

## NAVAHO INDIAN GAMBLERS.

BY COSMOS MINDELEFF.

Gambling games of one kind or another form a not inconsiderable part of the mental life of all savage peoples, who find in the vagaries of chance, aided more or less by skill, the occasional exaltation of mind which all men demand in one form or another.

Much has been written about games of chance, with especial reference to their origin, but this aspect of the case—the part which they play in the life of to-day—has been generally overlooked. Indians, negroes, Chinamen, have been hastily classed as inveterate gamblers, and such indeed from one point of view they are. But there is something more than this in the universal passion for play which characterizes all the lower races, without being by any means confined to them.

The negro, whose whole soul seems absorbed in the formula "Comeseben" or "Come eleben," in his favorite game of craps, is yielding to the same impulse which causes the Chinaman to expend all his earnings in the never-ending but to him always fascinating mysteries of "fan-tan," and which justifies the Mexican, in his own mind, for the loss of many hours and a few, if not many, dollars in the allurements of monte on the sunny side of his adobe shack. The fondness of many business men for a "quiet little game" is an exhibition of the same desire for mental excitement and change, different, perhaps, in amount, but not in kind, from that which holds a little band of Indians around a blanket spread upon the ground for days at a time while the chances of the game are making one man rich and the others poor.

From this point of view the gambling games of the Indians have a certain value aside from the picturesque which is nearly always an accompaniment. All kinds of games are to be found among them, native as well as imported, and while the latter are gradually supplanting the former on account of greater convenience, and perhaps because of quicker action, the strictly aboriginal games are by no means extinct. They can still be found in full swing in many parts of the United States which are a little remote from the usually traveled lines and but little changed by contact with our own civilization.

There is little doubt that in their origin many if not all of these games were real religious ceremonies, designed to foretell the future, but they also played the same part in ancient times that they do to-day in supplying a mental stimulus. Some of the games have come down practically unchanged in form, although now played under entirely different conditions from what they were originally. Among them perhaps the most striking is the game of moccasin, which seems to be unquestionably the forerunner of the "little joker," which every year proves so effective at country fairs in luring dollars from the pockets of the unwary. This game was once widely distributed among the Indian tribes, and it has been said that it is now extinct; but it can be seen to-day in its aboriginal form in any of the outlying parts of the Navaho reservation in Arizona.

The paraphernalia of the game are very simple and always at hand, consisting merely of a knife or other hard substance—a pebble will do—and the moccasins of the players. The game is usually played at night, although sometimes it extends over several days, and in its native setting has a weirdness and fascination which the modern fakir cannot claim. Five persons usually participate, four of them actively, while the fifth acts as musician, but usually a much larger number watch the progress of the game and perhaps place a bet occasionally.

Picture a rude shelter of green boughs, roughly circular in form, placed in some thicket, or under the overhanging branches of a large tree. In the center a blanket is spread upon the ground, surrounded by fifteen or twenty Indians squatting about it, or leaning over, intently watching the play. Over all the fitful glow and play of light from a huge fire on one side. The effect is heightened by a weird song, which is a constant accompaniment of the game, and which rises and falls as the excitement grows and wanes, reaching, sometimes, such frenzied accents that the casual passer-by might easily mistake it for a war song.

The players take their places at the four corners of the blanket, and are paired off by couples. Each player contributes one of his moccasins, and the winner of the toss lays them on a blanket upside down, and about six inches apart, with the toes pointing forward. Then with his left hand he lifts each moccasin in turn, and makes a pretense of putting the knife under it, making many passes and using every precaution to deceive his opponents and the spectators. During all this time the musician keeps up a continuous drumming, which he accompanies with a song. In the song the others all join, but the opponents of the players eagerly watch for some slip, which will give them a clew as to which moccasin the knife or "little joker" is concealed under.

When the knife is hidden to the satisfaction of

the player, he suddenly calls out "Ho" in a loud voice, and the singing drops to a low murmur. One of his opponents is provided with a short stick and he raises it threateningly over the moccasins, first over one, then over another, while all conversation ceases and every eye is fixed intently upon him. The interest becomes more and more intense as this by-play proceeds until finally the man with the stick places one end of it under the moccasin he selects and turns it over. Should the knife be found under it he wins, and the former player relinquishes to him the moccasins and knife, together with the stakes. It is thereupon his privilege to hide the knife while his opponent must guess at its



TYPE OF NAVAHO INDIAN.

location. This reversal in position gives the native player a much better chance to come out even on the play than the average fakir who works the game at country fairs is disposed to allow his victim.

The peculiar traits of the Indian character, especially his pronounced improvidence, is much in evidence in his gambling, and it is not unusual for a man to ride up with an elaborate outfit, horse, saddle and silver bridle, a silver belt worth \$40 or more, strings of silver beads and coral necklaces, silver buttons on his moccasins and leggings, etc., the whole rig worth perhaps \$200, and to leave a few hours later, bare-footed and carrying his saddle on his back, bereft of buttons, bracelets, and everything except his clothing. Through the operations of the savage law of hospitality, whereby no man can want for food if his neighbor has any, the evil effects of high play are so much diminished that no man hesitates to indulge to any extent he may wish, and the same man may be cleaned out a dozen times in as many months without apparently learning wisdom from experience.



A REMARKABLE GEYSER IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

The introduction of American and Spanish or monte cards has given greater opportunities for play and has done much to develop it. The most persistent efforts by many different agents to break up the practice have been entirely without effect, and the average Indian agent now simply ignores what he cannot control. It is not unusual to see small gambling parties in sheltered nooks and corners of the agency buildings, playing for the goods and rations which have just been issued. The idea of obtaining something for nothing is quite as fascinating to the Indian as it is to some white men, but among the former no odium attaches to the gambler, for all are gamblers. It is only on the hypothesis that play fills some pronounced want, some great mental need, that its universal distribution among the Indians can be explained.

## A REMARKABLE GEYSER IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

The people of Southern California have recently been favored with one of the most extraordinary exhibitions of natural phenomenon on record, one which has even astonished beyond measurement all classes of a community familiar already with instances of what nature can accomplish when it sets out to do something out of the common.

Southern Californians are so used to shocks of earthquakes, incipient volcanoes, or threatening tidal waves, that it takes something extremely eruptive to disturb their ordinary composure, but the successful effort of a rural rancher in his search for water with which to irrigate his fields, parched with a long drought, has turned the gaze of the whole State toward the little town of Whittier, a hamlet located in the neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Some weeks ago a farmer named Myers, living at Santa Fe Springs, began sinking an artesian well. Others in the neighborhood had successfully tapped a subterranean flow at depths of from 300 to 400 feet and Mr. Myers hoped for a successful issue to his enterprise. By slow stages the drills descended until a depth of 500 feet was attained. This was on Sunday, May 14. A drill 200 pounds in weight was employed, and the prospect of tapping a good flow of water was becoming more and more encouraging. A 10-inch pipe had been sunk some distance and the usual preparations made for controlling the flow when it did make its expected appearance.

The heavy drill was working with its usual monotonous regularity when, after one deep plunge, a loud roaring sound was heard coming from the well, accompanied by jets of muddy water and the outburst of heavy stones. Soon after, the drill itself made its appearance, followed by a grand column of water which forced itself higher and higher until the top reached an elevation of 500 feet. The flow was accompanied by vast quantities of gas smelling of sulphur strongly and igniting when fire was applied, burning with a strong blue flame. Oil in considerable quantities was mixed with the flow. The stones were thrown to an equal height with the water, and the exhibition of tremendous force was appalling to the last degree. No geyser of the Yellowstone ever displayed such activity. The column of muddy water was like a great pillar extending almost to the clouds, and falling back to earth again in graceful festoons. The force exerted was equal to a thousand powerful engines. For two weeks this phenomenon has been active, though some diminution of the force exerted is beginning to be apparent. The flow of water is enormous, and the country being flat some difficulty is apprehended in its control. The photograph was taken at the time when the column of water was fully 500 feet high.

## The Current Supplement.

The current SUPPLEMENT, No. 1227, has a large number of papers of unusual interest. "A Few Spiders and Their Spinning Work," by Miss Mary I. Cunningham, is concluded. This is one of the most remarkable natural history papers that it has been our good fortune to publish, and is profusely illustrated. "Gems of Maine" is a paper by E. R. Chadbourn. "Sanitary Lessons of the War" is an abstract of a paper by Surgeon-General G. M. Sternberg. "Why Do the Dials of Our Timepieces have Twelve Divisions?" is an interesting article. "Color Photography," by R. W. Wood, is a valuable paper on the subject by a specialist. "Perfume Plants" is a paper by Dr. A. W. Miller.

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