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Copyright photograph by Edward S. Curtis

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THE ARTIST'S SOUTHWEST

By Howard McCormick

Illustrations of kachina and snake dance ceremonies from the Author's photographs

HUNDREDS of peaceful Indians in Hopiland trudge down the steep mesa sides to till their meager fields and carry their products to homes on the wind-swept tablelands, living a life of contentment and simplicity. Consider a civilization with no artificial social demands, no extended business contact such as fret and worry the white man; a place where no time is known except as marked by the daily position of the sun, where one day is like another in that each rising and setting of the sun is the occasion for a prayer asking for rain, good crops and happiness.

The artist's most adequate pen or capable brush becomes commonplace in registering impressions of Hopiland. The limitless sky with its gorgeous but subtle gradation of color is the one big impression of the mesa country. At the zenith a positive blue fuses into a cool blue green, then into yellow green, and finally into delicate lavender as it nears the horizon, only to be violently arrested by a long strip of distant mesa of almost pure cobalt. The sun beats down and illuminates the grayish-yellow sand with a brilliancy seemingly beyond the power of paint to suggest. On the yellow sand lie bones whitening in the sun, startlingly brilliant.



Paraders in the Anyah kachina ceremony, which is common to Zuñi and Hopi pueblos. There are a great variety of kachina beings or gods believed in and represented by the Southwestern Pueblo peoples. New conceptions of such beings wholly different from the oldtime Indian ideas are constantly being introduced. Navajo Indians and white cowboys even are represented for the amusement of the spectators



The kachinas are supernatural beings or gods, who live in the San Francisco Mountains and elsewhere, much as do mortals. From December until July they are represented by masked dancers in the Hopi villages in many ceremonies. The Niman kachina ceremony is the last of this series. The dancers wear masks and are decorated with evergreen boughs



The dancers representing the Niman kachina gods are receiving a farewell message before they withdraw from the Hopi villages



During the kachina ceremonies divine honors are paid the dancers as if they were the supernatural beings. Sacred cornmeal is thrown on them and they are addressed in prayer



The departure of the gods. The dancers of the Niman kachina are shown leaving the Hopi villages from which they are believed to be absent until the winter solstice



Antelope priests leaving the kiva or underground room, in which a very important part of the snake dance is held. Kivas are used by the Hopi men as clubrooms and workshops and for important ceremonies



The antelope priests are making the four fold circuit of the plaza during the ninth day of the snake dance. The chief priest who is leading the procession holds in his left hand the tiponi, a very sacred badge of his office and the "mother" of the priestly society



The snake dance of the Hopi is given by two orders of priests, the snake men and the antelope men. These two orders are shown drawn up ready for the singing which precedes the carrying of the snakes on the ninth day of the ceremony



The most spectacular part of the snake ceremony is the carrying of the snakes in the mouths of the priests. A large rattlesnake is firmly held near the middle by the lips. The priest who follows closely carries a snake whip of feathers with which he distracts the attention of the snake when necessary



When the snakes have all been carried in the dance, a large circle is marked on the ground with the sacred cornmeal, six radii are drawn representing the sacred dimensions, north, west, south, east, up and down. The snakes are then thrown into the circle and sprinkled with cornmeal

Sagebrush which may cover practically all the ground is a beautiful foil for the luminous sand and delicate sky. Mesas rise out of the plains like great eroded monuments, turrets and towers. Imagination is lame in picturing shapes as varied and weird as Nature puts into her rock formations. Pinnacles rise before a flat smooth mass of rock streaked with delicate horizontal lines. Erosion turns a spur of rock into a beautiful spindle or leaves a tracery of lace across the hills. It etches, slashes and undermines, tumbling boulders down to lie exposed for centuries and finally to be swallowed up by the sand.

The shadow of the first mesa glides across the plain changing the gray green sagebrush to olive and rests at the foot of the nearer purple mesa, orange-tipped by the setting sun. The day dies while yonder square-topped mesa glows like molten iron, deeper red and deeper until straining eyes question whether its color is entirely gone. The stars come out brilliantly in a moonlit sky. The artist spreads his blanket on the ground and lies for hours enjoying an Arizona night as wonderful as an Arizona day. All is quiet except for the baying of a mongrel dog; or perhaps a belated worker in the fields sings a weird song off on the distant plain, draws nearer, passes, the voice stilled as he refreshes himself at the spring, then continues the song as he goes up the mesa to his home, a pueblo in the clouds.

These people, adjusted so perfectly to their surroundings, furnish for the



At a signal the snake priests grab up the snakes and run with them down the trail leading from the mesa to the plains where the snakes are released. These snakes are supposed to carry a report of the ceremony and the honor bestowed upon them to the supernatural beings who control the rainfall

artist the human interest for his pictures. In their daily life and many ceremonies they reflect the colors of skies, the shapes of the clouds and mesas and fill both with innumerable supernatural beings.

But the Hopi are profiting by the example of the Navajo in acquiring sheep and some cattle and although modern scientific farming is a failure in their reservation they succeed in raising corn, melons and peaches. Changes due to civilization have rapidly been taking place in the ceremonial life of the people. We can but wonder how this ceremonial life has held out so long considering the pressure of the Government and the constant flow of returning students from the schools. But the few old men of the tribe retain their confidence in the primitive traditions and are not in the least shaken by the young men's statements of facts which run counter to their accepted beliefs. What answer is there to the fact that after three months of drought the participants in a dance for rain were drenched? That a repetition of the dance the following day brought more rain? And that in a circuit of the villages extending over more than one hundred miles, with one or two exceptions rain attended the visits of the dancers?

The Hopi men have now adopted white man's dress in their daily life. Automobiles carry the mails to within a few miles of the Hopi villages and soon the land will be overrun with tourists. From an artistic standpoint the Indian of the Southwest is surely disappearing and it will soon be necessary for the artist to reconstruct the customs and habits which may now be seen in their final stage of dissolution. We are grateful that yet a few in Hopiland retain their beliefs based upon centuries of close contact with nature and still live in a world of their gods.