

Silent Eaters?

131 It is but fair to state that no city in the world is more completely under the control of its chosen officers than were the villages of the Sioux tribes. In the first place there was a Supreme Council, composed of the hereditary chiefs of the nation. Their places were vacated by death only, and filled by succession alone. Upon all matters touching the good of the tribe or village, the decision of this body was final and binding. This was called the Circle of Silence, and its fires were lit and burned in secret. None but the elect were ever permitted to enter its presence, and in the entire Sioux nation its membership did not number above one hundred.* This Circle represented the Masonry of the aborigine. It had its signs, its grips, its passwords and its unwritten law, and its influence was far-reaching and absolute.

The assertion has often been made, and never denied, that Masonic rites are practiced by the savages of every clime, and there is no good reason why this should not be so. Certain it is that the Circle of Silence was the one and only exclusive society known among the Sioux, notwithstanding the fact that several other secret societies flourished in the Sioux nation for over eight hundred years. These latter societies were three in number, and were known as the Strong Hearts, Badgers and Dog soldiers. The duties of these latter societies, so far as their relation to the village was concerned, was to carry out any and all orders promulgated by the Supreme Council. Whenever the village was moved, a majority of those representing the Circle of Silence took precedence in the march, while the Brave Hearts and Badgers flanked the moving village, and the Dog Soldiers brought up the rear. In all the Indian ceremonies this order of priority and honor was observed. The buffalo hunt, preparations for which were attended by every traditional ceremony, invariably demanded the recognition of the rights of the societies.

132 Serious results followed the disobedience of the supreme council's prop-g-nams. When it was suspected that an enemy was in close proximity to the village, an order would be issued by the council that no gun should be fired unless at the foe. This order was issued to the * Strong Hearts, who thereby became responsible to the council for its proper observance. The Strong Hearts in turn issued its orders to the Badgers that the village be warned of the danger. The badgers then became responsible to the Strong Hearts for the faithful performance of the duty entrusted to it. The Badgers thereupon notified the Dog Soldiers of the decree, and the latter immediately sent out its trusted "criers" to carry out the order. Thus it will be seen that the order of the Council passed successively through three responsible organizations before it found its way to the people of the village, and each society was directly responsible to the one next higher in authority for the proper discharge of its duty. Governmental "red tape" would not be more exacting than this. Time was sacrificed to certainty. Should the order of the Circle of Silence not to fire a gun be disobeyed, the Dog Soldiers, who were the active agents of the Council, would seize the offender's gun and destroy it. If the order were for no brave to leave the village, and one stole out, he would be followed till captured, when his horses would be killed and his blankets cut up. For graver offenses, the culprit's lodge would be destroyed and sometimes his life taken. But it was seldom that any damage was done to the property of a brave that was not at once repaired. In case of death through carrying out an order of the Council, the dead brave's family were generally made wards of the nation.