

INDIAN PIPES AND THEIR MEANING

By Agnes C. Laut -

It need scarcely be told in the pipes of long ago each feather appended to the stem represented an enemy slain. If one doubted the record of the war-eagle feather the warrior then showed the scalps of the enemy, which were kept as a sort of a sacred proof of his work. Such pipes were used only on occasions of peace and war. Speaking roughly, the best pipes of Eastern tribes were molded clay, the best of the Western tribes in slate pipe-stone taken from the famous quarry west of the Mississippi. Before the great buffalo and antelope hunts, when herds of game were driven into a pond, or an enclosed area of snares, it was customary for the Indians to whiff the incense of propitiation to the spirits of the animals about to be slain, explaining that only the desire for food compelled the Indians to kill, and that the hunt was the will of the Master of Life or "Master of the Roaring Wind", who would compensate the animals in the next world. The pipes used for this ceremony usually show the figure of a man in conference with the figure of an animal. Others show the figure of Indians with locked hands. This typifies a vow of friendship to be terminated only by death. It was usually between men; but sometimes between a man and a woman, in which case the Platonis bound not only precluded but forbade the very possibility of marriage. After that who shall say that the stolid Indian has no vein of sentiment in his nature?

One of the most curious pipes I have seen I bought from a Cree on a reservation east of the refugee Sioux. It is in the shape of a war hatchet of a metal which I do not know, though I suspect it is galena mixed with clay, the edge being sharp enough, but the back of the ax being a bowl and the handle a pipe stem. The odd lines in Indian carving and woven work are not without meaning. Fighting Mistah could read a legend where we saw nothing but bizzarre markings. There were the circular lines, hollow down, meaning clouds; the cross, meaning the coming of the priest; the tree, a type of peace with its branches overshadowing the nations; the wavy line, signifying water; the arrow, war. The ordinary Indian can read a tribal song or chonicle from obscure drawings on a face of a rock or crazy-coloredwork on a scraped buffalo skin.