

AN INDIAN SUN DANCE.

WOULD you like to see it? Yes, for it would be a strange sight. No, for it is hard and cruel, and a part of heathen worship.

Let us listen to Mr. Gilmour, as he tells in the *Leaflet* of one which he saw in the North West.

"You asked me for some description of an Indian Sun Dance:—

The Indians—that I have met with—believe that there is one God over all, but that to his white children He gave a book (the Bible) to teach them how they are to serve Him, while to his red children he gave no book, but by visions, or dreams, that come to certain Indians in each band, he makes known his will towards them. Thus it is given by dreams to a certain Indian, that for a number of years he is to have the conduct of the sun dance, and he becomes the master of ceremonies.

During the winter or summer preceding the dance some of the Indians have dreams that indicate that by going through some of the sun-dance ordeals, either the torture, or fasting, or dancing ordeal, he or some member of his family will get relief from some sickness they may have, or they will earn pardon for some past misdeeds.

A date is fixed upon for holding the dance; and word is sent to the other reserves, and a week before the time the visitors begin to arrive. This interval is spent in horse-racing, gambling, etc.

A sort of pavilion made of long poles is erected, and inside this skeleton of a building the dance is held.

The three principal features of the recent Lizard Point dance were: fasting, dancing, and the torture.

To a number it was revealed by a dream that they should fast, and for three days and three nights they neither ate nor drank, and kept continually blowing on a little whistle, such as boys are fond of making from the branches of some kind of bush.

The dancers shuffled their feet in a clumsy sort of way, keeping time to the beating of a large drum. This was kept up for perhaps

twenty minutes at a time, with a breathing space of one or two minutes between each dance. The same dancers continued during the three days and three nights, and without breaking their fast.

The torture consists in pinching up the skin on each shoulder in front; through this double fold of skin a hole is pierced, and a stick run through the two holes, to either end of this stick a strong string is fastened, and at a distance of a few feet from the body these strings are attached at the same point to a long rope, which, at a considerable height, is fastened to the centre pole of the pavilion.

The man then leans back so far that the weight of his body comes on the rope, and in this position sways to and fro until the skin tears out, or until, as is frequently the case, he faints. If he succeeds in bearing up until the skin is torn out, there is great rejoicing, the spirit is pleased with the brave man, and will grant that for which the torture is borne.

In one case the incisions were in the back of the shoulders, strings were fastened in these holes and tied to the skull of a buffalo; in this way he walked three times around the pavilion, dragging the skull after him.

Only the Indians who have been guided by dreams participate in these hideous rites, but all the others are there as spectators.

As soon as the dance is declared over, every Indian folds his tent and moves away, as the spirits would be much displeased if any should remain in the vicinity of this sacred ground. The pavilions are never touched afterwards, and are never used a second time.

This is all very sad to us, as it must be to all Christians, but we were pleased that none of our pupils, not even the larger ones, expressed any desire to see the dance. I think this dance belongs to the class that has been, recently, by law, forbidden, so that we hope they have had their last sun-dance."

When Robert Morrison started for China, an incredulous American said to him: "Mr. Morrison, do you think that you can make any impression on the Chinese? "No," was the reply, "but I think the Lord can."