

AN ACCOUNT OF THE OPENING AND RETYING OF THE SACRED BUNDLE OF THE ARIKARA

There were originally twelve villages in the Arikara nation, each village having its own sacred bundle which was the heart and center of all ceremonial life of the village. The bundle to be described here has not functioned in ceremonies for a great many years because the last person having full knowledge of the ritual pertaining to it died many years ago. But the bundle is still revered and cared for and is at present in the keeping of Mrs. Byron Wilde.

The wrapping of this bundle had become old and worn and Mrs. Wilde decided to have it opened and inspected and put back in order again and retied with new thongs. With this purpose in view, she had Mrs. Maude Gillette to tan a calfskin hide in the old Indian method and prepare from it the long thong required for binding the bundle. Mrs. Gillette was asked to do this work because she is one of the very few Arikara women still knowing the old technique of tanning. Any such account as this, having to do with the sacred bundle, must be performed with all due ceremony. As was stated before, the ritual pertaining to this particular bundle has been lost for many years, but the ceremonies of all twelve sacred bundles follow a similar plan, though differing in details.

Mrs. Wilde had asked Bears-Belly to act as priest in this ceremony, because he is well versed in the ritual pertaining to another village bundle which still is functioning. She had also asked Little-Crow to be Pipe Chief for the ceremony, and Hiram Price to be Fire Chief. I was invited by Mrs. Wilde to be present and I was allowed to bring my friends, Mr. George F. Will and Mr. Russell Reid, both of Bismarck, North Dakota. This ceremony took place on August 12, 1930, at the Tribal Council Lodge at Nishu, North Dakota. Mr. Reid brought his camera to photograph the bundle when opened.

First, the Fire Chief kindled the fire in the fireplace which is situated in the center of the floor of the lodge, just under the smoke hole in the roof. This smoke hole is a wide opening which serves as ventilator and skylight for illumination. Bears-Belly, as priest, was seated at the altar next to the west wall of the circular lodge. In the arrangement of the lodge there are four main posts: one at the southeast, one at the southwest, one at the northwest and one at the northeast of the fireplace. The roof is supported

on these four posts and on a circle of shorter posts at the wall. The Fire Chief has his seat during the ceremony near the southeast main post, and the Pipe Chief is seated just at the south side of the fireplace a little to the left of the Fire Chief. The company, assisting by their presence, sit farther back next to the wall on both sides of the entrance at the southeast and the northeast.

When all is in readiness, the bundle is laid on a bed made for it in what is called the Holy Place, which is the space between the altar and the fireplace. The new cowhide thong, which had been prepared by Mrs. Maude Gillette, was placed beside it. A vessel containing earth, which was to be used as a fireplace for the incense, was placed in the line between the posts of the southwest and the northwest.

The ceremony was begun by placing the embers from the fireplace upon the earth in this vessel. Then the incense of dried sweet grass was sprinkled upon the embers, and as the smoke rose from it the priest lifted the ancient bundle from its bed and held it in the smoke from the burning sweet grass. Then he returned to the altar and sat down and uttered an oration. He said, in his address to the people assembled, that this was a very ancient and venerable object and that it represented the thought and dreams of earnest men of the ancient time, and that their teaching had passed down from generation to generation but that all the ancient things of their people are passing away. The knowledge of the ritual pertaining to this bundle is also gone by the death of the last man who had fully known it. He said that he did not profess to know it himself, but he had been asked to perform this ceremony of opening and inspecting and replacing the objects, and of tying the bundle with the new thong to replace the one which had become weakened thus endangering the safety of the bundle; that he had been asked to do this because, though he did not know the ritual of this particular bundle, he had knowledge of the general meaning of it, and complete knowledge of the ritual of another similar bundle; that since the proper priests for this bundle all were dead, and since there was no one left who could more properly attend to this duty than himself. Therefore, though he felt an inadequacy for the duty, he was willing to do what he could, and that they should all look upon this as a sacred thing.

When he had finished his speech, he rose and approached the bundle and he called the Fire Chief to assist him. The bundle lay on its bed with its gourd rattles bound on its upper side, the handles of the

gourd rattles bound on its upper side, the handles of the gourd rattles being toward the altar. The five gourd rattles were bound in order on a wooden rack on the upper side of the bundle. The old thong binding was untied, the rack of rattles lifted up, then the bundle was opened and the wrapping was laid back, exposing to view the contents arranged in their places. All the objects contained in the bundle were lifted out and laid in their proper order; the buffalo skin covering was laid out upon the ground and the objects all replaced in their proper places upon it, first having been photographed by Mr. Russell Reid and all the several objects identified. These were skins of a number of different native birds, skin of a garfish and other species of native fauna. A list of these objects has been given in another paper.

The sacred pipe was removed and laid in front of the sacred bundle and parallel to it upon two billets of wood prepared to support it and prevent it from touching the ground. Bears-Belly then filled the ceremonial pipe, lighted it and made the usual smoke offerings to the four quarters, beginning with the southeast, then the southwest, then the northwest and then the northeast; then to the Mother Earth at the fireplace, then aloft to *Nesanu Natcitakh*, the Chief Above. After making these offerings, the pipe was passed around the circle of the company so that each one might either draw a whiff or two from it and bless himself, or at least, if he did not draw smoke, bless himself by drawing his hands along the pipe stem towards the mouthpiece then passing them over his own head and shoulders and body. After the pipe had been passed around the circle, it was emptied into the fireplace and returned to the care of the Pipe Chief. Then the public was called in for the feast.

After they were called, the representatives of the several mystery societies took charge. First Patrick Star, representing his society, the Ducks, made offerings for that society; then Red-Bear took charge and made offerings for his society, the Buffalo. Pipes were smoked out, emptied and returned ceremoniously to the Pipe Chief. Then Bears-Belly made an address to the assembly. There were frequent responses of "*Nawa!*" which is equivalent to assent and agreement.

On such occasions it is always proper to publicly present gifts to those whom one wishes to honor. At this time also it is proper to confer names upon children or to give new names to older persons. Mrs. Wilbur Howard, the daughter-in-law of Mr. and Mrs. Byron Wilde, was given the name Mother-

Comes. This name refers to the coming of the blessed Mother Corn. Bears-Belly was the priest who functioned in conferring the name. Next I heard my tribal name called out, so I arose and stepped forward, and a splendid eagle feather war bonnet was placed on my head as a gift from Mrs. Wilde. Then she spoke a eulogy in my honor, saying that this gift was made as a token of tribal esteem and appreciation for services which I had in the past done for the tribe and for Mother Corn.

After this, Bears-Belly filled the sacred pipe pertaining to the bundle and the Fire Chief brought a light from the fireplace with the ancient pipe lighter which was one of the objects contained in the sacred bundle. This pipe lighter was the shaft of an enemy arrow picked up from a battlefield by the Arikara after some battle in ancient times. It had been so long since the bundle had previously been opened that he found he could not make the sacred pipe draw so he merely went through the motions of smoke offerings and of blessings from the pipe to all the assembly along the south side of the lodge and then, in turn, along the north side. Then the pipe was returned to its rest on the billets of wood in front of the bundle. Then the feast was served to the people, Bears-Belly first blessing the food by making offerings at the four quarters, beginning at the southeast, then to the objects in the bundle, then to the sacred pipe of the bundle, then to the pipes at the tobacco board, and last of all to *Nesanu Natcitakh*, the Chief Above.

After this orderly closing of the ceremony, the objects were replaced in the bundle in their original order, and the buffalo skin covering was folded over. The rack holding the five gourd rattles were laid in place on top and the new thong was bound about the bundle, being so placed as to make four crosses on the bottom and top of the bundle; that is, the thong was passed under the bottom crosswise near one end and over the top in like manner, and down the length of the bundle near one side and passed over to the other side and crossed again in like manner so that when finished the thong made four crosses on the bottom and four crosses on the top, securely binding the covering in place.