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INTRODUCTION

EXCEPTING alone the Pueblo tribes of New Mexico and Arizona, no Indians now living within the United States whose ancestors came in contact with Europeans in the sixteenth century have preserved their aboriginal customs with any degree of purity. Indeed, few tribes that suffered such early contact are now known even by name; yet the Pueblos have changed relatively little during the intervening centuries, notwithstanding the active efforts made by the Spaniards in early days to lead the Indians toward Christianity by abolishing their native ceremonies. Permanent Franciscan missions were established among them in the first decade of the seventeenth century, and by the time the English colony had been founded at Plymouth, a number of the pueblos of the Rio Grande supported resident friars who not only brought to the villagers their own religion but instructed them in some of the arts and trades of civilization as well.

Although resentful that their own faith should be thus assailed, the Pueblos accepted the Christian teachings, but in outward form alone, jealously guarding the native beliefs and continuing secretly to practise them. While the attempt has been made to attribute the causes of the great Pueblo revolt of 1680 to conflict between official and ecclesiastic authorities, there seems little doubt that the hatred toward the priests was engendered largely by reason of what the Indians regarded as an overbearing attitude, especially toward their religious practices; hence they avenged the interference by instigating the rebellion and visiting death, with typical savage brutality, on every Spanish missionary whom they could seize.

With some exceptions the attitude of the Spanish leaders toward the Pueblos was not a beneficent one, as witness the atrocities perpetrated on these inoffensive people by the army of Coronado in 1540, and by Vargas and others during the reconquest of 1692. Yet in spite of all this, of the shifting of village-sites following the revolt and of the consolidation of many of the pueblos that they might the more readily be missionized, the Pueblos have clung tenaciously to the religion of their fathers, the overlay of Christianity being superficial indeed.

Brought more closely under Christian domination, the Pueblos of the Rio Grande and the Rio Jemez, together with Acoma, developed

that primitive protective instinct with regard to their rites and ceremonies that Zuñi, so long on the frontier of the New Mexico province, does not possess in such marked degree. True, to this day the Zuñi will not permit a Catholic Mexican to witness their religious performances which other foreigners may see without let or hindrance, and often they will openly explain sacred beliefs and customs, whereas to exhibit the objects associated therewith would be regarded as profanation.

From the information recorded in the present volume, which treats of San Juan, San Ildefonso, and Nambé of the Tewa group of Pueblos, and Zuñi which forms a distinct linguistic stock, it is evident that the Tewa especially practised an elaborate snake cult, perhaps with associated human sacrifice, which still survives in certain esoteric rites the end of which seems not far off. Of all the difficulties in procuring information concerning the secret rites and ceremonies of the Rio Grande Pueblos, none has been so troublesome to overcome nor so unprofitable in definitive results as that pertaining to this cult, for, by reason of its strictly esoteric character, the native laymen have little knowledge of its details, and even of these there are few who would risk forfeiture of their lives by revealing what little they know.

As mentioned in Volume XVI,, in conducting the research on which the present volume is based the writer had the assistance of Mr. W.W. Phillips who made a preliminary field trip in 1905, and of Mr. C.M. Strong who spent about eight months in 1909 at the Tewa villages. All the material gathered in these earlier years has been correlated and largely augmented by Mr. W.E. Myers, who visited the Rio Grande tribes in 1909 and 1917, and spent the entire summer of 1924 in the same field.

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