

Frequently in the dance one or more of the leaders while sitting within the circle would beat upon the earth with his extended palm, then lay his hand upon his head, afterward blow into his hand, and then repeat the operation, praying all the time. Sometimes the hypnotist would beat the ground in the same way and then lay his hand on the head of the subject (plate CXV). No satisfactory explanation of this ceremony was obtained beyond the general idea that the earth, like the sun, the fire, and the water, is sacred.

GIVING THE FEATHER

The ceremony of "giving the feather" has been already noticed. This was an official ordination of the priests in the dance, conferred on them by the apostle who first brought the ceremony to the tribe. Among the Arapaho, Caddo, Kiowa, and adjoining tribes in the south the feather was conferred by Sitting Bull himself. The feather was thus given to seven leaders, or sometimes to fourteen, that is, seven men and seven women, the number seven being sacred with most tribes and more particularly in the Ghost dance. The feather, which was worn upon the head of the dancers, was either that of the crow, the sacred bird of the Ghost dance, or of the eagle, sacred in all Indian religions. If from the crow, two feathers were used, being attached at a slight angle to a small stick which was thrust into the hair. (See Arapaho song 8.) The feathers were previously consecrated by the priest with prayer and ceremony. The chosen ones usually reciprocated with presents of ponies, blankets, or other property. After having thus received the feather the tribe began to make songs of its own, having previously used those taught them by the apostle from his own language.

Besides the seven leaders who wear the sacred crow feathers as emblems of their leadership, nearly all the dancers wear feathers variously painted and ornamented, and the preparation of these is a matter of much concern. The dancer who desires instruction on this point usually takes with him six friends, so as to make up the sacred number of seven, and goes with them to one who has been in a trance and has thus learned the exact method in vogue in the spirit world. At their request this man prepares for each one a feather, according to what he has seen in some trance vision, for which they return thanks, usually with a small present. The feathers are painted in several colors, each larger feather usually being tipped with a small down feather painted in a different color. On certain occasions a special day is set apart for publicly painting and preparing the feathers for all the dancers, the work being done by the appointed leaders of the ceremony.

THE PAINTING OF THE DANCERS

The painting of the dancers is done with the same ceremonial exactness of detail, each design being an inspiration from a trance vision. Usually the dancer adopts the particular style of painting which, while