

THE SIOUX SUN-DANCE.

Of the many astonishing features of Indian stoicism and barbarism not the least thrilling is the sun-dance, which is supposed to be of a "pious" nature, as the unconverted Indian understands piety. In "The Early Empire-Builders of the Great West" Moses Armstrong describes the Sioux sun-dance as he saw it in the early days of Dakota:

About twelve o'clock the musicians seated themselves. They were about fifteen in number. They had a large Indian drum made of bull's hide, upon which they began their monotonous Indian notes by pounding with clubs and sticks, and all singing the usual sorrowful Indian dirge.

Twenty-five men and women, facing the sun, began the religious dance. The men were decorated with head-dresses of feathers and strings of furs, their naked bodies painted generally a blue clay color, and from their waists down they wore a skirt of antelope or deer skins. Each had in his mouth a little whistle made of bone.

The women were more modest in their costume, but all were painted hideously in the face. With eyes upturned toward the scorching sun they began the dance, each keeping time with the drums by a short hitch of the body, raising the heel and uttering a squeak with the whistle as the drum went *tum-tum*.

The dancing was delayed at intervals to allow tortures to be inflicted. Two or three men stood over the devotee with needle and knife, very quietly performing penance according to the customs of all these sacerdotal rites.

Occasionally, also, the dancers could stop and smoke, but were not to eat and drink during the twenty-four hours of the performance.

While the men were being tortured their female relations came in and had pieces cut out of their arms, to show their appreciation of the valor and devotion of their kinsmen. Still as soon as could be the music was renewed, and the dancing went on.

The ceremonies were concluded at twelve o'clock. Then all the devotees gave away their ponies and other valuables to their friends, had their wounds dressed by attendant medicine-men, and sat down to an abundant feast of dog-soup and buffalo meat.