

## WILD WEST SHOWS

BY CHAUNCY YELLOW ROBE, *In the Quarterly Journal of The Society of American Indians*



**Y**EARS ago some Indian chiefs went to see the "Great Father," and while they were in the city, an old army officer who used to fight these warriors on the plains in the west invited them to dinner and told of his experiences on the old frontier. One of the chiefs, who had no experience in table manners, imitated the old officer by eating whatever he saw the general eating. The general took some horse radish and spread it over his meat. The chief did likewise and, after testing a spoonful of it, hung his head and shed tears. The general saw his misery and asked, "My friend, why are you crying?" The chief replied, "My friend, I am thinking of how you and I used to fight each other on the plains and when I remember how my brother was nearly killed on the battle field it makes my tears come."

I feel like the Indian chiefs in this case when I see the old hunting and battle grounds of our forefathers, in which now civilization has taken place; but I do not come before you to-night with the intention of declaring a Sioux outbreak on the frontier settlement or to stir up a strife, but wish to call your attention to the evil and degrading influence of commercializing the Indian before the world. The solution of this question is now in the hands of the Government.

It is now more than four centuries ago since Columbus came to our shores and claimed the country and gave us the name of Indians, and at the same time inaugurated the first Indian show by importing some of the Indians across the water for exhibition before the Spanish throne, and to-day the practice continues to exist in the wild-west shows.

Some time ago, Judge Sells, the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs, said: "Let us save the American Indian from the curse of whiskey." I believe these words hold the key to the Indian problem of today.

In some of the celebrations, conventions, and county fairs in Rapid City and other reservation border towns, in order to make the attraction a success, they think they cannot do without wild-west Indian shows, consequently certain citizens have the Indian show craze. In fact, the South Dakota State Fairs always have largely consisted of these shows. We can see from this state of affairs that the white man is persistently perpetuating the tribal habits and customs, We see the showman is manufacturing the Indian plays intended to amuse and instruct young