



Archery of the Mandans, plate 24 from the "North American Indian Portfolio"

Date

1845

Primary Maker

George Catlin

Medium

Color lithograph on paper

Description

This game, though not one of any great excitement or action, was one of curious interest, attended with rules and regulations which

were pleasing, rendering the scene very agreeable in effect. The Mandans, whom I found a polite and friendly tribe of Indians, on the head waters of the Missouri, seemed to vie more spiritedly and more constantly in their athletic games (and from their almost constant practice, seem to have advanced farther into the science of them), than any of the other tribes; and for their advancement, had formed into something like amateur clubs, which gave a value to their amusements, and lent an additional stimulus to their efforts, as well as a gentlemanly and studied grace to all of their groups, peculiarly pleasing to the eye of an artist or an amateur. A voluminous book might be devoted to the games and various amusements of this peculiar tribe, the principal of which are the games of Tchung-kee, game of the Mocasine, game of the Platter, Ball-plays, game of the Arrow, Horse-racing, Foot-racing, &c., in all of which, from constant practice, they become exceedingly skilled. Gambling is looked upon by all of these wild people as a rational and innocent amusement, there being no laws of their country denominating it a vice; and in these numerous games of skill and of chance, their few personal goods are most of the time liberally and boldly staked. The principal weapon of war and also for the chase, by which they supply their families with food, is the bow; and the strife illustrated in this plate, is one which, while it is affording them an exciting and pleasing emulation, is educating them in the effectual use of that weapon to which they are chiefly indebted for their protection and subsistence. The meeting represented here is something like that of an Archery Club in the civilized world, but for a different mode of shooting. Having but little necessity for correct shooting at a long distance, as I have mentioned in an early part of this work, their hunting and warring being chiefly done from the backs of their running horses, the great merit in archery with them consists in the rapidity and force with which they can discharge their arrows from their bows; and the strife in this game (in which I have given striking portraits from the life, of several of the leading young men of the tribe) was to decide who could discharge from his bow the greatest number of arrows before his first one should fall to the ground; each arrow to pass over a certain line sufficiently distant to characterize it as a clean and efficient shot. For this purpose a bow, a shield, a quiver or other valuable, is staked as an entrance fee, and each one, grasping in his hand with the bow, a handful of arrows drawn from his quiver, as he does when rushing into battle, gives a judicious elevation to his first, and follows it with others in the most rapid succession that he can: a red flag is raised at the end of the ground at the instant the first arrow falls, and he who can count the greatest number of arrows in the air at one time, is victor, and claims the highest prize. I never beheld a more classic and beautiful group, nor a more graceful and gentlemanly rivalry than in the instance when I made the subjoined sketch; and on this occasion the young man represented in the attitude of shooting, succeeded in getting eight of his arrows on the wing at once, which I distinctly counted. Nor did it appear to be owing to any extraordinary distance to which the first was thrown, but to the exact elevation given to it, and the incredible quickness of fixing the rest of them upon the string and getting them off.

Dimensions

Composition: 13 9/16 x 18 1/16 in. (34.5 x 45.9 cm) Sheet: 15 9/16 x 22 1/8 in. (39.6 x 56.2 cm)