

## BUFFALO-SKULL FROM THE ARIKARA

The Museum has recently acquired an interesting ethnological object, collected by the writer, from the Arikara tribe on the upper Missouri river in North Dakota. This object is a buffalo-skull which formerly belonged to an Arikara sub-chief named Soldier.

Soldier had possessed this buffalo-skull for many years before his death. It was used as a religious symbol, and was kept upon the roof of the owner's house, overlooking the entrance, at all times except on occasions of religious festivals celebrated in the holy lodge. On such occasions, this buffalo-skull was carried to the holy lodge and given a place of honor as an invocation for the presence and assistance of the spirit of the buffalo in the ceremonies in which Soldier was a participant.

In the Arikara conception of the universe, the four quarters of the horizon are consecrated to four elements, four guardians under God. Thus, the southeast quarter is consecrated to the Sunrise; the southwest quarter to the Thunder, which implies water, necessary element of all life; the northwest quarter is consecrated to the Wind, all movements of air; and the northeast quarter is consecrated to Night. Each of the four quarters also bears a second significance, and in this second grouping of powers or elements, the southwest quarter is dedicated to the guardian spirit or genius of the buffalo. In what may be called the Arikara Book of Genesis, this dedication was said to be in recognition of the divine promise through Mother Corn, the mediator, that the buffalo should be the principal gift from the animal people to humanity for our sustenance and support.

Sometimes a man would place a buffalo-skull upon the prairie as an invocation for the special care and guardianship of the buffalo spirit and for other special favors. In such cases, the skull was placed with a southern aspect upon the brow of a hill so to express the thought of watch and ward through the whole day, from the rising of the sun to its setting. The petitioner would there make offerings and prayers and sing songs of devotion. The rags wrapped round the horns of the present specimen are remnants of offerings which have thus been made during the years it was in use by Soldier.

When the buffalo-skull was placed on the roof of a dwelling, it was set just over the doorway

with an eastern aspect, for in Arikara house-building the doorway was oriented to the east. Placing the buffalo-skull thus over the doorway was an invocation that the genius of the buffalo might watch and guard all the outgoings and the incomings of the members of that household.

When Soldier felt the approach of death, he sent for a serious-minded young man in whom he had confidence, and said to him: "I shall die today. For that reason I wish you to remove, from over the door of my house, the buffalo-skull which is there. I wish you to carry it out and set it upon a hill on the prairie and there make an offering before it of this pipe and tobacco, and leave it there with God."

So the young man did as he was requested. He carried the skull out upon the prairie and set it down, facing toward the south, on the brow of a hill where never a plow had broken the virgin sod. Then he filled the pipe with tobacco and set it upon the ground with the mouthpiece toward the nose of the skull. And there it was abandoned to the sun, wind, dew and rains, and frost and snow. There it remained for a year or more, when the young man who had placed it there related the circumstance to the writer and invited him to take it up and preserve it as a relic. So he took the writer to the spot and showed him the skull and the pipe, and instructed him in what manner to take them up. So they were taken up and put away, and now at last they have been brought to the Museum.