

A HIEROPHANT OF THE AMERICAN INDIANS.

BY THE EDITOR.

ONE of the chief blessings of the Religious Parliament of 1893 is the new spirit which pervades our religious sentiments in the endeavor to understand people of a different faith. The old narrow view which looks upon non-Christians as misguided by Satan is fast disappearing, and we learn to look upon the pagans as well-intentioned in their attempts to grope after a solution of the deepest problems of life.

Much progress has been made in deciphering the religions of other nations by personal contact and sympathetic inquiry. The religions of Asia have been studied by scholars and scholarly missionaries, while the religion of the American Indian has been undertaken at the expense of the Smithsonian Institute under the supervision of the United States, and we come to the conclusion that the Indian is full of inspiration and truly religious sentiment. While he is ferocious in war, he is by no means the savage he is represented to be in many of our stories, and that he might easily appear in the history of the white pioneers of the wild west.

Professor Hartley B. Alexander, of the University of Nebraska, has devoted much of his energy to a study of the religion of the American Indian. See his article "The Religious Spirit of the American Indian," *Open Court*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 45, 74.

The same author describes in the present number a mystery play which is characteristic, not only of the Pawnee Indians but generally of the religious ceremonies of many tribes in the Mississippi valley. In fact it may be considered as typical of the religious spirit at the stage of mankind when agriculture begins to take root, and changes hunters into tillers of the soil. He has also written a poetic version of the ceremonial here described which renders faithfully the great mystery of life as interpreted in the religious expression of these simple people. In scope and meaning it is anal-

ogous to the ceremonies of the Eleusinian mysteries and may also be looked upon as a primitive Passion play. It has been published in the current number of *The Monist* (July, 1912) under the title "The Mystery of Life."

Professor Alexander's "Mystery of Life" is not pure imagination. On the contrary it is based on fact, and the main change which he has permitted himself to make is that of abbreviation of the lengthy performance of the Hako, the veneration of the corn as the source of life representing divine dispensation through sustenance of food. The statement is based upon a report by Miss Alice C. Fletcher embracing a whole volume of the 22d Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, and her report is based in turn upon the description of the Kurahus, the hierophant, or leader of the ceremony. Miss Fletcher says of this title: "This term is applied to a man of years who has been instructed in the meaning and use of sacred objects as well as their ceremonies. The word is sometimes employed as a synonym for a venerable man, one who commands respect."

This Kurahus, by the name of Tahirussawichi, a full-blooded Pawnee, had been invited to visit Miss Fletcher in Washington, and it will be instructive to read the characterization of this Indian priest because it will teach us best the deep spirit of the Indian religion. She says:

"Tahirussawichi is a member of the Chaui band of the Pawnee tribe and about 70 years of age. He is tall and well made, and preserves much of the vigor of his earlier days. He is mentally alert, quick to observe, possessed of a tenacious memory, and gifted with a genial nature. He enjoys a joke and is always ready with good-fellowship, but he never forgets the dignity of his calling, or fails to observe the conduct befitting his position as the guardian of sacred rites. Although he is childlike and trusting, he has a keen discernment of character and a shrewd common-sense way of looking at men and things. While he is not indifferent to the great changes which have overtaken his people, new conditions have failed to disturb in any way the convictions of his early religious training.

"He has struggled to avoid living in a house, and has held to an earth lodge until it has dropped to pieces about him. He said: 'I can not live in a white man's house of any kind. The sacred articles committed to my care must be kept in an earth lodge, and in order that I may fulfil my duties toward them and my people, I must live there also, so that as I sit I can stretch out my hand and lay it on Mother Earth.' Last fall (1901) I saw how he had propped

up a part of the ruins of his lodge so that he might still keep the sacred objects in a primitive dwelling.

"When he was in Washington in 1898 he was taken to the Capitol and the Library of Congress. While the vastness and beauty of these structures gave him pleasure, they did not appeal to him, for such buildings he said were unfitted to contain the sacred symbols of the religion of his ancestors, in the service of which he had spent his long life. He admired at a distance the Washington Monument, and when he visited it he measured the base, pacing and counting his steps. Then he stood close to the white shaft and looked up, noting its great height. After going inside, he was asked which he would take, the elevator or the stairs, and replied: 'I will not go up. The white man likes to pile up stones, and he may go to the top of them.'

"Equally characteristic was his interview with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. When introduced, he said: 'I am glad to see you and to take you by the hand. Many chiefs of my tribe have done so. I never expected to do it. I came here to talk of the religion of my fathers, which I follow. You can ask my sister (referring to me) what I have said.'"

For some time we have published in *The Monist* philosophical poetry, translations from Schiller and Herder, and also original poems by Major J. W. Powell. The current number contains the Indian drama on "The Mystery of Life," based upon the report of Tahirussawichi and reduced to English verse by Professor Hartley B. Alexander.

By philosophical poetry we understand such expressions of sentiment in verse or in exalted diction as describe man's conception of life, and certainly in the same category we must range the religious poetry of the different stages of human development. Among them the American Indian represents one of the oldest types, and we need not hesitate to say that the aborigines of the Western Continent are more religious than is the white man of the twentieth century. The Indian more than we feels himself as the child of nature, and his poetry is deeper than we can imagine. He admires the marvels of civilization, our ships, our railroads, our towering buildings, but in contemplating our big monuments and cathedrals he does not feel the holiness of a religious inspiration such as impresses him when he thinks of the sacred mysteries of his own more primitive folks, by which they express thanks to the powers above them and establish among the members of the tribe and their confederates the spirit of love and good will.