

NOTES ON THE SHAKER CHURCH OF THE INDIANS.

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The Shaker Indians of the West Coast are now taking steps to incorporate the Shaker faith in an organized church. Judge Giles of Olympia, Washington, is now working up the articles of incorporation for the Indians. Soon they will have an organized church, a church by Indians and for Indians only. Temperance is their watchword; and healing the sick through prayer and laying on of hands and "shaking" over them is one of their tenets. The church about to be incorporated is copied in part from several denominations, besides imbibing the doctor—"tomanawis" beliefs of the old times including a part of the "tomanawis" ceremonies. The Episcopal church furnishes the idea of chanting prayers¹. The Catholic church furnishes the custom of burning candles during the service and the old custom of making the sign of the cross and the bowing of the knee when "Jesus-Man" is mentioned. The shaking, body-jerking, the contortions, the muscle-quivering, the wried face, and the hypnotic influence are derived from the shamanistic customs of the old times. Hypnotism and shamanistic influence in general are the leading powers and are the things which actuate the Indian to perpetuate the religion.

In talking with a "shaker," he will always tell you he has felt the "power" and that is why he shakes so hard. "It is the power of God taking hold of him that makes him shake," he affirms. From the start it was my opinion that the "power" the shakers felt when shaking is hypnotism. To satisfy myself I went in among the actors several times. At once I could feel the "power." There was no mistake about it. I had often felt the same "power" at the old style medicine singings and dances from the Pueblo and Apache country to the land of the Norman Lion.

¹ The chanted "doxology" in the church language of the Shakers is:

"Kwax tsnahs mahah' stee stah nah' stee tah' tsohn tohs pray' kloh mahahs' stee stah'."

Note.—The "stee" above is pronounced as though the first two letters were medium between "s" and "t," ranging between "st" and "ts" in pronnnciation.

The accented words are much prolonged.

The power was undoubtedly hypnotism. The sensation produced was evidently that of hypnotic influence.

Once while I was attending one of these shaker meetings one of the actors was hypnotized. This was February 16, 1909. He had been standing with hands extended outward and upward for more than an hour while the shakers were dancing around him like the waves surging around a rock at sea in a stormy time. He was a novitiate at least for that night. He was trying to get the "power." He got it. He jumped up and down and stamped the floor in a circular movement, then for some minutes while his hands whirled, gyrated and his muscles quivered and jerked in a horrible manner. So hard did he stamp that he broke a hole through the floor. Soon he threw his hands up over his head and fell heavily to the floor. As he did so his muscles quivered as though he were in the dying stage. His flesh then became rigid. At this climax his pulse ran down to 57; five minutes later it was up to 60. Then as the spell was being broken twenty minutes later, it ran up to 76. The spell lasted forty minutes. Some of the Indians were scared, thinking the novitiate was dying, and rushed out of the hall. The performance over him was a complete hypnotic performance. The usual mode of removing hypnotic power was used. Hands were rubbed down his body and then the power thus gathered would be hurled to the four winds by a slapping, vigorous sliding of the hands across each other. When the "power" was removed so that consciousness was restored, the novitiate entered the dance vigorously again.

Effect of Shakerism upon the actors: The terrible shaking that has been mentioned here and in the previous article is bound to undermine the health of any person who will participate in it. Besides, the heating up of one's self as is done in the shaker halls and then the going out of doors immediately afterwards, tend to the giving of colds to the participants, especially in the winter months. This undoubtedly, will lead to pneumonia, consumption and death to many. Again, the horrid wrying and contorting of the faces will cause them to be wrinkled prematurely. The muscle-quivering and the hypnotic influence is bound, also, to have a damaging effect upon the nerves and mind of the actor; this dance is kept up all day every Sunday and from three to four hours every Thursday. Furthermore, in the doctoring of the sick the shakers are fanatical in the belief that shaking over the patient will cure it. "All shake—no medicine" has killed many an Indian and will in time decimate the tribes holding such beliefs.