

P. 11
October 20, 1949

Mr. Gene Price
The Beacon
The Ohio Oil Company
Findlay, Ohio

Dear Mr. Price:

I was much interest to learn of your sun dance data and photographs for the November Beacon. How do I get a copy of that?

The sun dance has been extensively studied by American ethnologists in nearly every tribe in which it was held. A series of books published by the Field Museum in Chicago, several of them by George A. Dorsey, give elaborate accounts of the ritual for each tribe lavishly illustrated with photographs. The only sun dances that I have ever seen are the Cheyenne and Arapaho sun dances which still are held down here sometimes, though now very much curtailed.

I think you will find that the sun dance is at base a rite to increase fertility. In fact the sun dance pole is our May pole around which our own ancestors danced in the spring or early summer in the hope of helping produce a good harvest. In short these ceremonies were rain-making ceremonies primarily. I remember the Cheyennes said it always rained hard after the sun dance. One day it rained during the sun dance and rained out the whole camp. The medicine man was flabbergasted and made a speech to the assembled group: "I am sorry for the flood. I had no idea my power was so great."

Of course, any great national ceremony like a sun dance which everyone was obliged to attend in the course of time attracted to itself many other rituals so that it was overlaid and surrounded by all these things. Plains Indians tortured themselves as a result of a vow and it became customary to perform the vow at the sun dance as the main religious festival. Also, giving things away creft in and honoring warriors, naming chiefs, renewing medicine bundles. All the various rites of tribal life creft into the sun dance ceremony until it sometimes lasted with the secret part and the public part a full week.

The Kiowa sun dance different from all others in that if any blood was shed even by accident during the ceremony, it had to be called off.

Undoubtedly the men who underwent torture had to show great fortitude, but that was not their object. It was either to fulfill a vow made when frightened or in aid of some other person who was in danger or very sick, or else it was