

ETHNOLOGY

Explains How "Spirits" Shake Tent in Indian Ceremony

Woman Visitor to Remote Chippewa Settlement Witnesses Rare Spectacle and Later Looks Behind the Scenes

A PLAUSIBLE explanation as to how an Indian spiritualistic seance, known as a tipi-shaking, really "works" has been reported for the first time, by Miss Frances Densmore, to the Bureau of American Ethnology.

Miss Densmore, well known for her studies of Indian music for the Bureau, has had the rare opportunity of observing a tipi-shaking ceremony on her latest field trip. The seance was conducted by a Chippewa Indian medicine man at Grand Portage, Minnesota. This is a remote Indian settlement, where many old native customs survive.

A tipi-shaking is usually held in order to summon the spirits, so that they may advise a medicine man in treating a serious illness, Miss Densmore explained. The medicine man, tightly tied, seats himself inside a little tipi, or pointed tent, which is just big enough to hold him. Then he frees himself from the ropes and beats his drum and sings to call the spirits.

When the tipi begins to shake as though a tornado was rocking it, the Indians gathered outside the tipi believe that the spirits are beginning to arrive. Voices can be heard inside the tipi. Sometimes the Indians around the tipi think they can recognize the voices of animals, representing the spirit of the mud turtle or the snapping turtle, or other animals. Sometimes voices are heard that sound like voices of people who happen to live miles away, or even the voices of dead people. If the voices speak loud and clear, the medicine man and the people are assured that the patient will recover.

Miss Densmore and her sister were crossing a field at dusk when they chanced to see the tipi-shaking going on. They knew they were observing a rare spectacle, something that few medicine men can conduct, and that fewer white people have ever glimpsed. They watched for an hour, seeing the tipi shake violently every few minutes. When they went closer, they could hear the medicine man singing inside and drumming. The songs were recognized

by Miss Densmore as medicine songs, such as are used in calling on the spirits. Between the spasms of shaking, the tipi stood perfectly still. There was no wind.

Next day Miss Densmore visited the medicine man, and by diplomatic measures arranged to see the tipi. She examined it at close range, inspecting the hoops and ropes that were inside the cloth covering. From this inspection, she believes that the ropes fastened to the hoops were probably manipulated in a clever way so as to make the tipi shake.

The hoops appeared to be a little larger than the circle of poles at the top, so that the jerking of the hoops would give enough play to throw the covering into a pendulum-like sway or a violent tumult.

The only suggestion as to how the tipi was rocked in such ceremonies has been that the onlookers were hypnotized. This explanation does not suffice, Miss Densmore said, since she and her sister were not among the medicine man's known audience.

The man for whose benefit the Chippewa tipi-shaking was held was suffering from incipient typhoid fever. As a result of the tipi-shaking, it was decided to hold a benefit dance, or rather a beneficial dance, for him, which Miss Densmore attended. The Indian dancers came together and danced so that the man might get well. What part all the ceremonies played in the career of his illness no one can say, but the man was recovering within two weeks, Miss Densmore was informed.

Science News Letter, January 24, 1931

ENTOMOLOGY

Noxious Weed Nurses Japanese Beetle Enemy

WILD carrot, hated as a noxious weed by farmers and dairymen all over the country, has suddenly found a useful job. It affords a home and food to an insect newcomer brought to America from Japan to fight one of the most ravaging of pests, the Japanese beetle.

Two Bureau of Entomology workers, J. L. King and J. K. Holloway, describe the new insect ally of man and tell of the efforts, finally crowned with success, to get it firmly planted in its new home. They have found that the adult insects, which are little wasp-like creatures, make themselves at home in the flowers of wild carrot, feed there, and will not take kindly to any other plant.

Science News Letter, January 31, 1931



PADDING AN AIRPLANE CABIN

Of a Curtis Condor. Studies at the U. S. Bureau of Standards have shown that this is the only successful way to silence an airplane and that by the use of the right kind of absorbent material noise can be reduced to about that in a moving railway coach. The insulating material must absorb. A cabin whose walls will not transmit sound may become as noisy as the motors outside if its walls will not absorb sound.