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THE

DACOTAH TRIBES.

THEIR BELIEFS, AND OUR DUTY TO THEM OUTLINED.

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BY

HENRY B. CARRINGTON,

COLONEL U. S. A.

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SALEM, MASS:  
PRINTED AT THE SALEM PRESS.  
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THE DACOTAH TRIBES: THEIR BELIEFS, AND OUR DUTY TO THEM  
OUTLINED. By HENRY B. CARRINGTON, Colonel U. S. A.

THE pulse of our quick life will brook no check. In the rage for gold, the white man has held for nought the red man's rights. How to get all he has and then get rid of him, at the first chance, and be glad when he is gone, is the sum which we count up, as fast as we can, to kill his race.

I wish to tell some things which will give him grace at your hands. I do not tell where he came from, but as he is a man, he has value, and if the brain force which is here can plan good for the live red man and let him live, it will be worth as much as to read what stones and coals say of the dead past. I will not try to work out the fact as to how he came to be. You who strive to get at the first start of each old race can do that. He is here, and I speak for him.

I felt a strange thrill of zeal for him when Irwakura, the chief of the Japan Legation which visited this country, stated, that "he asked that his train might stop at Echo Cañon, so that he might look upon the first red man he ever met." I give what he said, for your thought. It was this: "We have a tradition in our country, that our people came from the skies in a boat, and we have pictures which represent our ancestors. I know enough, now, to see that people cannot come out of the sky; but when I see those, who for the first time remind me of the pictures of our forefathers, I wonder, with awe, whether America was not their home and the ocean waves took them to Japan." It was a new thought to me, and I pass it to you who are adepts in this branch of study, for further solution.

I speak for the red men of Dacotah, but include all who were associated with my service on the Plains, principally the Pawnees, Winnebagoes, Northern Cheyennes, Arapahoës, Ogallalla and Brulé Sioux and the Crows. I do not say that like thought stirs the brain of all these bands; but in none have I found words which

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curse God. White Horse, an old Cheyenne chief, was aroused when he heard white men curse, and said, "it was not so bad for a boy to curse his father and mother, as for a man to curse the Great Spirit, who gave him air, earth, water and all good things." One, thus stated his idea, pointing to a child: "Pappoose wiskeat auteas? Pappoose wiskeat autrara?" (Pappoose curse father and mother)." "The child would have had no father and mother, and the father and mother would have had no child, but for the Great Spirit. Why do the white men curse?" The red man takes up our strong words to express anger; but his reverence for the Great Spirit is above that of some white men who claim to be his master.

Their views as to life after death are no less striking. When the dead were rescued from the battle-field after Fetterman's massacre in 1866, when three officers and seventy-eight men were killed and cut up in thirty minutes, I found that nearly every body was stripped of the muscles of the arm, breast, back, thigh and calves of the legs. The bodies were filled with arrows, one hundred and sixty-eight having been found in three bodies. I quote from the Official Report as to these mutilations. "Eyes torn out and laid on the rocks; teeth chopped out; joints of fingers cut off; brains taken out and placed on rocks, with members of the body; entrails taken out and exposed; hands and feet cut off; arms taken out from socket; eyes, ears, mouth and arms penetrated with spearheads, sticks and arrows; punctures upon every sensitive part of the body, even to the soles of the feet and the palms of the hands." I asked a member of the Red Cloud band, why this was done; and the key to these mutilations was startling and impressive. Their idea of the spirit land is, that it is a physical paradise, but we enter upon its mysteries just in the condition we hold when we die. In the Indian paradise every physical taste or longing is promptly met. If he wants food it is at hand. Water springs up for ready use. Ponies and game abound. Blossoms, leaves and fruit never fail. All is perennial and perpetual. But what is the Indian hell? It is the same in place and in profusion of mercies; but the bad cannot partake. Like Dives who saw, craved and panted for relief, he cannot enjoy. In the light of this idea, these tortured bodies had a new significance. With the muscles of the arms cut out, the victim could not pull a bow-string or trigger; with other muscles gone he could not ride in the stirrup or stoop to drink; so that while every sense was in agony for relief from



hunger or thirst, there could be no relief at all. The red man does not have the moral sense which would argue that every vice is crippling the moral and mental muscles, so that every fault leaves man less perfect for beginning a grand career beyond the grave ; but the germ thought is in his mind, and the white man can give it better force and activity if he will care half as well for the red man as he does for Hottentots, Asiatics and strangers of the South Pacific Isles. Before Chief Joseph of the Nez Perces fled from his rightful home, in 1877, to fight for his very life, he was asked if he wanted schools on the Wallowa reservation, he said " No ! " When asked his reason, he replied that " it would bring churches. " " Don't you want churches ? " was the next inquiry. " No, no, " he answered, " it will teach us to quarrel about God, as the Catholics and Protestants do. We fight each other, but we don't want to learn to fight about God. " When asked to sell his reservation, he sharply replied : " Do you believe that we came out of the bosom of the Earth ? I know you do. Then the earth is our mother. Would you sell your mother ? I never will sell my mother. "

Their mode of burial by raising the dead upon platforms, above the reach of wild beasts, until the dust returns to mother earth, is full of strange fancies. Their dread of being hanged is due to their fear that as the spirit leaves the body while the feet are above the earth, it will be doomed to the loss of all capacity for walking and running hereafter, the most horrible of fates for the red man whose hope and joy are in physical bliss alone.

One more phase of the red man's life is pertinent to this inquiry. " What shall we do with and for him ? " It seems to me that here is just the place to speak a word for him, because the work of science is to bless man ; and we do not push inquiry so far back into the silent past and into the cold forms of the once igneous trap and granite, and reconstruct old life from impress and fragment, that we ignore the living present. It is better to preserve a race with which our fathers did compete for this fair continent, than to explain how the red man came here, and what was his pedigree direct from Adam, or some anterior protoplasm. We call him a savage, but he can be a friend. The Narragansetts and Delawares were true to the white man. The Pawnees, Winnebagoes and Crows have been true to the white man. Spotted Tail, with his ten thousand companions, is true, and he has not failed to meet pledges made in 1866. Red Cloud and his eleven thousand

followers are true, in spite of repeated change of his reservation, and untold deprivations which the tide of western growth has brought. I say, plainly, that the red man when he enters into a fair contract, understandingly, is as faithful to obligation as the average white man, and that from 1865 until the present time, there has not been a border campaign which did not have its impulse in the aggressions of the white man. When Dull Knife, the Cheyenne chief, broke out of Camp Robinson, and his braves and squaws fought until nearly all were killed, it was because they would rather die than be sent to the Indian Territory, where they had neither friends nor country. And yet this man, in 1866, refused to take the war path with Red Cloud, and suffered much to prove that he was the white man's friend.

The occupation of the Powder river country, and the valleys of the Big Horn and Yellowstone, during that year, in the face of Harney's treaty of 1865, opened up that series of disasters which has sacrificed so many white men, and exacted so much of vengeance upon the red man himself. It was time that he was dealt with as other men are dealt with. Legislation and adjudication have changed the old theory of our Supreme Court, which held that the Indians were internal nations, dependent indeed, but capable of contracting by treaty. We must treat them as men, under law, and punish the red and white men alike and protect them alike. Then there will be found in America an asylum even for those whose fathers were here when our fathers sought an asylum, and we shall crown our work of the emancipation of the African, by the preservation of the Indian.

I was asked yesterday to explain why the Indians used arrows so freely upon the bodies of their victims. It is a part of their superstition. While they will not often use, again, an arrow shot at an enemy, if it miss him, because the Great Spirit did not wish it to hit, they count to their credit every act of courage. Thus, when in single combat, the red man would fail to get a scalp, unless aided, the friend who has helped him shoots arrows into the body and keeps the record, to show that while he did not get the scalp he was the cause of its being secured. This very chief, Dull Knife, when in 1866, he refused to join Red Cloud, at the first outbreak of war, was slashed across the shoulders with bows, in contempt, with the cry of "Coo!" (coward) and these "Coos" are recorded by knots tied in their ponies' manes, as the next thing to

victory. So the arrows used upon a body under a state of facts such as given are so many "Coos" to the credit of a warrior. The hundreds of arrows found in the bodies after the Fetterman massacre, showed that the whole force of the red man was employed to silence the brave men who fought with desperation against an overwhelming body. It is enough for us to know that white men first stole their lands, and then sold them arms, and did by every low passion work out the scheme by which we should treat the Indian as a brute to be exterminated, rather than as a man to be saved. In the horrors of that calamity when loved companions fell so suddenly after safely passing the ordeal of four years of war, and it seemed as if there was no salvation for the rest of the small force in Dacotah, and when our wives and our children were in peril, so that no one knew what the next hour would bring of toil or trial, I could not but feel that, if I had been a red man, I would have fought as bitterly, if not as cruelly, for my rights and my home, as the red man fought.

Be it our part to strengthen the hands of those who would save the red man, so that the eternal disgrace of his extinction shall not attach to America while Christianity is its strength and its glory.

[SALEM PRESS, July, 1881.]

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