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ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

COMMISSIONER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

TO THE

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

FOR

THE YEAR 1885.

ARIZONA PIONEERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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NAVAJO AGENCY, *August* 31, 1885.

SIR: In conformity with instructions from your Department, I have the honor to submit this as my second annual report of affairs at the seven villages of the Moquis Pueblo Indians under my charge. Isolated as these people are from all of the rest of the world, their lives are essentially uneventful. One day is to them just like every other day, unless the one happens to be a fête day. An ordinary Western village will change more in a month than one of these will in a century, no occurrence important enough to make an item for a country newspaper occurs among these people on an average once a year. They plod along in their patient, careful way, plant, gather, and store; their only care or aim in life seems to be to procure the means of sustaining it, and in this respect all of their surroundings seem admirably adapted to keep them busy.

Consider that their villages are located on the narrow, bare, rocky top of a mesa, from the base of which, 600 feet below, every drop of water which they use must be carried; that all of their fuel must be brought from points 8 and 10 miles away; that their gardens are located in pure unadulterated drifting sand; that not a single stream of running water exists for many miles from them in any direction, and if this is not enough to wholly discourage the poor Moqui, it is very likely that some vagrant Navajo will pilfer the scanty crop that he has nursed into a feeble and uncertain existence. Still, in spite of all these disadvantages, these people seem well satisfied and thoroughly contented. They are hard workers, prudent, and economical in all ways; they save every odd and end; nothing is allowed to go to waste; even the dogs are eaten, as well as such horses, burros, and sheep as may die a natural death.

It seems unnecessary for me to say that these Indians have been quiet and peaceable during the year. They have always been so; never were known to commit a murder, or any other serious crime. They stay right at home and attend strictly to their own business. This does not cut much of a figure in the world, but it seems to keep all of them very busy.

They have no Agency buildings, no Government property, no school, no food supplies, no medicines, and have but one employé of your Department among them. Mr. George H. Bendell, farmer, has been stationed there since last fall. His knowledge of Spanish enables him to communicate with them, and he has been instrumental in doing them much good. By authority of your office I issued them some implements and tools last fall. For these they seemed very thankful, and are making good use of them. This was the first notice they have had from the Government for several years. They are a very deserving and appreciative tribe, and I believe should receive more assistance from the Department. They are surely more deserving than some of their southern neighbors on whom large sums are annually lavished. These people try hard to help themselves; don't ask for much, and never forget to feel thankful for what they do get.

I am sorry to learn that no school will be allowed for the Moquis this year. They are also much disappointed. I believe they would appreciate one and fill it up with their children, and I hope that you will establish one for them as soon as you deem it practicable to do so.

The Moquis have but little stock of any kind. What they have has mostly been procured from the Navajoes, all scrubby to begin with, and the scant feed around their villages has not improved it. They have a few horses, some burros, sheep, and goats, and a small herd of cattle.

Could these people be induced to abandon their inconvenient, rocky dwellings, and settle out in the valleys of their reservation, the maintenance of life would be an easy struggle for them; with their industry and patient perseverance, they would soon be prosperous. But to their dwellings they cling with unaccountable tenacity. They know nothing of the outside world, care nothing for it, cling to all of their old ideas, and are very strict in all of the observances of their religious rites. Of one of these, locally known as the "snake dance," it might not be out of place to give a brief description here. It is undoubtedly the most weird and strange ceremony on the continent.

The snake dance, which by the way is a movable festival, occurs every alternate fall. The last was on the 18th of the present month. These people believe that the snakes have control of the weather. In order to obtain a good crop they must have rain. To obtain this they believe it necessary to propitiate the snakes, and to do this members of the villages are sent out to gather in as many rattlesnakes as possible. They pin them to the ground with a forked stick; then place them in earthen vessels, closed up, until they have secured a hundred or so. The men who are to officiate in this strange performance prepare themselves by fasting, prayer, and other observances. The day having arrived, all of these snakes are emptied out in a pile on the rocky floor, and the priests vie with each other to see who will grab the most. As soon as caught they are placed in the mouth of their captor, grabbed by the middle of the body, tail and head free to coil around the features of the Indian at will. In this way they dance about for awhile, the women of the village,

meanwhile, as occasion presents, scattering cornmeal over the snakes in the mouths of the dancers. This is an offering to them, and a reminder that rain is needed to grow the corn of which the meal is made. When the snakes are thrown down, many of them scatter and crawl in every direction. They are caught by the performers. They always take care, however, to pick them up only when out of coil. Of course, many of these dancers are bitten, but they pay no attention to it, and it does not seem to affect them. Scientific men who have had opportunities of observing all pronounce the snake "simon-pure," genuine rattlesnake, and untampered with. The only way they account for this apparent harmlessness is that the Indians induce them to strike repeatedly at a stick just before the dance, thereby exhausting their stock of virus. When the dance is over the snakes are all turned loose and bidden God speed down the mesa, into the valley below. One thing connected with the last two of these dances has been particularly unfortunate. Each of these has occurred in a very dry season, and both have been immediately followed by heavy showers. Whether this has been due to the efficacy of their supplications or was caused by the commencement of the rainy season is a matter of opinion. But one thing is certain, a hundred failures would not cause the Moquis to lose faith in the ceremony or make them forget their two successes.

I hope you will interest yourself in these strange people, and do all you can for their benefit. They seem to have been forgotten in the past. No tribe under your charge is more deserving, and none other offers any better field for labor; none other will appreciate aid as much. Should there be any funds applicable to their benefit for the current year, I hope they will be expended for them in the purchase of implements and tools; of these they will make good use. They do not expect food or clothing. They should be provided with some medicines, and, when possible, a school.

For the courtesies extended toward me by your Department I shall ever feel grateful. Herewith is submitted statistical report.

I am your humble servant,

JOHN H. BOWMAN,
Indian Agent.

The COMMISSIONER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS.

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