

THE INFLUENZA AND THE NAVAJO.

BY

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The Walketon (Ind.) Independent and The Indian School Journal both report: "Dispatches from Phoenix, Arizona, state that two thousand Navajos, residing on that part of the reservation in Apache County, under the jurisdiction of Fort Defiance (representing about one-fifth of the Navajo country) have died of influenza. The chief clerk of the Navajo agency made the report."

It is the writer's belief that the above statement is a gross exaggeration; yet the death-rate was appalling. Probably no other people in the United States suffered from the ravages of this plague at all comparable with them.

The Navajos belong to the Athapascan stock of Indians and are full cousins of the Apache. In the 17th century, they appropriated the farm lands of the Tewa Indians of New Mexico, called Navahu, and engaged in farming. To distinguish them from the other and more roving Apaches, they were called Apaches de Navajo or "great seed sowings" by the Spaniards. In time, the first part of the name was dropped, leaving the name "Navajo" as the tribal signification, though at the present time it is a misnomer as they are now a pastoral people. This name is not used by the Navajos except when they try to speak English. In fact, many of the tribe do not know it and only the educated part of the tribe can pronounce the word correctly, as "v" is a sound unknown in their language. They call themselves "Dine" (the people), which, in its variable forms, is the general tribal name of the whole Athapascan family.

They believe that they were created by the gods of Arizona and Utah about 500 years ago, though they believe that the earth was previously peopled with human beings most of whom were destroyed by demon giants. They probably wandered into Arizona and New Mexico in small bands from the north. A joining of these groups enabled them to make a successful war on their neighbors. By this means and by adoption of the captured women into the tribe, they soon became a powerful people. Besides the addition of several Athapascan bands that joined them of their own free will, their stock is now made up of descendants of captured Pueblos, Shoshoneans, Yumans, and Aryans. Their language is a modified Dine dialect of copious vocabulary and intricate grammatical construction, exhibiting many words, phrases and constructions from outside sources. Also in appearance, the Navajos have no prevailing type which gives further evidence of their composite origin. The population of the tribe is estimated to be in the neighborhood of 35,000.

They have several kinds of houses, among which are the hogan (dwelling), the medicine lodge, and sweat-house. They are all cone-shaped, built of upright poles or logs placed horizontally in polygonal, worm-fence shape over which branches, grass, and earth are placed. A smoke-hole at the apex serves as a chimney for each kind except the sweat-house which

is warmed by rocks heated without. When any one dies in a hogan or near it, it is at once destroyed, being considered a "devil house." Brush corral, windbreaks, lean-tos, and open sheds, serve as dwellings in summer.

They are quite religious. Their deities are nature gods, animal gods, and local gods. The most revered deity is Estsanatlahi (the ever-changing year), called a woman who changes or rejuvenates herself.

They have great stores of legendary and mythic lore, innumerable songs, and prayer-chants. They are very fond of games and races. Their principal dance lasts nine nights and parts of ten days. The culminating performance in the medicine cultus is the Yavaehai ceremonies in which pictures of their deities are painted in dry powders on the floor of the medicine lodge.

They were quite warlike when we began to learn about them in the 17th century. At that time and until the occupancy of their country by the United States, they kept up an almost continual marauding war against the Pueblos and whites. The United States made treaties with them in 1846 and '49 but these were both outrageously broken. "Kit" Carson cornered them in 1863—killed all their sheep, captured practically the whole tribe, and took them to Fort Sumner at Bosque Redondo on the Rio Pecos in New Mexico where they were kept till 1867. They were then returned to their own land and given a new supply of sheep. Since then, they have remained at peace. They are now a prosperous people.

They are jovial and much given to merriment and jest, and are not stoical like the eastern Indian. On the whole, "they are celebrated for their intelligence and good order." They are also great and shrewd traders and are considered "the noblest of the American aborigines."

Their reserved lands, known as the "Navajo Country," cover 25,725 square miles, or an area of sixty-three square miles larger than the District of Columbia, Delaware, New Jersey, Vermont, the Panama Canal Zone, Guam, our possessions in the Samoan group, Rhode Island, and Porto Rico combined—about one thousand square miles larger than Greece. For the purpose of administration, this vast area is divided into the following reservations: Pueblo Bonito, Hopi (whose inhabitants are partly Pueblos), San Juan (Shiprock), Western Navajo, Navajo (Fort Defiance), and Navajo Extension.

They have never been under very severe discipline of the government. They are wanderers in the full sense of that word. Like the Irishman's flea, they are here this moment but where will they be the next sun? Though placed on the largest body of reserved land in the United States, they wander off of it at will and many isolated families live beyond the reservation boundaries in all directions. Like the noble Arab, they move about with their flocks of sheep and goats, horses and a few cattle. They may be in a certain wash or canyon today and miles from there in another tomorrow, as the scarcity of grass and water necessitates. They have but few traps of any sort, so that moving from place to place is an easy and ever round of life. In a few favored places, they may raise a little corn and a few melons, the extent of their agricultural efforts. Also, like the

men of Arabia, they are very independent by nature and wish to be let alone. Moreover, the medicine men doctor them when sick and also prepare them for the Happy World in the hereafter.

The influenza broke out at the boarding-school at Tuba City, Western Navajo Agency (Arizona), October 12, and in the other reservations of the Navajo country at about the same time. At the school, there were 138 cases at one time but due to prompt action on the part of Dr. N. O. Reynolds, the agency physician, and the ever vigilant and careful work of the other employes in taking care of the pupils—many employes doing nurse work to save the children even when they themselves were running a high fever—only two deaths then occurred and only one since from complications due to the disease. Most of the other Navajo schools fared worse. The school at Fort Defiance is reported to have lost 67 pupils.

At the time the malady was raging at the school, the Hopi Pueblo of Moencopi, two miles from the school, was stricken with the plague. At one time, 181 of its 300 population were down with the disease. At the same time, all the government employes at the place but one became sick. At this critical moment, some nurses arrived from Flagstaff and attempted to look after the Indians' needs: but, with the best of intentions, they made a failure of their efforts. Not understanding the Indian character, they made the villagers so angry that they would not allow them to give them medicine or attention. The "principals" of the place also followed them around and forbade every one to take their remedies. Consequently, they gave up the task as hopeless. By this time, the pupils at the school were so convalescing that a force of school and agency employes could be spared for taking care of the Hopis. These took food from the school to the village; and, gaining the good will of the Indians, soon had them taking all the medicine needed and receiving all the necessary care. As a result, of the 300 sick only 16 died.

By the time the people of Moencopi began to recover from the disease, the epidemic had begun to spread to the Navajo settlements on the reservation. Aid was at once sent them in every possible way. Hospitals were established at every convenient place to which the sick were taken for treatment. The hogans were also visited. But the work was difficult.

When the disease reached the Navajos, they fled from the places where it appeared. Those at the "Fields" in Moencopi wash south of Tuba fled westward and northwestward to Black and Navajo mountains. In this panic, they often abandoned everything, even their sheep in some cases. One Navajo is alleged to have abandoned his sick wife and several children to die of starvation. Several families are alleged to have abandoned sick members of their family. While sick with the disease, a Navajo woman gave birth to a baby girl. Five days later, it becoming evident that she would die, she and the baby were abandoned. Later they were found by a government party, both still alive. They were both brought to the hospital into which the Marsh Pass school had been converted but the mother died that same evening, and the little one had been so starved that it succumbed two days later. Other similar cases of abandonment are reported. One is

an instance where the husband abandoned several children by the side of his dead wife, all of whom are reported to have starved to death. It might be added that among the Navajo if the mother dies the children are virtually orphans, though the father survives. They are not considered his children but the children of the clan to which his wife belonged. In addition, he inherits none of his wife's or of his children's property in case of their death, same diverting to the clan of the wife. Hence the children from the Navajo standpoint are not his in the same sense that a white man's children are his.

The disease was astoundingly fatal. Whole families were wiped out, leaving their flocks wandering over the hills at the mercy of the wolves. Several related families living together all died but one small boy who was found herding the combined flocks of sheep; and, it is now reported that the agent of the San Juan reservation, under whose jurisdiction he belonged, has recommended that this boy inherit the combined sheep droves he saved from the coyotes. At another place, a family of eight were picking pinyon nuts when the disease reached them. Later their dead bodies were found around their wagon. A Pinte woman died on their reservation north of the San Juan river. Fleeing from the place of the dead, the husband and five children crossed the river into the Navajo country with their sheep where they died one by one along the trail. Only one little boy survived and he is so small that he is unable to give his parents' name.

No people have a greater dread of ghosts and mortuary remains. Consequently, to prevent a stampede, the two pupils who died at the boarding-school, both dying at night, were carried out of the dormitory as soon as dead, with lights darkened so that the pupils could not see what was being done. The dead pupils were also buried in the early hours of the morning for the same reason. At the hospital at the Marsh Pass school—which was filled with sick adults—a patient died near sunrise one morning. Immediately, the death-wail was struck up and pandemonium took possession of the sick. With eyes wide and staring, they strove to leave the place. Even a sick man, who could hardly hold his head up the evening before, sprang from his bed as he trembled from head to foot and started to run out of the room. Luckily there was another hospital room to which they were all speedily moved. To prevent a like occurrence, the deathly sick were put in a building by themselves, and when one died he was buried at night so as not to arouse the superstition of the Indians any more than possible.

The Indians were so terribly afraid of the dead or so weakened by the disease themselves that they fled from the "chindi Hogan" (devil's house), as they termed a place where a Navajo died. Many were left where they died in the hogan and were simply covered over with a few shovels full of dirt right where they expired. In one case, that of the only Indian stone house in 60 miles of Kayenta post office, the relatives of the deceased (wife) threw some dirt over the corpse near the fire-place where she died; then in panic they fled, leaving the door open. Later, they begged a party of government officials to close the door, which they did. Many other dead were

abandoned and left unburied, the scared Indians begging the whites to inter them. If there were no whites in the vicinity, they were left unburied. The agency and school people interred many Indians who had thus been abandoned. The Kayenta policeman was buried by a government party after he had been dead in an abandoned hogan eight days. Also, in the week closing April, the government stockman interred two influenza victims who had lain in their respective hogans since last fall.

When sick, the Navajo think one should eat a whole lot. If one can not eat, it is expected he will die. Stuffing in sickness is usually practiced as a remedy and is often the cause of much trouble and many deaths. At one place on the reservation, during the plague, meat balls the size of the end of one's thumb were forced down the patients who were too weak and sick to eat until no more could be forced down them. The stomach of an influenza victim at another place, who had been abandoned and partly eaten by the wolves, was seen to contain about a quart of corn which had probably been boiled before it was forced down him. Such stuffed patients usually died.

When sick, the medicine man often gives the patient the juice of the Arizona jimson and same was much used during the influenza epidemic. This makes the pulse run high and causes the patient to be delirious. It is used as one of the last resorts. One jimson victim examined by the agency physician had a pulse running as high as 240. The Indians also killed horses and made horsetail soup as a remedy to combat the disease. This was a good thing in a way as it helped get rid of some of the worthless ponies. The main remedy, however, was the powwow, Yavachai ceremonies, accompanied by elaborate sand-paintings.

In making these paintings, all but the patient in the respective household concerned is removed from the hogan, usually to a corral-like brush wind-protection—provided a regular medicine-lodge is not erected for the ceremony. The drawing is then made around the central fire or about it; each medicine man has his own system and places the drawing to suit his own taste and whims. Usually, the parts of the drawing are in concentric bands whose separating rings represent rainbows. The inter-rainbow spaces are filled with crude figures of human-mythical beings called "chindes." When completed, the nude patient is smeared from head to foot with a blackish, medicinal concoction. He is then placed either on or near the drawing. Then elaborate singing and praying follows. As a faith cure, it is a good remedy, but it failed to cure the influenza. This failing, the final and last remedy was a massage, contorting process. As the disease usually terminated in pneumonia and consequently the lungs became "tight," the medicine man jumped on the chest to loosen up the lungs. The result can be imagined!

After the final abatement of the malady, the Indians rode over the reservation, scattering sacred meal and corn pollen in prayer over their stone altars on every high point, to prevent the epidemic from returning. It is to be hoped that the deities will listen to their earnest supplications.

