Indians at Celilo Falls

As their fathers, and their fathers before them far back in dim time, Indians to this day follow ways of their ancestors at roaring Celilo Falls on Oregon's mighty Columbia. Here the "river of the west" gives up gamey salmon to spears and net of redmen who travel from afar to replenish tribal larders for reservation winters.

In long ago time, Indians came to the falls with nets made of tough, native Oregon grasses, and with spears tipped with laboriously carved points of volcanic rocks. Indians lived their simple lives as children of nature. They had no knowledge, perhaps happily so, that white men existed and that there were great nations beyond the seas they never knew.

Through the shades of a million yesterdays, the Indians knew the river and the river was their friend. And the redmen were thankful for the largess bestowed upon them by the divine providence of roaring waters and a beneficient nature which brought giant Chinook salmon upstream to be netted.

In rituals, origin of which have been lost in antiquity, they paid honor to the king of the river, the Chinook, and reverence to the Great Father who brought him there. To some extent the ceremonies have carried on into modern times. The old time Indians hope the ancient rites will always be observed.

In the past at such ceremonials, the first salmon netted or speared from the spring run is sprinkled with the down of a young eagle and borne on a cedar bark tray to assembled Indians in the long-house, aboriginal meeting hall.

Prayers are offered to the Great Father for bringing the salmon to the river. The spring feast is then ready, providing, of course, fish, along with camas root, wild parsnip and wild carrot, followed by a salmon dance. Ceremonies preliminary to the feast are much like a litany. Indian theology is recited in the form of questions

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