

TURNER, GOLDIE.

SUN DANCE.

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Goldie Turner,
Field Worker,
8-13-37.

A good description of the Sun Dance.
Goldie Turner, Field Worker.

The Sun Dance was the most baneful of the old time practices of the Indians. It was not a function to test the personal courage of the braves for a place among the warriors. The test of courage was merely an incident of the ceremony, which ceremony was held for the purpose of propitiating by personal sacrifice the great spirit, and placating the pernicious spirits of the earth. It was an oblation purely, the persons taking part desiring to show that they were willing to submit to personal suffering in the hope that the community would be blessed in the harvest or in any undertaking in which they were about to engage.

The Sun Dance pole, which was usually about twelve inches in diameter at the base and twenty feet in length, was selected with much ceremony. After being carefully prepared the larger end was set in the ground a sufficient depth to give it firmness.

Throughout the preliminaries the medicine men fasted and prayed, and during the dance the ears of the children

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were pierced. While the ceremony was in progress, and the candidates were suspended by lariats run through the muscles of their breasts or back from a cross bar situated near the top of the pole, the prayers and dancing went on without interruption, the selected singers chanting in weird and mournful strains. The men fastened to the pole made their self immolation by staring continually at the sun, in consequence of which their eyes invariably became terribly inflamed. Some of the lookers-on would plead with the candidates that they be cut down, to which they would not consent. On the contrary they whistled continually to show that they were not affected by their sufferings. Other candidates for the sacrifice had buffalo heads attached to their bodies by lariats with skewers through their back muscles and ran around jumping and dancing until the weight of the drag broke the flesh away.

The dance usually lasted three consecutive days, the test of courage and endurance being reserved for the last day. The lacerated wounds received no attention in the way of dressing or being cared for until the dance ended at sundown on the third day.

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The above description of the Sun Dance was found as a printed clipping in an old McGuffey Reader and was evidently written many years ago and appeared in some newspaper current at that time.