



BLACKFEET BRINGING IN BRANCHES FOR THE SUN LODGE

# THE SUN DANCE OF THE BLACKFEET

BY CALVIN McQUESTEN

THE Sun Dance gatherings of the Blackfeet are the last surviving remnants of the tribal life of a people who once ranged supreme and untrammelled over a stretch of territory as large as the whole of England. To-day their numbers are more than decimated by war and disease. Crowded to the wall by a foreign invader whose civilisation they seem utterly unable to assimilate, they drag out a miserable existence cooped up within the narrow limits of their reservations, and huddled together round the distributing offices of the Government which feeds them.

But at these annual gatherings are to be seen the last broken outlines of their unique social organisation, the last spiritless performance of their weird and frenzied religious rites,

and the last faint gleam of the wild, fierce and almost heroic spirit which has made these and other red men of North America appeal to the imagination of the world.

Here the Ikunuhkatsi (comrades-in-arms), the ancient warrior bands bound together by oaths as solemn as those which held the knightly orders of mediæval chivalry, once more sit in social circle and pass the memory-stirring pipe from lip to lip, as they talk of battle and of buffalo hunt, of scalping and of pony raiding, until the old fierce flame lights up their faces and flashes from their eyes, and the crop-haired school-boys slink away to hide their shameful store-clothes, or cover them with the blanket toga of their race. Here are performed the fragments of that mys-