

THE BLACKFOOT SUN-DANCE.

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The most important sacred festival of the Blackfeet is the Sun-Dance. In the native language it is called Okán, a word whose meaning is now entirely lost. It is known amongst the white people as the Medicine-Dance or Sun-Dance. This arises from the fact that Natos, *the sun*, when combined with other words is also translated *medicine*, referring to the spiritual ceremonies of the medical priesthood. In the native religion of the Indians its true signification is *holy* or *divine*. As examples of these distinctions we have, Natos-aumûqka, medicine-runner, Natoapsínaksín, the divine book, the sun-book, the Bible, Natcyetístekwé, the holy day—the sun-day—the Sabbath.

As these Indians have borrowed some of their ceremonies from the Sioux Indians, and the natives of Yucatan still hold the religious festival of the Sun-Dance, it may have happened that in the dim past they adopted this festival and modified it to suit themselves. A festival of nearly similar import is celebrated amongst the Crees named the Thirst-Dance. The records of tradition state that an old woman had a sick child which she loved tenderly. In her anxiety for its recovery, she prayed incessantly to Natos for help in her distress. One evening as she slept, Natos appeared to her in a dream, and told her that if she would build a Sun-lodge and make sacrifices to him, the child would get well. She awoke, and told her people of the wonderful vision, the lodge was erected, the festival was held, and the child recovered. Since that period, the Sun-Dance has been annually held. The time for the celebration of this festival is when the wild-fruit is ripe, at the end of July or early in August. Seven days is the length of time it is generally held, although this is sometimes shortened. The object of this festival is twofold, namely: military and religious. It is chiefly a sacred assembly, and constitutes a part of their native religious system. A virtuous woman