



Indian Feast of the Dead

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INDIAN FEAST OF THE DEAD:—Among the Indians of Northern Michigan the observance of the Feast of the Dead celebrated on All Saints' and All Souls' Days, November the first and second at Cross Village, Michigan is a very important occasion.

The hosts extend invitations to all the Indians of that region and to any strangers who may be in the vicinity.

The celebration really begins on Hallowe'en when kettles are set up and pies are pushed into ovens in preparation for the big dinners which are given during the two days following. During these three days, the Indians lavish all that they possess upon their guests and reduce themselves to such extreme poverty that they do not reserve a single thing for themselves. In the future they may be hungry, but at this time they must cook for the dead. It is the living, however, who sit at the banquet tables. Certain among them represent the departed who sleep under the white crosses or cobblestone markers in the burying grounds.

The sole object for which they incur all of this expenditure is that they may render the souls of the departed happy and more highly respected in the country of the dead. For the Indians believe that they are under the strictest obligation to pay these honors and that it is only by this lavish spending that they can secure rest for the departed souls. Some of the Indians still cling to the belief that the dead return to their former homes and partake of the food of the living. Cakes, pies and other good things are left for them on the tables, and the rooms are kept warm for their comfort.

For generations, Michigan Indians have kept the two days as a festival for the dead. The schools are closed; religious services are held in the church and a procession to the cemetery follows.

For weeks, the women of the Chippewa and Ottawa tribes busy themselves making floral wreaths to decorate the graves. The artistry of these squaws is evidenced in the beautiful wreaths of red, white, and yellow roses, poppies, lilies, and colorful pansies which their deft and skillful fingers fashion. Throughout the day of October 31 and until noon November 1, groups of these squaws carry these floral tributes to the cemetery, remove the faded and weather-beaten wreaths of last year and replace them with new ones.

It is after the visit to the cemetery that the final preparations are made for the feasts for the dead. Except for the women who cannot leave the kettles, a few old men and women, and those who are sick, practically every Indian in the vicinity walks in the procession. When the service at the cemetery are over, the Indians give themselves up with utter abandon to visiting, dancing, and feasting. For many of them, these days are a homecoming and their only opportunity to see friends who are distantly located.

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PETER SIMON SUCKEGG:—There is given below an item which seems little known among collectors, but which I believe merits investigation:

Peter Simon Suckegg
Traded his wife for a duckegg.

The duck egg was rotten
So he traded for cotton.

The cotton was yellow
So he traded it for tallow.