

# Ghost Dance of the Zuñis.

By Prof. CARLOS TROYER.

[The following description of this ceremony by Prof. Troyer, who was an eye-witness of it, was first printed in the introduction to the spring quarter, 1904, of the Wa-Wan Press quarterly series, to accompany the publication of Prof. Troyer's composition, "The Ghost Dance of the Zuñis." This introduction having since gone out of print, the account of the Ghost Dance is here reproduced for the benefit of members of the Wa-Wan Society who may be interested in this composition, which is to be found in the libraries of Centers. The letters refer to corresponding letters in the composition. A violin part is now issued, to accompany the Ghost Dance.]

This dance is not strictly an annual with the Zunis; in fact various occasions may induce its performance, foremost, the recent death of a beloved member of their tribe. The ostensible object of this ritual, it would seem, is the calling into view and into their presence, the spirits of the departed, which they hold is best accomplished by the strenuous exertion of the fire-dance and by loud and urgent appeals and entreaties to appear and join them in the merry dance. The time chosen is usually at the full of the moon and the dance is participated in by most of the tribes-people. The ancient ruins and deserted and secluded places are the spots looked upon as favorable to this object, such as the old town of Zuni, but more frequently the plateau upon the great thunder-mountain "Tai-a-olon-ne" is the special haunt of the annual ghost dancers.

This latter spot constitutes the highest elevation of the mount, which is about a mile in diameter. Standing upon a projecting rock within two hundred feet of the center we could distinctly feel the heat (tho' in a cold winter night) of the tall, pyramid-shaped fire-piles in full blaze. Two concentric circles of fire-piles were visible, the piles of the outer being about five feet apart, the inner or central pyramids (about twenty feet from the outer circle) being built closer together. The dancers were almost nude, but most fancifully painted all over their bodies, the red color predominating, the turbaned heads adorned with eagle feathers and their feet clothed in moccasins.

The opening of the dance was preceded by the blast of long, deep-sounding trumpets, accompanied by the beating of gongs and the snake-drums, which, together, had the effect of a solemn, dirge-like march (a-b as noted in the composition). This was followed by the appearance of some forty ghost dancers holding in their right hands fire-brands, which they whirled to and fro, and in their left snake-rattles, which they shook at every step of the dance, singing to a wild monotone chant, "Hec, hec, hec, hec, hec, hec, hec, tu-na, wo-ki, nai-ia, ku-ra hec, hec, hec," etc., meaning "Come, come, come, come among us, come be with us, all united we will meet you in the fire-dance, come, come, come," etc., (c-d). The dance proceeds immediately after the inner pyramids are lit, the dancers following a serpentine path in and out the fire-piles, but soon becoming lost to sight as the volume of smoke completely envelops them.

The chant is a constant and varied appeal to their departed friends, alternating in loud and low strains, once merry and joyful as in happy expectancy, then again mournful and entreating, that they should come and join them in their dance and make themselves visible. Thus by their acclamations and various methods, they seek to attract the spirits of the departed, first in merry-making, then by the imitation of sounds of wild animals, such as the wolf, coyote, mountain lion and wild birds, (which they are wonderful in imitating as a lure while on the hunt) (e-f): then again they appeal to their sympathies in mournful strains, begging them to be again among them to cheer their lonesome lives, and to these cries strange responses are echoed, bringing assurances that the spirits will soon appear to them (g-h).

The climax of the greatest excitement of the dance was reached, when the inner fire-circle was at its fullest blast, and the cries and moans of the dancers rose to the highest tension. At this moment, when from all sides the closest watch was kept on the rising smoke of the central fire, a sudden lull took place—as of a deep inspiration before giving vent to their pent up feelings—for their anxious expectations seemed at last gratified by the appearance of slowly descending figures of transparent human forms. An outburst of the wildest joy and the loudest exclamations of welcome, nearly bordering on frenzy, took possession of the assembled crowd. These spectral figures were seen slowly descending and rising and in part keeping step with the music of the dancers, while the excitement was at its height. As the fires diminished the spectral forms quickly vanished (i-j).

Then the dance was renewed again, this time the outer fire-piles being set on fire. The dancers, one and all, soon disappeared behind the burning pyramids as the smoke became the thickest and the fire-flames rose the highest. All the spectators now turned back to more elevated regions on the surrounding cliffs, to watch the progress of the second fire-dance. The same scene was enacted and the transparent human forms appeared this time still more distinct and apparently closer to the ground. The crowd could now no longer be held back, and the surging mass rushed towards the center amidst the wildest cries and moans, only to find that all had vanished, ghosts and dancers alike, and nothing was left on the ground but the last dying embers and ashes of fire-wood."