

Indians were active participants in the ceremonies, and something deeply significant was going forward most of the time.

Imagine two large companies of dark-skinned people, drawn in semi-circular form about an open space, the front ranks on their knees, their hands clinched, their heads bent forward, their eyes intent upon their opponents. One man of the party holds in either hand a tube of polished bone, each with different markings. At the head of the circle two or three men beat monotonously on tom-toms.

All the men in the front rank keep time with sticks, striking a board, timed to a rude chant. It is the hope of these chanters to inspire their chosen mind-reader to place correctly in the hand of his opponent the marked bone. This player croons a low plaint to his guardian spirit for right direction. Sometimes he gets it, and then his side sings with redoubled energy a song of triumph. Sometimes he fails, and then the song becomes a wail. There may be much or little at stake on the result. That does not matter. It is the power to judge that pleases.

This is the ancient game of "Slahal," known by one name or another to all the Indian tribes of North America. It is a game in which whole tribes can be pitted against each other, each tribe backing their chosen mind-reader with their own strong "medicine." Horses, cattle, arms, ammunition and some times the women of a tribe are lost in the venture. There is a similar game called "slahallub" which they play with wooden discs hidden in fine shavings of cedar bark.

The Indians, yesterday, most of them farmers with families, staid and sober all other days in the year, were painted and decorated for this potlatch celebration, and were as deep in the ancient mysteries as their ancestors were before ever they had seen a white man's books or known a white man's ways.

Something in the nature of the Indian marks him as superior by nature in some respects to other races. It took our forebears, the Britons, 700 years after they were under the dominion of the Romans to get away from eating raw beef torn from the bone by teeth. I watched these Indians at dinner. Many of them were born in wigwams and none of their ancestors knew the meaning of a knife or fork or spoon. But they ate off white crockery, handled their knives and forks with as much ease and politeness as any gentlewoman, had as good table manners as generations of Chesterfieldian teaching has given to the Saxon world, and much more gentleness and consideration for each other than is often observable in our mixed companies.

And when the meal was finished they followed an old man in a chant of thanksgiving to the Giver-of-Good. With a childish simplicity and gratefulness that might shame many a glibly remembered prayer, many a fashionable choir of praise.