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THE YANKTONAI

THE Yanktonai constitute, with the Yankton, the so-called middle division of the Dakota, that body which, in later historic times, has made its home along Missouri river. First mentioned in 1680 by Hennepin as occupying the region north of Mille Lac in eastern Minnesota, this branch of the Dakota began from there a westward movement that eventually brought it to the Missouri at a point, tradition tells us, near the mouth of White river in South Dakota. No definite date can be assigned to this migration. It of course consumed many years, ending probably not later than 1750, for not long thereafter — about 1770 or 1775 — they were established on the Missouri in such numbers as to attack and almost exterminate a strongly stockaded Mandan village near the site of the present Bismarck, North Dakota, two hundred miles north of White river. And inasmuch as the clear Mandan tradition of the slaughter speaks casually of the victors, without the expression of the surprise and consternation that would have been caused by the sudden appearance of hostile newcomers in the land, it may be concluded that the Yanktonai were not then strangers in the region.

There in the Apple Creek country of North Dakota they remained until reservation days, raiding to the north upon Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Cree, and Assiniboin, and to the northwest upon Blackfeet, Atsina or Gros Ventres, Apsaroke, Cheyenne, and even so distant a tribe as the Nez Percés; while in the south their war-parties encountered the Omaha and the Pawnee. Their hunting parties, too, pushed far up the Missouri, ever pressing on the rear of the Assiniboin until, about the year 1863, was negotiated a peace that suffered only two interruptions. Four years later hostilities with the three tribes of village-dwellers — Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara ceased, and in 1869 the last roaming band of Yanktonai was brought within reservation bounds.

In few aspects do the Yanktonai differ greatly from the Teton. Although they have no knowledge of the myth of the White Buffalo Woman, to whom the Teton ascribe the origin of their five principal religious rites, they nevertheless observed the same five ceremonies of Foster-parent Chant, Sun Dance, Vision Cry, Ghost Keeper, and Buffalo Chant.

Most important, next to these, was the Mystery Dance of the fraternity of medicine-men, an institution early adapted by the Santee,

Yankton, and Yanktonai Dakota from a similar Algonquian one, but not existent among the Teton. The purpose of the organization was to afford the opportunity to demonstrate the strength of each member's medicine, and the dance, held annually, resolved itself into a contest among the various *waka*^{n} powers of the medicine-men. While dancing the participants struck one another with their medicine-bags, and as one man fell in acknowledgment of another's superiority, the spectators expressed their approbation by lusty shouts. Into this order a new member was initiated by a ritual. Here he was first instructed in the performance of an act of legerdemain, and then one of the older men flung his medicinebag at the candidate, who fell, ostensibly unconscious, to be quickly restored by the use of the same wonderful medicine. When a member had obtained a new medicine, either by revelation or by purchase, he at once tested its virtue, tying little bags of it to the wrists or moccasins of a relative in order to determine whether it would protect him in battle, if that were the purpose of the medicine. When the efficacy of the medicine had been proved, he gave the *Waka*^{n}*-woha*^{n}*pi,* or Sacred Feast, inviting the other medicine-men and perhaps their families. Only those who were free of defilement were permitted to attend the feast. Each brought a large wooden plate, which, after certain prayers and songs, was piled high with food, and as the host began to sing rapidly the guests were required to eat with equal rapidity, until no morsel remained.

The members of the middle branch of the Dakota family were distributed in 1907 as follows: Yankton — under the Yankton agency, South Dakota, 1716. Yanktonai-Upper Yanktonai under Fort Peck agency, Montana, 1145; scattered among other Sioux (including the Cutheads at Fort Totten, North Dakota), about 150; Lower Yanktonai under Crow Creek agency, South Dakota, 1028; Upper and Lower Yanktonai under Standing Rock agency, North Dakota, about 2500. Total population of Yankton and Yanktonai, about 6500.

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