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## Human Sacrifice among the Indians

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**Abstract:** A series of brief comments in which the author presents archaeological findings, architectural notes, and myths and legends that deal indirectly with the Book of Mormon. Dibble discusses the wheel, ancient irrigation methods, metals, Mexican and Mayan codices, Quetzalcoatl, ancient buildings, and numerous other related items. The twenty-eighth part covers the practice of human sacrifice among the Aztecs.

# Human Sacrifice

## AMONG the Indians

By DR. CHARLES E. DIBBLE

THE practice of human sacrifice is often cited to show that the Aztecs were a savage, backward, and ruthless people. The custom is properly Aztec, but the cosmology and ideology of the people help place the practice in its true perspective.

The Indian had been created by the gods. According to some versions, the gods gave their lives to realize the creation of the world. Furthermore, the manifestations of nature—sun, moon, rain, wind, etc.—were gods who furnished the elements so necessary for the well-being of a sedentary, agricultural people. The arduous work of the gods depleted their strength, so they required nourishment. But the gods received little nourishment from the coarse food of the Indian. Human blood, then, was a refined and purified food for the gods.

Human sacrifice was man's part of the bargain with the gods. For the well-being of the Indian, his gods must live. They, in turn, could remain strong only by the ritual offering of human blood. Sacrificial ceremonies were not haphazardly grouped together; rather, they came at special appointed times. Not all ceremonies required the death of Indians. Many rituals were accompanied by the sacrificing of quail, eagles, dogs, or turkeys.

The sacrificed victims were more often the captive warriors of enemy tribes. During ceremonies to the Rain god and the god of Vegetation, many lives were sacrificed. Victims numbering into the thousands were sacrificed during the dedication of temples to the major gods.

The practice, so repulsive to our thinking, would probably have run its course. It represents a stage in the evolution of Indian ideology rather than a permanent social practice.



ONE OF THE AZTEC METHODS OF HUMAN SACRIFICE, ACCORDING TO DURAN

THE IMPROVEMENT ERA



## T A G S

By JANE HART

"RATTLESNAKE CREEK, Wolf Creek, Castle Creek, Crab Creek, Chimney Rock, and points west!"

A conductor would have sounded off something like that had there been a conductor to sound off, when the second party of Mormon pioneers left Nebraska and headed for Salt Lake City.

But to the original band, not even that delightful list of destinations would have been announced. To them fell the fun of following the old Indian trail almost obliterated by dust and grass, of blazing new trails guided by Fremont's map, and of labeling the wilderness for the benefit of following companies.

Fremont had previously named key points. He went in for euphonious tags and called latitude 41° 3' 44" "Cedar Bluffs," but Brigham Young dubbed the adjacent stream "Rattlesnake Creek." President Young, riding along the banks of the stream, "discovered that his horse stepped within two feet of a very large rattlesnake." As it was his custom to hurt nothing, including snakes, he turned his horse away without harming it. But later, one of the brethren hoofing it, happened upon the snake which coiled and struck, springing several feet into the air. The brother dodged, and, as my literal historian records: "took his rifle and shot the snake dead." These adventures resulted in naming the stream "Rattlesnake Creek."

Heber Kimball, scouting for a road along a river bottom, interrupted two wolves at lunch. He made noises at them but they held their own, glaring at the intrepid Mormon over a "dead carcass," and the unarmed brother "concluded to move away as soon as he could." He had to reconnoiter over ten miles before he struck anything

that could pass for a road, and then he got caught in a rainstorm, but when he returned to camp the stream was christened "Wolf Creek."

The little band is now following the Platte, and its countless tributaries make river-crossing practically a daily occurrence. Often the soft, sandy bottoms force them to double up the teams to get the wagons across. One large tributary required an entire afternoon to cross, and was named "Castle Creek" because the opposite bluffs resembled the rock on which Lancaster Castle is built, and the bluffs were named Castle Bluffs.

The bends in the river create a very crooked road, and the prairie, soft and uneven, is tough on the teams. They cross a shallow stream about twenty feet wide, and name it Crab Creek because one of the brethren saw "a very large crab in it."

Still following the Platte, they catch their first sight of Chimney Rock, already named. My historian compares it with the factory chimneys in England. The surrounding romantic country intrigued them as much as the fantastic rock itself, and they named one formation which resembled an immense frog with a wide open mouth, "Frog's Head Bluffs."

After crossing these bluffs they followed a high ridge of gravel, rounding on top, with cobbles varying from fifty-pounds to B-B size. They called it Cobble Hill, and although the oxen could take it, it was hard on the horses.

My mentor fails to record how "Rawhide Creek" got its name, he being so filled with the peace of the mild beauty of the Sunday morning when he camped on "The Rawhide."

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