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A VIGIL OF THE GODS—A NAVAHO CEREMONY

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It is my purpose in this paper to describe some rites which possess many points of interest to the student of ceremonies. In them we find a nocturnal vigil analogous to that of the medieval knight over his armor; we find a vigil in which men and gods, or the properties that represent the gods, alike take part; we find evidence of the belief in a community of feeling and interest between gods and men, and we have an instance of a primal feast in common or love-feast closely resembling certain ceremonial acts performed among ourselves today.

The rites to be described occur on the fourth night of a great nine days' ceremony known among the Navaho as *kiedji hathal*, or the night chant. The principal purpose of this great ceremony is to heal the ailing man or woman who defrays all the expenses of the ceremony; but the occasion is used, also, to implore the gods for various temporal blessings, not only for the sick man, but for all who participate in the work, with their friends and relations.

This ceremony, like nearly all ceremonies, ancient and modern, is connected with a legend or myth (several myths, indeed, in this case), and many of the acts in the ceremony are illustrative of the mythic events.

From about nine o'clock on the fourth night to about dawn on the fifth day this vigil is maintained over the masks and other properties of the dance. The patient and the boy and girl who accompany him stay awake all night; so may some of those who participate in the singing. At any moment of the night it will be seen that the great majority of the numerous occupants of the commodious medicine-lodge are awake. Wakefulness is the order of the night. Still there are few who do not take an occasional doze during the watch; even the shaman who conducts the ceremonies may sometimes be seen to close his eyes and nod his head when the small hours come on. There is no light save that of the fire which blazes in the center of the lodge; there is no seat save mother earth; the temptation to stretch your weary back

on her bosom and then to go asleep is hard to resist. If you sleep you may fail to see something which you should have observed. The white watcher must be the most wakeful of all.

There are rites, and rites of great interest, too, as I have said, but the time is spent mostly in song, which when no ceremony is in progress is continued with little intermission all night. The shaman often leads in song, but not always. Among the visitors in the lodge are many old and middle-aged men who know some particular set of songs and take the lead, to the relief of the tired shaman. Again, series of songs of sequence from other rites are allowed, particularly after midnight (when the ceremony of waking the masks is done), to keep the weary watchers awake, and priests of other ceremonies come with their assistants, by previous arrangement, to sing sacred songs of their particular rites.

About nine o'clock at night a buffalo robe is spread on the ground to the northwest of the central fire. This is covered with some new white sheeting or printed calico, which are the modern substitutes for the fine white buckskins of the ancient days. On this sheeting are laid the masks of the gods, the foxskins, the gourd rattles, the sacred ears of corn, the eagle plumes, and other properties of the ceremony. These properties are all laid down in two rows in an established and invariable order. Every mask has its appropriate position, every sacred article its proper place, which I hope to illustrate in some future publication.

The giver of the ceremony—the patient for whose benefit the rite is performed—now sacrifices to the masks by sprinkling pollen on them, and this he must do in a very particular way. Standing with his back to the fire, at the tops of the supine masks, he sprinkles the pollen in a straight line, letting it drop from between his thumb and first two fingers, thinly down the center of the mask from top to bottom. He sprinkles it in a similar way up the left edge or cheek from bottom to top and up the right edge in the same direction. This is the common method of applying the votive pollen to the masks, and it is followed in other ceremonials. He then sprinkles pollen along both rows of sacred objects and scatters it widely on the ground in front of him. Sometimes the shaman precedes the patient in performing this devotional act and sometimes others follow him. All is done silently, without song, conversation, or audible prayer, although it is said the votaries pray in thought. In the myth

which is connected with this rite it is related that those who sacrificed to the masks prayed for abundant crops.

After all this is done there is a silent and expectant pause, which is broken by the voice of the herald, outside the door, crying, *Bike Hathali hakù!* "Come in the trail of song!" Then the portiere of the lodge is thrown aside and a number of women enter, bearing bowls and dishes of food in great variety. These dishes are ranged in a circle around the fire. The procession of women moves sunwise. When the leader gets back to the eastern side, having walked around the fire, she lays down her bowl, and the others lay theirs down, one after another, in the order in which they stand. The dishes are from twenty to thirty in number—the exact number being immaterial. But among the messes there are always certain ones made of wild seeds and herbs cooked in peculiar ways (some of which are now fallen into disuse) which were the ancient food of the Navaho and are mentioned in the myth. I have made a record of the names and constituents of these dishes and of the order in which they are laid down around the fire, which I hope to publish in the future.

As soon as the dishes are deposited the women who brought them in sit down wherever they choose in the lodge and song is begun, which is continued without dance or other work for about an hour. The songs sung at this time are thirty-two in number, and are called *India' Big'n*, or Songs of the Plumed Wands. The rattle furnishes the only accompaniment to this set of songs of sequence. While the songs are being sung the dishes around the fire wait. When the songs are nearly done the ceremonies are begun. These are so arranged that the bowl of cold gruel, to be described later, is mixed as the thirty-second song is sung.

Next comes the sprinkling of the masks. While the songs continue the shaman mixes in a water-tight basket a cold infusion, the water (from a constant spring obtained east of the lodge and rain or snow water obtained west of the lodge) being poured from a wicker bottle in five different directions into the basket. When the infusion is ready, the boy takes two plumed wands in each hand (wands which symbolize males and females), the girl does the same, and with many minute observances, which I shall not now take the time to describe, they sprinkle the sacred masks and properties of the ceremony lying on the buffalo robe; then

the boy sprinkles the edge of the lodge in the north, for in all Navaho symbolism the north belongs to the male, and the girl sprinkles similarly in the south, for the south belongs to the female. Then they sprinkle the ceiling of the lodge till the infusion is exhausted. They sprinkle in the direction of the sun's apparent course. When the children are done, the shaman takes the wands and puts them behind the masks.

After an interval of a few minutes, during which song continues—the thirty-second song being now reached, as I have said—the girl mixes some corn meal and cold water in a deep wicker bowl. The boy pours the water for her into a cup from a wicker jar. In adding the water she advances one cupful toward the bowl with a sweep of her arm from the east, another similarly from the south, a third from the west, a fourth from the north, and a fifth from the zenith. After this she adds, unceremoniously, as much water as may be needed, and stirs the mess till a cold thin mush or gruel is formed. Four handfuls of corn meal made from green corn baked in the earth are used.

Now begins the love-feast, the feast of gods and men, of which all the faithful present are expected to partake. The gods are first remembered, as is only fitting—in other words, the masks are fed. The boy first puts a small portion of the gruel on the mouth of each mask, and the girl, following him, does the same. Then they sprinkle, in like order, a little of the mixture on the other sacred properties. The boy next, dipping the tips of his five digits into the bowl, conveys a small portion of the food to his mouth and swallows it. This he does four times. His example is followed in turn by the girl, the patient, the shaman, the principal singer who assisted in the songs, and, after these, by every one in the lodge. In passing the bowl to the multitude it is started in the east, south of the entrance, and sent around the lodge by the south, west, and north—sunwise, in fact. If any of the gruel is left after all have taken once, some help themselves a second time till all is gone. This feast occupies about twenty minutes.

The first time that I partook of this sacrament I was seated in the west, about half way around the lodge. Some forty persons ate from the bowl before my turn came; in other words, about two hundred fingers, innocent of soap, had been dipped four times each in the cold gruel before I had a chance at it. My

neighbors watched me closely to see if I were a true believer. I devoured my four morsels in due form, but while so doing made no effort to call to mind my previous studies in bacteriology.

Soon after the communal feast is over the dishes of archaic food which have been standing around the fire for an hour or more are eaten. First a fragment is taken from each dish and put in a bowl for the shaman to eat. I have sometimes seen more than one bowl so filled. Then the dishes are passed around for any one to partake who chooses to do so. Only the patient and his comrades, the boy and the girl, must not eat.

When the meal is done two bags containing pollen are passed around, and each one helps himself to pollen in the usual manner—*i. e.*, he puts a little on his tongue and a little on the top of his head, making at the time a silent prayer. One of the bags of pollen is passed from west to east by way of the north; the other from east to west by way of the south.

Then song is resumed without accompaniment of either drum or rattle, the regular songs of sequence for this occasion being the *Haschèhogand Bigin*, or Songs of the House God, twelve in number; but songs of other rites may now follow to fill up the time until midnight.

Meanwhile the shaman smokes to the masks. He lights a cigarette filled with the native wild tobacco of the Arizonian mountains, the *Nicotiana attenuata*, called by the Navaho *dsilnato*, or mountain tobacco. He puffs smoke to sky and earth each alternately four times and then puffs it in the face of each of the masks separately.

The next thing is the interesting ceremony of waking the gods, and it is surprising to find that, among a people who do not use time-pieces and whose astronomic observations are of the most rudimentary character, this ceremony always occurs almost exactly at twelve o'clock at night. I have never seen it vary more than fifteen minutes from the midnight hour. They say they tell the hour by looking at the stars, and winter skies are usually clear in their land. If the ceremony took place only on some particular night of the year, we might more easily understand the correctness of their observation, but it may occur during any one of the four months of the cold season. I have not discovered by what signs in the heavens they are guided.

The shaman begins by singing the waking song, the burden of which is *Hyǰdžznà*, "He moves, he stirs." There are two preliminary stanzas of this, in which no god is named, and in singing these the shaman stands motionless. In all the other stanzas the name of some divine character is mentioned, and for most of these there is a mask lying in the rows before the singer. When he mentions the name of the god he lifts the appropriate mask, as if to waken the god, to call on him, and shakes it from side to side a few times. In all, twenty-one divinities are named, and in connection with each is mentioned some property peculiarly belonging to the god.

The following stanza, where the chief war-god is named, is a type of all the stanzas in the long song :

Hyǰdžznà Hyidezna,
 Kat Nagenezgàni, Hyideznà Hyideznà
 Kàti thadeldjái Hyideznà Hyideznà
 Kàt bike hojòni Hyideznà, Hyideznà
 Kàt saa nagàie, Hyideznà Hyideznà
 Hyideznài Hyideznài, Hyideznà Hyideznà.

He stirs, He stirs,
 Now Slayer of the Alien Gods, He stirs, He stirs,
 Now with his stone necklace, He stirs, He stirs,
 Now in the trail of beauty, He stirs, He stirs,
 Now in old age walking, He stirs, He stirs,
 He stirs, He stirs, etc.

When the masks have all been shaken he begins another song of *Hyideznà*, very much like the first, during the singing of which he lifts and shakes the rattles and other properties of the dance.

After he finishes the songs and ceremonies of shaking the masks and other properties, the shaman repeats a prayer for his own benefit in a low tone, in which the patient does not join, the first monologue prayer of the whole ceremony.

After this there are no ceremonies belonging properly to these rites until the approach of dawn is announced; the time is occupied in singing songs of sequence. But I have once seen a man who sang a series of songs from another rite sprinkle pollen on the masks before he began singing and after he had done. This was a special requirement in his case, perhaps.

When it is near dawn, as determined by the stars, and after a certain song of sequence has been finished, the shaman applies

pollen to the patient and then repeats aloud a long prayer, which the patient repeats after him, sentence by sentence. Sacred cigarettes are taken out to be sacrificed. Prayer is muttered over the boy and girl and pollen is administered to them.

At length the masks are collected. The shaman takes those of *Haschëyalti*, the Talking God, and his goddess in the hand. The patient, if a man, takes all the rest. If the patient be a woman, some male relation of hers holds the masks, for women are not allowed to handle the sacred objects. The shaman and the patient, or the shaman, the holder of the masks, and the patient (if the latter be a woman), stand in the west of the lodge, facing east, in the order named, from north to south. While they stand holding the masks in their hands the shaman repeats one of his long prayers, sentence by sentence, and the person who holds the masks repeats it, sentence by sentence, after him. This part of the work is, I understand, sometimes omitted.

When the prayer is done the masks are laid down, those of *Haschëyalti* and his goddess by themselves, the others in a pile. A silence follows, during which the occupants of the lodge may pass in and out at will.

The silence is broken by a shout outside the lodge. *Hayël-kàlgo!* "It is dawning!" and at once the shaman begins to sing the *Hojòni Yikàìgin* or Beautiful Dawn Songs, six in number. He continues to lead in various songs of sequence for about an hour. When the whole series is done another monologue prayer is recited by the shaman, the pollen bags are passed around for all to help themselves, and the vigil of the gods is done.

The patient now may leave the lodge for a few moments, if he or she chooses, and the boy and girl leave. I have seen a woman patient, on one occasion, who started to go out of the lodge from her seat in the west by walking to the south of the pile of masks, recalled by the shaman and made to pass by way of the north or in the sunwise circuit.

There now follows a period of gossiping and smoking in the lodge, after which the masks and other sacred properties are unceremoniously laid away at the edge of the lodge in the west and the ground is cleared for the work of the fifth day.

The north, I have said, belongs to the male and the south to the female. Why is this? There are many instances in Navaho language and legend where, when two things somewhat resemble each other, but one is the coarser, the stonger, or the more violent, it is spoken of as male or associated with the male; while the finer, weaker, or more gentle is spoken of as female or associated with the female. Thus the turbulent San Juan river is called by the Navaho *To'baka*, or Male Water, while the placid Rio Grande is known as *To'baad*, or Female Water. A shower accompanied by thunder and lightning is called *niltsa-baka*, or male rain; a shower without electrical display is called *niltسابaad*, or female rain. In the myth of *Natimesthani* the mountain mahogany is said to be used for the male sacrificial cigarette and the cliff rose for the female. These two shrubs are much alike, particularly when in fruit and decked with long plumose styles, but the former (the "male") is the larger and coarser shrub. In the myth of *Dsilyi neyani* another instance may be found where mountain mahogany is associated with the male and cliff rose with the female. Again, in the myth of *Natimesthani* a male cigarette is described as made of the coarse sunflower, while its associated female is said to be made of the allied but more slender *Verbesina*. I might multiply instances of this character indefinitely.) On this principle the north is associated with the male and the south with the female for two reasons: (1st) cold, violent winds blow from the north, while gentle, warm breezes blow from the south; (2d) the land north of the Navaho country is more rough and mountainous than the land in the south. In the former rise the great peaks of Colorado, while in the latter the hills are not steep and none rise to the limit of eternal snow.

A symbolism probably antecedent to this has assigned black as the color of the north and blue as the color of the south. So in turn black symbolizes the male and blue the female among the Navaho.

CLIFF-DWELLINGS.—Mr J. H. Dorking has been exhibiting at Skaneateles, New York, the partially mummified remains of five Indians from the cliff-dwellings of northern Arizona.

MR F. L. HOFFMAN'S "Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro" will shortly be published by Macmillan & Company.