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INTRODUCTION

IN this volume are grouped three tribes, — the Mandan, the Arikara, and the Atsina, — all differing linguistically; but the first two have lived as close neighbors for so long that externally they are much alike.

Information relative to the Mandan must, for the average person of this generation, have a particular interest, as it answers questions already in his mind. For three-quarters of a century serious literature has been published in all parts of the world, built upon George Catlin's romantic day-dreams, in which he endeavored to show that the Mandan were Welsh, going even so far as to print in his book a chart on which are indicated the ships reputed to have brought Madoc and his colonists to America. Theories of a foreign origin for the American Indian, and particularly of his descent from the so-called Lost Tribes of Israel, were very popular in that day, and indeed for two hundred and fifty years before, and while modern research has left no foundation for them, still for the majority of those who read this volume there yet exists a special interest in the Mandan owing to that romantic conjecture.

It is not our purpose to criticise Catlin. He did a remarkable work, one for which the world will always be his debtor. He made mistakes, many of them natural, and anyone working as he did would, perhaps, have made as many. Unfortunately he seems to have had his readers too much in mind and yielded to a desire to interest. In the few cases in which it has been necessary to state here a fact that apparently disproves his conclusions, it has been done not in a spirit of faultfinding, but because the situation demands it.

In the present weakened condition of the Mandan tribe, there is scant material for illustration. It is felt, however, that the text affords a very adequate idea of them and their former mode of life.

The Arikara material is alive with illustrations many of which picture a reenactment of their old-time medicine ceremony. In this the participants made no pretence of performing the feats of legerde-main that were such a feature of the ceremony during past generations, but otherwise they followed the usual procedure of this most interesting rite. The tricks were, in reality, the dramatic features of the ceremony, designed to convince the people of the supernatural power of the performers, and perhaps to strengthen their own belief in it, while at

the same time entertainment was afforded the audience.

So little has been written of the Atsina, and most of that has usually been of so derogatory a nature, that it is with much pleasure the present material is given. It is not exhaustive in any sense of the word, yet sufficiently ample to show that the Atsina were a strong, active tribe, the equal of many of their better known neighbors. It is anticipated that a future close study of the tribes to the north and south will shed additional light on the subject of their migrations.

In gathering and compiling the material for this volume, I have had the able assistance of Mr. W.E. Myers, Mr. E.J. Dalby, and Mr. A.B. Upshaw; and, in the laboratory, of Mr. A.F. Muhr.

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