

AMERICAN SECTION.

MYSTERY PACKS OF THE AMERICAN INDIANS.

[The account of the Indian sacred bundles, used in the preparation of this article, has been furnished by Mr. M. R. Harrington, who collected more than one hundred bundles from the Indians.—EDITOR.]

A VERY unusual and interesting feature of the newly installed exhibits of the Heye Collection is the series of mystery packs or sacred bundles which have been selected for the public benefit from a much larger number comprising the greatest and the most complete collection of the kind in existence.

Presenting the unpretentious outward appearance of smoky packets, about eighteen inches in length, the real interest and importance of the sacred bundles becomes apparent only when they are opened and their contents exposed to view.

In the rapid transformation of Indian ideas and methods that followed the coming of the white man, worn out and discarded accoutrements of the hunt and the warpath, as well as those of everyday use, were replaced by others in a different style; but the contents of the sacred bundles, because of their associations, were carefully preserved, or, if newly produced, were made with strict regard to the old beliefs. That is why they are among the few surviving works of the Indian which represent him still unspoiled and peculiar to himself.

Old arts and crafts, otherwise perhaps lost to knowledge even of the Indians themselves, are often revealed by the opening of a sacred bundle; but more important still are the revelations thus afforded of the inmost soul of the Indian; of his spiritual needs and the scope and content of his religious experience.

On such a mystery pack the fortunes

in war or the happiness in peace of a whole tribe depended, for it contained the elements from which were compounded the success and the very existence of the tribe as well as of the individual owner. It is therefore no matter for surprise that the Indian of to-day, though the fortunes of war for good or for ill are no longer in his reckoning, and happiness in peace is his great affliction, should cherish these storied relics of the glorious past. According to his accepted belief they were bestowed on his people by the Manitos, who in order to make the gift, laid all nature under contribution.

The sun and the thunders gave of their strength; the beasts of the earth and the creatures of the air gave, each according to his kind. The bold eagle; the swift hawk; the night-seeing owl; the swallow, darting unhurt amid flying arrows; the sturdy buffalo; the tireless wolf; the sly weasel, approaching his prey by stealth; the snake, charming his foe with magic arts, and slipping unseen through the grass;—each gave an essential item to the Thing of magic.

The herbs also contributed a share of their enchantments.

The wonderful gift of the mystery pack came to no man merely for the asking, nor could a sacred bundle be made on any model however perfect. The essential knowledge came only in the Vision, not to all men but only to him who had proved his worthiness. In wild and lonely places, fasting and praying, the chosen suppliant received the Vision, which spoke to him according to his need and after the desire that was in his heart. It might be the love of a maiden for which the young man sought the aid of the unseen powers. Or the boon he craved might be the doctor's art, or the gift of prophecy; or, forgetting himself, he might ask for something that would bring happiness and renown to

his people; but the thing for which the Vision was most frequently invoked in pain and travail was to be made strong in battle. When the invocation was successful and the young man had his Vision, the Vision became his tutor. It told him how to magic himself into the possession of whatever gift he wished. Then, following his instructions, he went about preparing the magic bundle even as Medea gathered the enchanted herbs and strangely assorted odds and ends for the renewal of old Æson.* Thus have come into existence all these grimy heirlooms, which, handed down from generation to generation have gathered round them so much lore, which have been guarded with so much care and treated with so much ceremony.

The contents of an Indian mystery pack varied with the tribe and according to the instructions that the owner received from his Vision; nevertheless a war bundle is always found to possess certain well marked characteristics. Such a bundle gave the owner protection in

war by rendering him invulnerable to his enemies. Its purpose was, therefore, analogous to the witches' cauldron in Macbeth, which was apparently prepared with a pretense of protecting him from his enemies, in order to work his destruction.

"For, you all know, security
Is mortal's chiefest enemy."†

The charm which was prepared for Macbeth, although accompanied by a deceptive promise of security against all his enemies, purposely left him exposed to the one whom he most dreaded, and thus treacherously compassed his death in the battle with Macduff. The charm, according to his belief made him invulnerable, but the protection was incomplete. Some essential ingredient had been purposely omitted from the witches' charm. Thus also the Indian warrior, finding himself overtaken by the death to which he believed himself immune, ascribed the failure of his charm, not to any defect in his system of belief, but to some acci-

* The ingredients of Medea's sorcery were as follows: roots, seeds, flowers and acrid juices of plants gathered during nine days and nights, while she wandered alone and fasting in the mountains. To these she added stones from the East, sand from the shore of ocean, hoar frost gathered by moonlight, the wings and flesh of a screech owl, the entrails of a wolf, the skin of a water snake, the liver of a stag, the bill and head of a crow, and a thousand things without names. (See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book VII.)

The witches' charm in Macbeth is still more familiar:

Round about the cauldron go
In the *poison'd entrails* throw,
Toad, that under coldest stone,
Days and nights hast thirty-one
Swelter'd venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i' the charmed pot

Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt, and toe of frog,

Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork, and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg, and owl's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf;
Witches' mummy, maw and gulf
Of the ravin'd salt-sea shark;
Root of hemlock, digg'd i' the dark;
Liver of blaspheming Jew;
Gall of goat, and slips of yew,
Sliver'd in the moon's eclipse;
Nose of Turk, and Tartar's lips;
Finger of a strangled babe,
Ditch-deliver'd by a drab,
Make the gruel thick and slab.
Add thereto a *tiger's chauldron*
For the ingredients of our cauldron.

Cool it with a *baboon's blood*
Then the charm is firm and good.
(Macbeth, Act IV, Scene I.)

† Macbeth, Act III, Scene 5.

dental omission on his part or failure to interpret aright the directions of his Vision.

The following is a partial inventory of the contents of an Iowa war bundle.

- An otter skin.
- A weasel skin painted green.
- Various pieces of scalps.
- Six eagle feathers.
- Deer's hair.
- Three snake skins.
- Two buffalo tails.
- Two ropes of buffalo hair.
- Two miniature war clubs.
- A wolf skin.
- The tail of a white wolf.
- The skin of a hawk.
- Skins of four swallows.
- The skin of a squirrel.
- A human nose.
- A pair of human lips.
- A weasel skin stuffed with buffalo hair.
- Four weasel skins.
- Piece of an eagle's skin.
- Three pieces of spotted fawn skin.
- Two bags of red war paint.
- A bag of tobacco.
- Various packets of herbs.

The whole is wrapped in a double cover of buckskin, doubly bound with cords and thongs. Upon the outside of the cover are attached a war club and three flutes.

Many of these articles are variously decorated and wrought into objects appropriate for personal adornment. A common method of decoration employed on such objects as snake skins and the wing feathers and tail feathers of birds is the beautiful dyed porcupine quill embroidery for which the Indians have become famous.

Another form of mystery pack was the medicine bundle. Its object was to secure control over the evil spirits and other hostile principles of the universe which cause sickness and misfortune. The possession of such a bundle, therefore, secured for the owner health and long

life. It also enabled him to confer these blessings upon others. The following partial inventory of the Winnebago medicine bundle may serve to indicate the general character of this particular form of magic.

Three paws of the black bear used as bags and containing herbs. (The sole of one of these paws is painted red.)

A little bone tube stuffed with small feathers wrapped in the skin of an eagle's head and neck which, in turn, is enclosed in a pouch made from an otter skin.

An otter skin containing dried bird's flesh and a bunch of feathers and fastened at the mouth with a piece of eagle's skin.

Two cane whistles.

A paint bag in the form of a miniature embroidered moccasin with legging attached, containing herbs and closed by a bunch of buffalo hair.

Four snake skins.

A white weasel skin containing herbs and a bone whistle.

A brown weasel skin containing herbs.

Two snake's vertebrae.

A bone whistle.

A cormorant's head.

A woodpecker's head.

A black squirrel skin.

Two little wooden dolls tied together.

A dried eagle's claw clasping a little pack of herbs, and a feather dyed red.

(The last two articles are enclosed in a black squirrel skin which, in turn, is secreted in a woven sack.)

An eagle's claw clasping a pack of herbs, and a bunch of eagle quills painted red and green.

(The last two articles are contained in a decorated woven sack.)

An animal's eye.

A horse chestnut and a tooth enclosed in a woven sack.

A miniature wooden bowl and spoon.

Eight woven and five rolled pouches containing numerous dried herbs.