, are treated as in the highest degree sacred, and "wakan," containing the very essence of the gods, and perfect charms against certain forms of evil. Carefully wrapped in cloths, they are placed on fine days outside the tent, and are never to be touched by an adult female. I remember well the confusion and despair written upon the face of an old Sioux warrior, when a lady with me touched and carefully examined his war drum. The lady, a well-known missionary of wide experience amongst Indians, had not met with this phase of belief before, and so all unwittingly, broke one of the most important canons of Indian law.

To obtain any of the above articles from the medicine-man, the unfortunate devotee has to injure and humiliate himself, obeying him in every particular, and subjecting himself to an exhausting course of "inipi," or vapour baths, fastings, and vigils. The ceremony of presenting the armour is thus well described by Pond:—

"The spear and tomahawk being prepared and duly consecrated and rendered 'wakan,' the person who is to receive them, with a most piteous wail and suppliant aspect, approaches the god-man and reverently presents to him the pipe of prayer. He then lays his trembling