
The Hopis Snake Dance.

The Hopis have eighteen different ceremonials or feasts or dances, by far the most striking of which is the "Snake Dance." It is the most impressive, the most sacred and, is indeed, from various causes, one of the most awful and dramatic spectacles on earth.

It always takes place in the last days of August, and is essentially a joint prayer for rain. It is preceded by eight days of various observances, and is the culmination of a nine-day religious festival. During the last four days the priests descend to the plain, and collect all the snakes they can find until from seventy to one hundred have been gathered. These are principally rattlesnakes, the deadly spotted monarchs of the Arizona deserts. They pick them up without fear or deliberation, roll them up carelessly like so much rope, and place them in buckskin bags. What secrets of treatment against poison they possess no outsider has ever been able to discover, but while some may be bitten by rattlers in the course of the snake dance, there is no record of any Hopi ever having died from such a bite. These bags of snakes are taken to the village and delivered to the high priest, who is ensconced in the *kisi*, or sacred tent, a structure of cottonwood boughs which has been erected on the main street, the scene of the dance.

Early the next morning the great day opens with the snake race. All the population gather at the edge of the mesa to await the result. Soon, far out on the plain, some small moving black objects similar to ants are seen. These are the leaders in a five-mile race in which forty or fifty of the young men are competing. The race ends only at the top of a mesa, a rapid climb of six hundred feet after running five miles. It is as exciting as any foot-race, and the people become wildly aroused, greeting the victor with a hullaballo that is pheno-