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Maynard Dixon

THE YE-BITCHAI DANCE OF THE NAVAJOS: FROM LIFE--BY MAYNARD DIXON.

TO-NIGHT the Navajos are dancing. In a far-away corner of North-eastern Arizona, where their desolate domain reaches its barren leagues beneath the frosty stars—mesa and plain, steep-walled canyons and mountain peak—the tribesmen gather from the remote canadas, where their hogars stand darkened and silent.

For nine days they have come from the points of the four winds upon their shaggy little ponies, with their wagons and their women and their children; the brown little babies rolled safely in their mothers' blankets, the shy young girls peeping coyly from the wagons, and the restless boys, whose keen, prying eyes never miss a movement. Even the dogs and camp kettles look alert—for on this night the medicine men call to their aid the mighty spirits of the past—the ye-bitchai, the giant grand-fathers of old.

For nine nights the strange, rhythmic hum of the medicine chant has not ceased in the big ye-bitchai hogar or

medicine lodge—for nine nights the young men, the tireless dancers and sweet singers of the people, have danced between the fires, and the medicine men have anointed the eyes of the young boys with the sacred meal, that they may not be stricken blind when they look upon the strong gods in whose forms the dancers move.

The camp has grown day by day, until now, upon the last night of the ceremony, there is a campfire near almost every juniper within a quarter-mile of the medicine lodge, and still over the low-rolling ridges come the Navajos upon their ponies, a succession of wild silhouettes passing swiftly across the last dull green glow of the Western sky—and up from the trading post there comes the rumble of wagon wheels and a drumming of swift hoofs in the darkness. There are shrill shouts and the crying of children and the fierce barking of wolf-like dogs.

This dance is being given by a young buck who owns many sheep and ponies, wampum and silver—for the Navajos are good silversmiths in the Indian style—as

a thank offering for the recovery of his mother from a long illness. The sum of his payments to the medicine men and singers, whose services he has retained, and gifts to guests will come to near \$500 in Navajo goods.

This ceremony may be held either as a thank offering or as propitiation of the powers of departed and deified ancestors of the tribe, as the case may demand. Sets of dancers, six to twelve in a set, from different parts of the reservation compete for the honors of their calling, dancing alternately in relays.

Long before the dance begins the long space between and all around the twelve great bonfires of juniper logs is filled with a dense and restless throng, wild in the many colors of their blankets. The medicine hogar is at the west end of the lane and the dancers' lodge—a high, circular corral of green brush—at the east. All who can have backed their wagons in behind the fires forming two irregular rows, and these are filled with men, women and children, deeply muffled in their blankets, for the night is biting cold.

Here and there, amid the throng, a

massive silver bracelet or concha flashes in the firelight. Tall, stately figures of the chief's medicine men stalk through the flickering light, or stand silent and impressive in statuesque poses, while always from within the medicine lodge comes the weird cadence of the chant.

At last, from the lower end of the lane, comes a shrill "whooh! whooh!"—like the cry of some unknown bird—the crowd opens a trifle, and a young man appears, waving his arms as he advances. He is clad all in brown velvet—his moccasins are decorated with silver buttons, around his waist is a belt of enormous silver conchas, about his neck an ungainly, bushy wreath of evergreens—but his face is covered with a hideous mask of buckskin, painted an ashen gray and surrounded with a wild wig of goat hair. It is decorated behind with a tall, fan-shaped spread of eagle plumes, lightly swaying as he rolls his head from side to side.

He retreats into the darkness again and a chief steps forward to address the crowd. He delivers a long harangue in the strange creaking Navajo tongue, his strong voice and gestures seeming to

command respectful attention. We learn that he is giving his people a temperance lecture. Shame be it to us that he need do so.

At last, after long waiting, we hear that weird whoop again, and the young man who gives the dance, and the Laughing Doctor, the greatest medicine man of the tribe, come out from the medicine lodge a little distance and sit down upon the ground. We hear the faint jingle of sleigh bells, the dry ch-r-r-r of rattles far beyond the crowd, then the spreading plumes of the leader appear and eight terrible figures follow him into the glare of the fires.

They halt in single file and while the Laughing Doctor and the young man make a long, silent prayer of a basket of sacred meal we have time to note their attire. The leader being described there comes an array of lithe and sinewy bodies, dressed in moccasins and breech cloths, and each with its head hidden in a terrible mask, painted to represent some god of Navajo mythology. Some of the dancers are painted white all over, with curious emblems upon their breasts;

others are all black with crooked lightning patterns in white or red upon their arms and legs; others are dressed all in black velvet and wear black masks; some have wreaths of evergreen about their necks and waists, and nearly every one is crowned with two long eagle feathers, tipped with down.

The prayer finished, the Laughing Doctor advances down the line, sprinkling each dancer with the sacred meal, returning to his place. Then the leader rushes to the far end of the line, stopping suddenly and throwing out his arms and giving his peculiar whoop, and back again, doing the same before the Laughing Doctor.

The first dancer advances until he faces the host and begins with his rattle and stamping with one foot and hopping slightly on the other, that strange rhythmic step of Indian dancers whose very monotony is a fascination. He begins the chant, which is taken up by each dancer in turn, and the dance is on. They go down the middle and back and around and dance together in a cir-

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