

ACCOUNT OF THE CEREMONY FOR COMFORTING THE MOURNERS AFTER DEATH IN THE ARIKARA TRIBE

This is a ceremony held by the friends of a family in which a death has occurred. It is held any time within a week or two after the death.

On October 14th, 1922, I was at Armstrong, North Dakota, and it chanced that about a week before this day the mother of Mr. Albert Simpson, an Arikara living in that neighborhood had died, and on this day there was held the ceremony for comforting the mourners, "To wipe away their tears" as they say. The ceremony was held at Bears-belly's old house. At the present time, he lives in a frame house several rods away from the log house in which he has lived for many years, but for this occasion the log house was used. It stands on the terrace above the Missouri River about a mile and a half or two miles west of the Roman Catholic church at Armstrong. The log house has an earth floor and an earth roof. In the arrangements of the ceremony, the stove which stood in the center of the room occupied the place of the ancient central fire-place of the old time Arikara dwellings. The doorway was at the east. Opposite the doorway and beyond the fire-place at the west wall was the altar. Above the altar a bundle of wild sage *Artemisia gnaphaloides* was hung on the wall. One of the sacred bundles of the tribe was used for this ceremony.

In the ritualistic ceremonies a sacred bundle is exposed on the altar. The bundle is opened and the objects contained in it are exposed to view in the proper order. Each sacred bundle of the tribe has its own order, and its own complement of sacred objects. These vary in number and kind, but in every sacred bundle there will be found a sacred pipe and pouch of tobacco of the species "Nicotiana quadrivalvis." This is the species of tobacco which has been cultivated for ages by the Arikaras and other tribes throughout the Plains region from Texas to the upper Missouri. Another indispensable object of each sacred bundle is an ear of sacred Mother Corn. The bundle used in this instance was that which was in the keeping of Snow, the mother of Claire Everett.

Four-rings was the chief priest in charge of this ceremony. He asked Bears-belly to assist him. Four-rings and Bears-belly were seated at the altar Paul yellow-bear was the keeper of the pipes for this occasion,

and according to the ritual of this particular sacred bundle his seat was at the north side of the lodge. At this station all the pipes belonging to the men who were present as participants of this ceremony were collected. He had a supply of tobacco and filled and lighted the pipes at any time when smoking was done during the progress of the ceremony.

The mourners and friends were seated along the wall on the three sides, the north, east and south sides of the lodge. When the ceremony was about to begin a shovelful of coals was brought from the stove and placed on the ground before the sacred bundle at the altar. Four-rings then pulverized some dried sweet grass from a braid of the same which was kept with the sacred bundle, and sprinkled this pulverized sweet grass upon the coals for incense. He first incensed himself, and then his assistant bears-belly did likewise. The method of incensing themselves was by holding their open hands, palm down, in the smoke and then rubbing their hands together in grasping handfuls of the smoke. Then they put up their hands to their heads and opening their hands, passing them down over their heads, shoulders and bodies. Then the sacred bundle was incensed by holding it over the smoking coals.

After being incensed it was laid back on the altar and opened and the sacred objects which it contained were laid out in proper order. At this time a wooden bowl was brought and placed at the left before the altar. Then the relic pipe of the bundle and its stem were joined together, being secured by a tie which was on the stem for that purpose.

Four-rings then seemed to engage in a prolonged silent meditation or prayer, kneeling on one knee at the right of the altar, holding the relic pipe with the bowl on the ground, stem inclined, at about 45 degrees toward the sacred bundle, while a man was sent to bring two small billets of wood which were placed before the altar. On these billets of wood the pipe was then laid. Some water was brought and poured into the before-mentioned bowl. Four-rings then chewed some substance, the identity of which I have not yet learned, probably parts of plants of supposed mystic power. He then took up the bowl of water and held it aloft, then passed it around the fire-place back to the place of beginning again, held the bowl aloft, then placed it on the ground and then dropped from his mouth some of the chewed substance into it, then took from his mouth some

more and placed it in the water. Then he took a brush apparently of small twigs and stirred the mixture in the water. Then he took an ear of Mother Corn from the sacred bundle and leaned it against the bowl, pointing towards the fire place. A bundle of a few stems of a certain species of grass was brought and four-rings laid this at the right of the bowl, and about eighteen inches from it. Then Four-rings indicated certain cuts to be made in the beef that lay a little to the east of the fire-place between it and the door. Hiram Prince did the ceremonial cutting of the meat. Four-rings and Bears-belly now prepared pipes and tobacco on the cutting board and placed them at the station of the keeper of the pipes on the north side of the lodge. This keeper of the pipes as before mentioned was Paul Yellow-bear, who is a lay reader in the Episcopal church in charge of missionary work to the Arikaras. A certain old man was then called to be cook and he got a metal tub and filled it about half full of water and carried it to the fire which has already been prepared in the yard. Then he came in with another metal tub and got the meat and carried it out to cook. Presents were brought and placed before the sacred bundle. These were to be distributed to the old people after the ceremony.

Four-rings then began the long recitation of the creation myth of the Arikaras. At about the middle of this recitation the women wet up a wail and continued to wail until after the recitation of the creation myth was finished. The occasion of wailing was that at this point the entrance of sickness and death into the world was told. Four-rings ended the recitation of the creation myth by also crying. After crying and wailing for a short time he concluded with the word "*Nawa.*" The women also then ceased their wailing.

At this time Bears-belly was called to light the relic pipe. The pipe keeper, Yellow-bear was called to assist by handing the relic pipe to Bears-belly after which he sat at the right end of the altar. Bears-belly untied the bowl from its stem. With a mussel shell from the sacred bundle for a cup he took some of the medicine water from the wooden bowl into his mouth. This he blew through the stem of the pipe and then some more through the pipe bowl. Then with one of the stems of grass before-mentioned, he cleaned the pipe stem and pipe, then reattached the bowl of the sacred pipe to its stem and replaced the pipe upon its rest on the two wooden billets. Then the pipe keeper was called to bring the common pipes from his station to the altar and they were likewise cleaned and taken back to their place by the keeper. Then the mussel shell was wiped, and

some medicines were taken from a bag and placed in the shell. The pipe keeper was called to come and take up the relic pipe and carry it around the fire-place and back to the altar where he handed it to Bears-belly, who then lighted it. It was lighted by means of a regular lighting stick pertaining to the pipe which was carried to the fire-place and lighted until the end was a red coal. It was then applied to the tobacco in the sacred pipe. Offerings of the sacred pipe were now made in the regular way to the four quarters, to the earth, and to the sky. This was done by holding aloft the sacred pipe pointing its mouth-piece first to the Sunrise (north east), then to the Wind (south east), to the Thunder (south west), and to the Night (north west), then towards Mother Earth, then directly above to the Sky. The relic pipe was now carried around the lodge and smoked in communion and then returned to its place at the altar. The method of smoking was this: the attendants who carried the pipe placed the mouth-piece to each person in turn who might draw a whiff of smoke from it, stroking at the same time both hands along the stem, and then passing them over his head and down his shoulders and sides to bless himself from the sacred pipe. It was passed to all persons, men and women both, and the person might draw smoke and bless himself in the matter described or simply bless himself or herself by stroking the stem without drawing smoke.

Then a woman mourner was called to stand before the sacred bundle, facing the fire-place. Mother Corn, which had been placed in the bowl of water was then taken up by Bears-belly and passed from the top of the head down the right side, then from the top of the head down the back, and from the top of the head down the front. He then replaced the ear of Mother Corn in the bowl. Then the mourner was directed to take up the ear of Mother Corn from the bowl in the right hand and draw it through the lips, sucking from it the water which had adhered to the ear of corn from being dipped in the bowl. Then to take the mussel shell and dip from the bowl and take a sip from the shell. She was then directed to step forward to the fire-place and there facing the fire-place towards the east to eject the water from her mouth into her hands and perform the motions of washing her face and hands therewith. Then other mourners, men and women, in turn did as the first had done. One woman started to cry after she had performed this rite. The fire tender was directed to wipe away her tears for her and comfort her. This he did and accompanied her to the place where she was seated in the

lodge and dismissed her with the upraised hand in sign of peace.

After all the mourners had performed this rite, Bears-belly took the bowl and with the mussel shell dipped some of the water for it which he drank, then took up the ear of Mother corn, which had been dipped in the water in the bowl, sucked from it as the others had done, and then replaced the Mother Corn with the relics. He then took up the bowl of water and carried it in turn to the four corner posts of the lodge and poured a little of the water at each, beginning at the north west corner and concluding at the south west corner. He then drank some more water from the bowl and set it down on the ground where it was before.

Four-rings then went out and went upon the roof of the house and made a proclamation, the content which I have not yet ascertained. Bears-belly then took up the bowl of water and carried it to a certain man and gave him to drink of it and then replaced it before the sacred bundle. Bears-belly then took a small particle of the cooked meat, divided it and placed a bit of it at the north west, then one at the south west, then at the south east and then at the north east, then to the earth at the fire-place and then to the sky. The keeper of the pipes was then called to come to the altar and bless himself from the relic pipe, and then to return to his station and bring thence the pipes in his keeping and have them blessed. Then Four-rings made an exhortation to the people seeming to speak from the relics of the sacred bundles as mnemonics, the people responding often with the word "*Nawa*." The subject matter of his exhortation was that we should all be kind and considerate towards each other, that all of us have our troubles and griefs which are hard to bear, and we should be sympathetic and kind and helpful towards each other in all ways. That we should be forgiving if we at anytime felt ourselves aggrieved, and should never hold grudges against anyone. We should speak kindly to each other and be hospitable, to give clothing, food and shelter to all who may need the same, to be considerate and helpful to the old and to do whatever we can for the sick and for all who are in any trouble, and always be kind.

This concluded the ceremony and after this the feast was served. The fire tender took the meat from the boiling pots and placed it in a large pan, and then took bread and put it into another vessel to carry around to the people. Coffee was also brought to each person. Bears-belly also made an exhortation, as Four-rings had done, to which the people responded as they had to that of Four-rings. The fire tender when brought food

and drink to Four-rings and Bears-belly. The pipe keeper then passed the pipes around to four-rings and to all the men mourners who in turn smoked in communion with each other.