

THE OSAGE WAR DANCE.

LITTLE MITANKE'S son had died. He died from drink, but his devoted father insisted on having the war dance performed in his honor. That was my great luck, because I was there and could witness it, and it may be the last war dance of the Osage nation; at least, they think so themselves.

The Osages are very conservative. Practically all the older men and all the women wear moccasins, leggings, and blankets; and in their daily life they religiously follow their own old conventions; but of recent years a great many of them have joined the modern heresy of the mescal cult. The war dance is one of the old religious observances, and the mescal eaters call it the devil's work. Partly on that account, and partly because Mitanke could not stand the expense, there was a great deal of talking back and forth.

At all feasts, religious ceremonies, and dances the Osages split up in their two component sections, tshisho and hanka. Now the section that wants to perform such a ceremony as the war dance must buy a man from the other side to help. So little Mitanke, who was a tshisho man, had to buy a hanka to mourn with him, and to help him conduct the ceremonies. For this he was supposed to pay the hanka a good horse. Mitanke chose his mourner and offered the horse, but after he had thus complied with the requirements of society, it was found out that the dead boy had mortgaged the horse for a drink of whiskey, and it took a long time before the matter was settled. But finally, when the law had been satisfied, and the war dance ultimately decided upon, everybody seemed glad. Even the mescal eaters declared that they liked their children to have an opportunity to see the customs and ways of their fathers.

They then held a council consisting of the relations of the dead boy, the chiefs, and other important men of the tribe. At this council a day was chosen for the mourning to start and it was decided when the war dance and final ceremonies should take place. Ten days' mourning was imposed upon Little Mitanke, because he had been drinking since his son died, and, as one of the chiefs told me, had not behaved as if he cared very much.

The council departed and the news of their decision spread like wildfire all over the Osage nation. The mourning was to start in three days, and to last for ten. At the end of that time the dance was to begin.

On the day specified for the beginning of the mourning we heard a heart-rending wail from Little Mitanke's house long before sunrise. It was repeated by all those in the village, who had lost relations or friends since the last war dance, and the whole camp seemed in one agony. Between day-break and sunrise a procession started from Mitanke's house. At its head was led a fine looking horse, decked with handsome blankets, and with gay colored ribbons braided in its tail. Next came Mitanke himself. His face was painted black, he was wrapped in a dirty white sheet and carried a tobacco pouch on his back, and a forked stick in his hand. Otherwise he wore nothing but a loin cloth and moccasins. After him came fifteen to twenty relations and other mourners, the women in the rear. All of them were crying and lamenting, the women apparently trying to out-do the men. They walked slowly the whole length of the camp road from Mitanke's house to that of his hanka man, who lived in a summer tent on the outskirts of the town, to the west. There they stopped. The horse was tied to a tree and relieved of its blankets and finery.

That was the payment to the hanka mourner. All the people of the procession went into the tent, and soon we could hear them chanting prayers, interrupted by occasional moanings and cries. These ceremonies lasted while the sky changed from yellow to reddish green and again to a dark blue with a scorching orange sun peeping into the tent.

Then most of the people departed. Shortly afterwards Mitanke and his hanka mourner were seen, tightly wrapped in their sheets, each carrying his tobacco pouch and forked stick. With their heads bowed they walked slowly in single file towards the west, the timber, and the creek.

For ten days they remained out. A little tent was built for them away from the others, where they could rest at night. But each morning before sunrise we heard their loud wailings, and from then till sunset they were not supposed to sit down, or to eat or drink. After sunset the women brought them water, in which to wash their faces and served them with a scanty meal.

While the men were mourning alone in the timber, the women of the family also got up each morning before sunrise. They made little cakes of ashes and mud and put them on their heads. When the men started mourning in the woods the women answered from their home, but directly before breakfast they washed themselves and were permitted to eat and drink.

All this while everything was quiet in the camp except for the wailings; but the tenth day was a busy one. All the people from the camp moved out on the west side of it. They built light summer tents of poles covered on top with branches and twigs with the leaves left on, and towards noon the Osages from all over the reservation began to arrive. The visitors, too, built their

tents on the new camp ground and at night quite a village had been built there. On the morning of the eleventh day a tent was put up still farther to the west and in that a council was held, and two additional mourners asked to volunteer. Then the chief mourners were called in from the creek; but it is claimed that after some few days' loneliness in the timber these men could talk with the animals, could communicate with the departed spirits, and have visions of the future world. They therefore did not wish to come back and resume their natural state, and the volunteer mourners must pay them each a horse and blankets to make them stop mourning. Then the new mourners stripped themselves of all clothing except the loin-cloths and moccasins. They smeared their faces and bodies with cinders and ashes. A pipe was given to each of them, and they went outside in the burning sun and afterwards they could not sit down, go into a house, or eat from sunrise till sunset as long as the war dance lasted.

The council then divided itself into hankas and tshishos. Each party formed a procession and, led by the nude mourners and the chief mourners in their dirty sheets, they went all around the new town. The hankas went east by the south side and came back west by the north, and the tshishos went west by the north side and came back by the south.

When the procession started out the mourners began to build two tents on the west side right opposite each other. They made great haste, and when the tents were ready a post was put up in front of each. These posts were covered with red cloth and each had a hatchet driven into it by the town crier. The raising of these posts started the war dance, and the *scalp-hunters were sup-*

posed to be gone. Each tent also had the American flag on a pole stuck in front of it.

Now the procession returned. The marchers went into the new tents, and the rest of the dancers in their usual dancing clothes with bells around their knees, and wearing a headdress of turkey bristles with an eagle's feather stuck in the middle, joined them there.

Two captains were chosen. They carried croziers covered with white feathers, and led the dance, always with an assistant by their side. The hankas, mounted on horses except for the nude mourners, who led the procession, came over to the tshisho tent. The hanka captain jumped off his horse and danced in front of the tent in a squatting position. He mounted again and the assistant dismounted and danced. After everybody had danced in turn the hankas returned to their tent and waited for the tshishos to repay the visit. After that, four hankas and four tshishos mounted their horses and each party, led by the nude mourners on foot, went in a trot all around the town. The Osages said that this party laid out the dancing road. When they came back to the tents they dismounted, made a squatting dance and entered. One hour later some few drum beats brought all the dancers out. Five to eight old men carried and beat the drum singing as they went. The flag preceded and after that came the dancers and finally the drummers. The hankas went east by the south side, and the tshishos went west by the north. At certain intervals the processions stopped. The drum beats called back the dancers, who started a curious horse-trot dance around the drummers. In the east they met. The nude mourners ran forward and circled around all the dancers. The flag bearers took their stand on either side and so did the nude mourners, and the chief mourners in

their dirty sheets. The rest, in the space thus formed, danced around the drummers. They stopped seven times. This dance was repeated several times during the day. In the evening they had the sunset dance.

The hankas and tshishos met between the two tents. The dance was performed in couples and looked very much like the drill of our soldiers. The drummers stood to the east and sang. The dancers carried rattles and flutes. Some of them had flags and others carried spears or hatchets and a few had shields on their backs. After a while they formed a semicircle sitting in a squatting position and facing the west. Following the drumbeat each in turn got up slowly, making a curious sound like that of a bird, while rising. They then danced forward, throwing their heads back with an expression of defiance in both features and motions, and went out in front of the circle. Several of the dancers gave the war-whoop, whereupon they again returned and squatted in their former places. When all had gone through this performance, they returned to their tents. The older men were then permitted to go home, while the young men had to sleep in the warriors' tents.

Before daylight the next morning, the nude tshisho mourner began to pray. Then the chiefs and head men began to assemble, and they all chanted a low prayer. The mourners and captains on each side formed a line and with wailings and prayers, rattling and blowing their flutes they walked round the town. Half an hour later they had the sunrise dance, which differed but slightly from the sunset dance of the evening before. During the day they danced as on the day before, but on this day the tshishos were the leaders and they danced the tshisho dances. They concluded with the sunset dance in the evening, but after

dark the warriors and dancers promenaded round the town.

The third day and part of the fourth were much like the first two. But later on the fourth day a tent was again erected on the west side of the two warriors' tents. Both the hankas and the tshishos went over there and for a long time nobody disturbed them. The mourners stood in front of the tent and from time to time their wailing was heard. At other times loud prayers and chants were heard coming from the inside of the tent. The ceremony itself I could not observe, but the Osages said that they were preparing the body of the enemy. After a while drum beats were heard and the dancers one by one danced out towards the west with the feather-clad croziers in their hands. When they were done, the crowd scattered, and a woman was seen carrying a bundle on her back (the dead enemy's body, they said) down to the tshisho camp where she entered. Then they made the usual round of the town following the drum, but at each stopping place they formed in line while one or more of them performed the sunrise and the sunset dance, giving the impression that they were scouting or looking for the return of the scalp hunters.

At two o'clock the last dance was performed and the balance of the afternoon was devoted to ceremonies. The men in the hanka tent threw off their shirts and smeared their bodies with black. They prayed. From time to time foot races and horse races were performed, seemingly to divert their minds while they waited. Finally at about 5 o'clock three men mounted on horses without saddles came dashing up to the tent of the hankas and gave to the chief mourner something on a stick. That was the scalp. In former days, it might be a scalp of anybody who was not

an Osage. Now they borrow some hair from some white people, or take the scalp of an animal. Shortly after this the dancers started to wash off their paint and put away their ornaments. Everything was quiet till a procession of men with the mourners dressed up in brand new clothes carried the feathered croziers out towards the west. They prayed and had a small ceremony whereupon the old squaw town-crier took the croziers and carried them still farther off towards the west.

That evening there was great ado in the camp. The women went singing from tent to tent, and the young men kept drumming, singing and dancing, and in many places the camp fires kept burning brightly almost till daylight.

Most of the fifth day was taken up with ceremonies, which ended in the evening with a dance in which the women took part. But already that afternoon a great many of the people had broken up and left, and on the afternoon of the sixth day the place was almost deserted and looked bleak and forlorn after all the life and bustle that had so recently given color and animation to the landscape.

GERDA SEBBELOV.

THE MUSEUM COURSE OF LECTURES.

The success of the course of lectures given at the Museum last year on "The History of Mankind" and the general approval of the members as expressed by their attendance at this course in large numbers has made it seem well to make arrangements for a similar course during the present season. In arranging such a course the Museum's object will be to maintain a standard that will secure the continued approval and support of the members.