



Dreams

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Native Americannorth American

Intermediate
8 min read

As soon as manhood is attained, the young Indian must secure his “charm,” or “medicine.” After a sweat-bath, he retires to some lonely spot, and there, for four days and nights, if necessary, he remains in solitude. During this time he eats nothing; drinks nothing; but spends his time invoking the Great Mystery for the boon of a long life. In this state of mind, he at last sleeps, perhaps dreams. If a dream does not come to him, he abandons the task for a time, and later on will take another sweat-bath and try again. Sometimes dangerous cliffs, or other equally uncomfortable places, are selected for dreaming, because the surrounding terrors impress themselves upon the mind, and even in slumber add to the vividness of dreams.

At last the dream comes, and in it some bird or animal appears as a helper to the dreamer, in trouble. Then he seeks that bird or animal; kills a specimen; and if a bird, he stuffs its skin with moss and forever keeps it near him. If an animal, instead of a bird, appears in the dream, the Indian takes his hide, claws, or teeth; and throughout his life never leaves it behind him, unless in another dream a greater charm is offered. If this happens, he discards the old “medicine” for the new; but such cases are rare.

Sometimes the Indian will deck his “medicine-bundle” with fanciful trinkets and quill-work. At other times the “bundle” is kept forever out of the sight of all uninterested persons, and is altogether unadorned. But “medicine” is necessary; without it, the Indian is afraid of his shadow.

An old chief, who had been in many battles, once told me his great dream, withholding the name of the animal or bird that appeared therein and became his “medicine.”

He said that when he was a boy of twelve years, his father, who was chief of his tribe, told him that it was time that he tried to dream. After his sweat-bath, the boy followed his father without speaking, because the postulant must not converse or associate with other humans between the taking of the bath and the finished attempt to dream. On and on into the dark forest the father led, followed by the naked boy, till at last the father stopped on a high hill, at the foot of a giant pine-tree.

By signs the father told the boy to climb the tree and to get into an eagle’s nest that was on the topmost boughs. Then the old man went away, in order that the boy might reach the nest without coming too close to his human conductor.

Obediently the boy climbed the tree and sat upon the eagle’s nest on the top. “I could see very far from that nest,” he told me. “The day was warm and I hoped to dream that night, but the wind rocked the tree top, and the darkness made me so much afraid that I did not sleep.

“On the fourth night there came a terrible thunder-storm, with lightning and much wind. The great pine groaned and shook until I was sure it must fall. All about it, equally strong trees went down with loud crashings, and in the dark there were many awful sounds—sounds that I sometimes hear yet. Rain came, and I grew cold and more afraid. I had eaten nothing, of course, and I was weak—so weak and tired, that at last I slept, in the nest. I dreamed; yes, it was a wonderful dream that came to me, and it has most all come to pass. Part is yet to come. But come it surely will.

“First I saw my own people in three wars. Then I saw the Buffalo disappear in a hole in the ground, followed by many of my people. Then I saw the whole world at war, and many flags of white men were in this land of ours. It was a terrible war, and the fighting and the blood made me sick in my dream. Then, last of all, I saw a ‘person’ coming—coming across what seemed the plains. There were deep shadows all about him as he

approached. This 'person' kept beckoning me to come to him, and at last I did go to him.

"Do you know who I am,' he asked me.

"No, "person," I do not know you. Who are you, and where is your country?"

"If you will listen to me, boy, you shall be a great chief and your people shall love you. If you do not listen, then I shall turn against you. My name is "Reason."

"As the 'person' spoke this last, he struck the ground with a stick he carried, and the blow set the grass afire. I have always tried to know that 'person.' I think I know him wherever he may be, and in any camp. He has helped me all my life, and I shall never turn against him—never."

That was the old chief's dream and now a word about the sweat-bath. A small lodge is made of willows, by bending them and sticking the ends in the ground. A completed sweat-lodge is shaped like an inverted bowl, and in the centre is a small hole in the ground. The lodge is covered with robes, bark, and dirt, or anything that will make it reasonably tight. Then a fire is built outside and near the sweat-lodge in which stones are heated. When the stones are ready, the bather crawls inside the sweat-lodge, and an assistant rolls the hot stones from the fire, and into the lodge. They are then rolled into the hole in the lodge and sprinkled with water. One cannot imagine a hotter vapor bath than this system produces, and when the bather has satisfied himself inside, he darts from the sweat-lodge into the river, winter or summer. This treatment killed thousands of Indians when the smallpox was brought to them from Saint Louis, in the early days.

That night in the lodge War Eagle told a queer yarn. I shall modify it somewhat, but in our own sacred history there is a similar tale, well known to all. He said:

"Once, a long time ago, two 'thunders' were travelling in the air. They came over a village of our people, and there stopped to look about.

“In this village there was one fine, painted lodge, and in it there was an old man, an aged woman, and a beautiful young woman with wonderful hair. Of course the ‘thunders’ could look through the lodge skin and see all that was inside. One of them said to the other: ‘Let us marry that young woman, and never tell her about it.’

“All right,’ replied the other ‘thunder.’ ‘I am willing, for she is the finest young woman in all the village. She is good in her heart, and she is honest.’

“So they married her, without telling her about it, and she became the mother of twin boys. When these boys were born, they sat up and told their mother and the other people that they were not people, but were ‘thunders,’ and that they would grow up quickly.

“When we shall have been on earth a while, we shall marry, and stay until we each have four sons of our own, then we shall go away and again become “thunders,”” they said.

“It all came to pass, just as they said it would. When they had married good women and each had four sons, they told the people one day that it was time for them to go away forever.

“There was much sorrow among the people, for the twins were good men and taught many good things which we have never forgotten, but everybody knew it had to be as they said. While they lived with us, these twins could heal the sick and tell just what was going to happen on earth.

“One day at noon the twins dressed themselves in their finest clothes and went out to a park in the forest. All the people followed them and saw them lie down on the ground in the park. The people stayed in the timber that grew about the edge of the park, and watched them until clouds and mists gathered about and hid them from view.

“It thundered loudly and the winds blew; trees fell down; and when the mists and clouds cleared away, they were gone—gone forever. But the people have never forgotten them, and my grandfather, who is in the ground near Rocker, was a descendant from one of the sons of the ‘thunders.’ Ho!”

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