

TWINKLING STAR.¹

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Synopsis.

The Apache medicine girl Twinkling Star is dying of consumption. Medicine singings are held over her night after night. The magic, medicinal powers of the snake, frog, medicine god, medicine stick, and medicine cane are applied, but she gradually declines. The medicine game is then played to make her well, but the medicine man loses the game. The Gunelpieya Medicine Disk ceremonies are resorted to, and these are followed by the medicine dance. In the excitement, at the climax of this performance, Twinkling Star joins in the dance in hilarious action. She swoons and dies. A wild, indescribable scene follows. After the body is elaborately attired, it is carried to the mountain side and buried with her personal effects under a piñon tree. Her live stock is then killed and her tepee burned. This being done, the women wail and mourn for her at morning, noon and night for thirty days.

Characters.

1. Twinkling Star and the people about her tepee.
2. Chief Medicine Man F-4.
3. Medicine singers.
4. Gumwapah, an old medicine woman.
5. Clowns and ghost dancers and other medicine actors in the Gunelpieya Medicine Disk ceremonies.
6. Medicine dancers and assembled Indians.
7. Actors in the ceremonies over the dead.

Scenario.

Scene 1.—Twinkling Star, a young Indian woman, sits in front of her father's tepee coughing and showing every symptom of a person in the last stages of consumption.

Scene 2.—Subtitle: "Medicine Singing Performance."

Night comes on and the medicine people come to her tepee to perform over her. Among them is Chief Medicine Man F-4.

Scene 3.—The sick one reclines on a pine-twig mat by the fire within the tepee.

Scene 4. The medicine man enters, goes over to the side of the tepee by the central fire and doubles his feet under him in a sitting position near the sick one. He then bends his body over forward, places his hands claspingly over his face and forehead in the form of a sort of hood and begins to sing.

"Go away sick! Go away sick! Go away sick!"

¹ This scenario depicts the medical attention given Twinkling Star, an Apache girl, the death scene and burial ceremonies, as acted out by the Indians and witnessed by the author, in 1902.

Scene 5.—The musicians enter and begin to beat tom-toms (pots with rawhide stretched over their open faces).

Scene 6.—The medicine man stops singing, spits in the fire, and sprinkles the sick one with cattail flag pollen. He then resumes his singing with posture as before.

Scene 7.—The medicine man produces a crudely made, striped, wooden snake. This he places in the hot ashes a moment. He then places its head on the afflicted parts of the bared body of the patient in four different directions, corresponding to the semi-cardinal directions. As he thus places it, he sings and points respectively to the gods who are holding up the four corners of the earth. He then burns the wooden snake, as he sends the evil spirits away with a hissing breath and looks with elevated face toward the northeastern heavens.

Scene 8.—The medicine man produces a wooden frog and performs with it same as he had performed with the snake in 7.

Scene 9.—The medicine man resumes his singing with posture as in scene 3.

Scene 10.—The medicine man produces a wooden carving, an effigy of his leading medicine god (fig. 1). This he places on the sick woman as he did the snake in Scene 7.

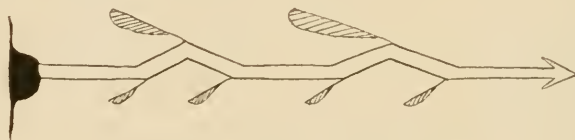


Fig. 1. The Feathered Lightning Effigy.

Scene 11.—He hides the medicine god in a niche in the rocks of a neighboring cliff.

Scene 12.—The sun comes up and the ceremonies cease. But the patient is worse.

Scene 13.—Night brings the medicine man and the musicians to doctor the sick one again.

Scene 14.—The medicine man sings over the sick one; the musicians beat the tom-toms.

Scene 15.—The medicine man performs over the sick one with five medicine hoops some two feet in diameter and colored to represent the colors of the rainbow, performing the same as he did with the snake in Scene 7.

Scene 16.—He then takes the hoops and hides them in a niche in the rocks on a nearby mountain side.

Scene 17.—He performs over the sick one with medicine stick (fig. 2) as with the snake in Scene 7 and then burns it.

Scene 18.—He performs over the sick one with a medicine cane as with the snake in Scene 7. He afterwards buries the cane in the floor of the tepee.

Scene 19.—Subtitle: "The Medicine Game."

He plays the medicine game (fig. 3) with four flat splints with a chosen partner. The sticks are bounced on a flat rock in the center of

a six foot circle of forty cobble-stones. The sticks falling with a certain side up are favorable to the recovery of the patient. Knowing that the patient will die, the medicine man plays to lose the game.

Insert: "The sick one grows steadily worse day by day."



Fig. 2. The Medicine Staff, with dangling medicine pouches.

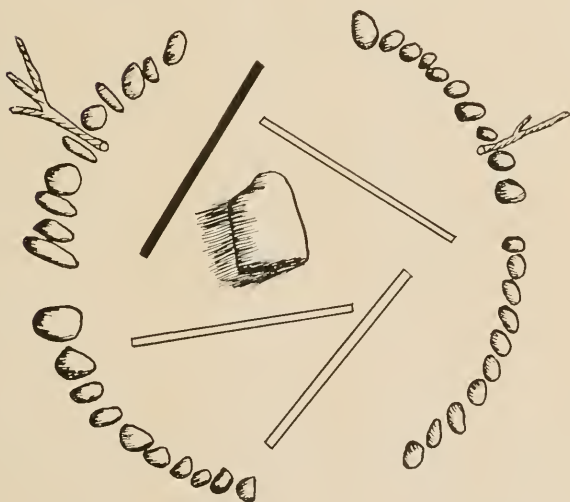


Fig. 3. Game Field of the Medicine Game, showing the "cobble-stone circle" and counting sticks in place showing the counts received (they are the sticks lying between the cobble-stones). The two wide spaces are designated "water". Should the tallies be such as to place a tally-stick in either of these spaces, the player loses all the points he has made in that game-count and, consequently, must begin the count again. The game sticks, as they have fallen within the circle in the cut, count the thrower two points. One hundred and sixty-four continuous points constitute a game.

Scene 20.—Subtitle: "The Gunelpieya Medicine Disk Ceremonies."

A horseman rides swiftly up the valley and summons the people to make a medicine disk (fig. 4).

Scene 21.—In the mid-forenoon the people assemble in a protected spot at the edge of the woods and proceed to make the likeness of the "Sun Father" on the ground in disk form, in accordance with the Indian belief. The drawing is some sixteen feet in diameter. It is the front view of the massive head, with a crown for a hat and the suspended "medicine squares" for a necktie. There is no nose, or neck, or body shown. The eyes and eyebrows are there as is the mouth. The latter is peculiar. The lips are in the form of a square set naturally with the face. They are parted showing the odd-shaped mouth. This is shaped like a diamond, or square, so drawn that each of its respective corners bisects a side of the square that forms the lips. From the mouth at



Fig. 4. A Medicine Disk, used at another, but similar, medicine performance.

the left there is supported a long stemmed pipe, on which is drawn the bolt lightning. And from each corner of the lips, as drawn, a funnel-shaped wisp of the sun's rays extends out into measureless space. The different parts of the drawing are variously colored in red, white, black, gray and green. The red coloring matter is made from ground up red sandstone; the white from ground up limestone; the green from crushed leaves; the black from pulverized charcoal; and the gray from a mixture of charcoal and limestone.

Scene 22.—The disk being completed, a canvas is stretched around it leaving a small doorway at the east side.

Scene 23.—Insert: "The sick one is to be presented to the drawing of the god of day; and he can either cure her or take her to his abode in the immensity beyond."

The actors come. Gumwapah, an old medicine woman carrying a dirty bowl partly filled with water, comes from a near-by wigwam; enters the medicine disk by way of the pipe stem; and, in a stooping position, passes around within it from left to right near its outer rim. As she thus moves around near the drawing of the outer circle of light, she takes a pinch of the coloring matter from each respective part of the drawing and puts it into the cup. Completing the dust gathering, she sets the bowl down in the upper corner of the sun's mouth and then passes out of the disk drawing by the way she came.

Scene 24.—The medicine men come with the patient from a near-by tepee. They are carrying her. They also enter the disk by the pipe stem. They carry her around the circle of the sun's rays from right to left; then to the center of the sun's mouth and place her upon it with face turned toward the afternoon sun.

Scene 25.—A medicine ghost dancer sallies forth into the open space from a nearby thicket. He is nude with the exception of a dancing skirt. His body is painted in white, and zigzag lines run up his arms and down his lower extremities to represent the blazing thunder bolt of the raging storm. He also wears a loose, sack-like cloth mask, on top of which there extends skyward a row of lath facing the front and so placed as to crudely represent the spread tail of a turkey. In addition, he carries a sword-like wand-stick in one hand and an old Indian knife in the other. Shrieking, whooping, and occasionally gobbling like a turkey, he crow-hops in a large circle around the drawing of the god of day and the sick one waiting to be cured, posing now and then in baboon style. Completing the circle, he makes a rush sidewise for the presence of the sick one like a male swine going to battle. Reaching her presence, he squats in front of her, sticks the knife in the ground by her side, places the wand on the afflicted parts of the sick one in each of the semi-cardinal directions, gathers the sick on the wand in this way, takes the wand up before his face, blows a hissing breath on it to drive the evil spirit "sick" away. He then gives a hideous, ear-grating howl, seizes his knife and gallops forth into obscurity.

Scene 26.—The chief medicine man enters the circle, and, taking a piece of green gourd rind in his hand, he rubs the sick one all over with it. He then daubs her all over with the muddied water from the bowl, the moistened dust of the drawing of the Father of the Day. This being completed, he places the gourd rind against the lower end of the sick one's breast bone and sings a song to the gods to help her, the musicians with tom-toms aiding him in the singing.

Scene 27.—The sick one is carried from the medicine disk inclosure; and the medicine drawing is at once obliterated.

Scene 28.—Subtitle: "The Medicine Dance."

A huge fire is kindled in the center of a level area among the hills. Here are assembled all the people of the valley. Around the fire in a great circle they are squatted on deer skins. At one end and within the circle are the doctors and musicians; but the dancers and sick one have not yet arrived.

Scene 29.—We find the sick one in a near-by improvised tepee. She is lying face down on a mat and medicine women are rubbing her back with scorching, smoking piñon twigs. Time and again she faints, only to have the twigs snatched from the blaze quicker and applied to her back. But the dancers are coming.

Scene 30.—The sick one is carried to within the circle of human beings and placed on the opposite side of the fire from that occupied by the musicians.

Scene 31.—The tom-toms begin to beat. The chief medicine man leans his body forward and covers his face with his hands, holding them in a sort of hooded position. The doctor and the musicians commence the monotonous chant, as they wave their bodies to the time of the music. The sick one looks expectant. They are coming, the ghost dancers of the gods. They enter the circle of light from the northeast. There are five of them. Four of them are attired as was the dancer in the afternoon (Scene 25); but now each carries a wand in either hand. The fifth actor is a clown. He is attired only in breech-cloth and is masked with a horned mask. He carries a wand in his left hand, a three-pronged stick in his right. Around the central fire, the musicians and the sick one, they dance in single file for a considerable time, the four dancers posing now and then and gobbling the while like a turkey, which they are supposed to represent; the clown at times cuts capers and tumbles around over the ground to amuse the populace.

At last they approach the sick one in single file. Then acting like a bird when it has seen something it is rather afraid of, they gobble and dance backwards from her presence in single file. Again and again they approach her, each time getting a little closer to her. Finally the foremost dancer of the line leaves his fellows, trembling, prancing, and dances to the feet of the patient. She sits up. He leans over her. He places his wands crossed on her head, on her back, on her lower extremities, and on her chest. Then he raises the still crossed wands toward the northeastern heavens and, as he parts them with a sweeping motion and emits a hissing breath from his mouth, he scatters the "sick" toward the four winds. And with a shrieking howl, he canters off into the blackest darkness.

The rest of the dancers follow in succession and perform in a similar manner, as does the clown also, except that he acts the clown as well as a medicine dancer. His principal feat is to kill the "sick" by spearing it with his trident after he has collected it on his wand. His performing completes the first of this setting. There are three more scenes in it, all of which are similar to the one just described, except that in scene two the sick one faces the southeast and the actors approach her from that region; in scene three the sick one faces the southwest, and the dancers the northeast; and in the fourth scene she faces the northwest, the actors the southeast. But they are gone and another set of actors are taking their places.

Insert: "Throughout the night dance ceremonies like the above are kept up till thirteen consecutive dance scenes are completed. Then comes the closing scene."

Scene 32.—As the sun begins to show his advance fingers of gorgeous colored light over the eastern mountain peaks, the clown wakes all the sleepers with his trident and compels them to stand up. The chief medicine people sprinkle all with sacred meal. Every one takes one more drink of Indian whiskey (twiswin). The medicine dancers approach the sick one again. As they perform, every one joins in a straight backward and forward dance within the circumscribed area. The excitement becomes intense. They all shriek and shout till the hills re-echo it again and again; and the drummers pound the tom-toms till it seems as if the very poles of the earth have thundered. The sick one makes one supreme effort to rise and join in the dance but she has not sufficient strength. They lift her to a standing position, they sprinkle her with the sacred dust, they rub her back and her chest with scorching fir twigs, they support her in a dancing position. She makes one more heroic effort to dance and become well. Greater and greater becomes the excitement. The chief medicine man prays louder, the shrieks and shouts of the dancers become deafening. The crisis comes. In the excitement, under the influence of the hypnotic spell, the sick one forgets her ailments. She dances. She takes a medicine hoop in each hand. She lifts them high above her head. She leaps. She crow-hops. She poses. She struts around the great fire like a turkey. She calls the gods by name. She shrieks, swoons and dies.

Scene 33.—Subtitle: "The Ceremonies over the Deceased."

Words can not describe the scene that follows. The men weep, the women wail with the hideous coyote yelping wail. They pull their hair out by handfuls, then rend their apparel and destroy their property at hand. They make a rush to see the corpse. They trample over each other, and it is with difficulty that they are kept from crowding one another into the great fire.

Scene 34.—They carry her to the nearest wigwam; strip, wash, and dress her; bead her with all the beads of the clan; put wristlets upon wristlets on her wrists; and roll her in her best robe.

Scene 35.—They take her and all her personal belongings to the mountain side and bury them beneath a piñon tree.

Scene 36. They then return to the village and destroy everything which belonged to her, both animate and inanimate, together with her tepee (the horses, cattle, dogs, were stabbed to death; the other property was piled up and burned).

Insert: "The property of the deceased is destroyed that it may be with her in spirit in the land of bliss."

Scene 37.—Subtitle: "For thirty days the women mourn and wail for the dead."

Then for thirty days the women go to some secluded place and wail and mourn for Twinkling Star at morning, noon, and night.

