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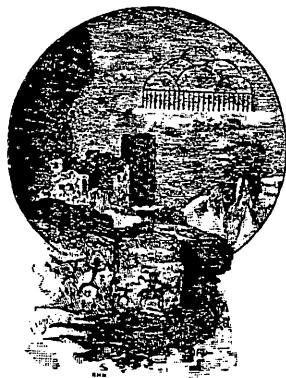
TO THE

SECRETARY OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

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BY

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DIRECTOR



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Hoffman, WJ. THE MIDE'WIWIN OR GRAND MEDICINE Society
OF THE OJIBWA.

Washington, District of Columbia, in 1888, says, regarding this subject:

The general character of his voluminous publications has not been such as to assure modern critics of his accuracy, and the wonderful minuteness, as well as comprehension, attributed by him to the Ojibwa hieroglyphs has been generally regarded of late with suspicion. It was considered in the Bureau of Ethnology an important duty to ascertain how much of truth existed in these remarkable accounts, and for that purpose its pictographic specialists, myself and Dr. W. J. Hoffman as assistant, were last summer directed to proceed to the most favorable points in the present habitat of the tribe, namely, the northern region of Minnesota and Wisconsin, to ascertain how much was yet to be discovered. * * * The general results of the comparison of Schoolcraft's statements with what is now found shows that, in substance, he told the truth, but with much exaggeration and coloring. The word "coloring" is particularly appropriate, because, in his copious illustrations, various colors were used freely with apparent significance, whereas, in fact, the general rule in regard to the birch-bark rolls was that they were never colored at all; indeed, the bark was not adapted to coloration. The metaphorical coloring was also used by him in a manner which, to any thorough student of the Indian philosophy and religion, seems absurd. Metaphysical expressions are attached to some of the devices, or, as he calls them, symbols, which could never have been entertained by a people in the stage of culture of the Ojibwa.

SHAMANS.

There are extant among the Ojibwa Indians three classes of mystery men, termed respectively and in order of importance the Midĕ', the Jĕs'sakkĭd', and the Wābĕnō', but before proceeding to elaborate in detail the Society of the Midĕ', known as the Midĕ'wiwin, a brief description of the last two is necessary.

The term Wābĕnō' has been explained by various intelligent Indians as signifying "Men of the dawn," "Eastern men," etc. Their profession is not thoroughly understood, and their number is so extremely limited that but little information respecting them can be obtained. Schoolcraft, in referring to the several classes of Shamans, says "there is a third form or rather modification of the medawin, * * * the Wābĕnō'; a term denoting a kind of midnight orgies, which is regarded as a corruption of the Meda." This writer furthermore remarks¹ that "it is stated by judicious persons among themselves to be of modern origin. They regard it as a degraded form of the mysteries of the Meda."

From personal investigation it has been ascertained that a Wābĕnō' does not affiliate with others of his class so as to constitute a society, but indulges his pretensions individually. A Wābĕnō' is primarily prompted by dreams or visions which may occur during his youth, for which purpose he leaves his village to fast for an indefinite number of days. It is positively affirmed that evil man'idōs favor his de-

¹ Information respecting the history, condition, and prospects of the Indian tribes of the United States. Philadelphia, 1851, vol. 1, p. 319.

² Ibid., p. 362.

sires, and apart from his general routine of furnishing "hunting medicine," "love powders," etc., he pretends also to practice medical magic. When a hunter has been successful through the supposed assistance of the Wābēnō', he supplies the latter with part of the game, when, in giving a feast to his tutelary daimon, the Wābēnō' will invite a number of friends, but all who desire to come are welcome. This feast is given at night; singing and dancing are boisterously indulged in, and the Wābēnō', to sustain his reputation, entertains his visitors with a further exhibition of his skill. By the use of plants he is alleged to be enabled to take up and handle with impunity red-hot stones and burning brands, and without evincing the slightest discomfort it is said that he will bathe his hands in boiling water, or even boiling maple sirup. On account of such performances the general impression prevails among the Indians that the Wābēnō' is a "dealer in fire," or "fire-handler." Such exhibitions always terminate at the approach of day. The number of these pretenders who are not members of the Midē'wiwin, is very limited; for instance, there are at present but two or three at White Earth Reservation and none at Leech Lake.

As a general rule, however, the Wābēnō' will seek entrance into the Midē'wiwin when he becomes more of a specialist in the practice of medical magic, incantations, and the exorcism of malevolent man'idōs, especially such as cause disease.

The Jēs'sakkīd' is a seer and prophet; though commonly designated a " juggler," the Indians define him as a "revealer of hidden truths." There is no association whatever between the members of this profession, and each practices his art singly and alone whenever a demand is made and the fee presented. As there is no association, so there is no initiation by means of which one may become a Jēs'sakkīd'. The gift is believed to be given by the thunder god, or Animiki', and then only at long intervals and to a chosen few. The gift is received during youth, when the fast is undertaken and when visions appear to the individual. His renown depends upon his own audacity and the opinion of the tribe. He is said to possess the power to look into futurity; to become acquainted with the affairs and intentions of men; to prognosticate the success or misfortune of hunters and warriors, as well as other affairs of various individuals, and to call from any living human being the soul, or, more strictly speaking, the shadow, thus depriving the victim of reason, and even of life. His power consists in invoking and causing evil, while that of the Midē' is to avert it; he attempts at times to injure the Midē', but the latter, by the aid of his superior man'idōs, becomes aware of, and averts such premeditated injury. It sometimes happens that the demon possessing a patient is discovered, but the Midē' alone has the power to expel him. The exorcism of demons is one of the chief pretensions of this personage, and evil spirits are sometimes removed

by sucking them through tubes, and startling tales are told how the Jēs'sakkīd' can, in the twinkling of an eye, disengage himself of the most complicated tying of cords and ropes, etc. The lodge used by this class of men consists of four poles planted in the ground, forming a square of three or four feet and upward in diameter, around which are wrapped birch bark, robes, or canvas in such a way as to form an upright cylinder. Communion is held with the turtle, who is the most powerful man'idō of the Jēs'sakkīd', and through him, with numerous other malevolent man'idōs, especially the Animiki', or thunder-bird. When the prophet has seated himself within his lodge the structure begins to sway violently from side to side, loud thumping noises are heard within, denoting the arrival of man'idōs, and numerous voices and laughter are distinctly audible to those without. Questions may then be put to the prophet and, if everything be favorable, the response is not long in coming. In his notice of the Jēs'sakkīd', Schoolcraft affirms¹ that "while he thus exercises the functions of a prophet, he is also a member of the highest class of the fraternity of the Midāwin—a society of men who exercise the medical art on the principles of magic and incantations. The fact is that there is not the slightest connection between the practice of the Jēs'sakkīd' and that of the Midē'wiwin, and it is seldom, if at all, that a Midē' becomes a Jēs'sakkīd', although the latter sometimes gains admission into the Midē'wiwin, chiefly with the intention of strengthening his power with his tribe.

The number of individuals of this class who are not members of the Midē'wiwin is limited, though greater than that of the Wābēnō'. An idea of the proportion of numbers of the respective classes may be formed by taking the case of Menomoni Indians, who are in this respect upon the same plane as the Ojibwa. That tribe numbers about fifteen hundred, the Midē' Society consisting, in round numbers, of one hundred members, and among the entire population there are but two Wābēnō' and five Jēs'sakkīd'.

It is evident that neither the Wābēnō' nor the Jēs'sakkīd' confine themselves to the mnemōnic songs which are employed during their ceremonial performances, or even prepare them to any extent. Such bark records as have been observed or recorded, even after most careful research and examination extending over the field seasons of three years, prove to have been the property of Wābēnō' and Jēs'sakkīd', who were also Midē'. It is probable that those who practice either of the first two forms of ceremonies and nothing else are familiar with and may employ for their own information certain mnemonic records; but they are limited to the characteristic formulæ of exorcism, as their practice varies and is subject to changes according to circumstances and the requirements and wants of the applicant when words are chanted to accord therewith.

¹Op. cit., vol. 5, p. 423.

Some examples of songs used by Jēs'sakkīd', after they have become Midē', will be given in the description of the several degrees of the Midē'wiwin.

There is still another class of persons termed Mashkī'kīkē'winīni, or herbalists, who are generally denominated "medicine men," as the Ojibwa word implies. Their calling is a simple one, and consists in knowing the mysterious properties of a variety of plants, herbs, roots, and berries, which are revealed upon application and for a fee. When there is an administration of a remedy for a given complaint, based upon true scientific principles, it is only in consequence of such practice having been acquired from the whites, as it has usually been the custom of the Catholic Fathers to utilize all ordinary and available remedies for the treatment of the common

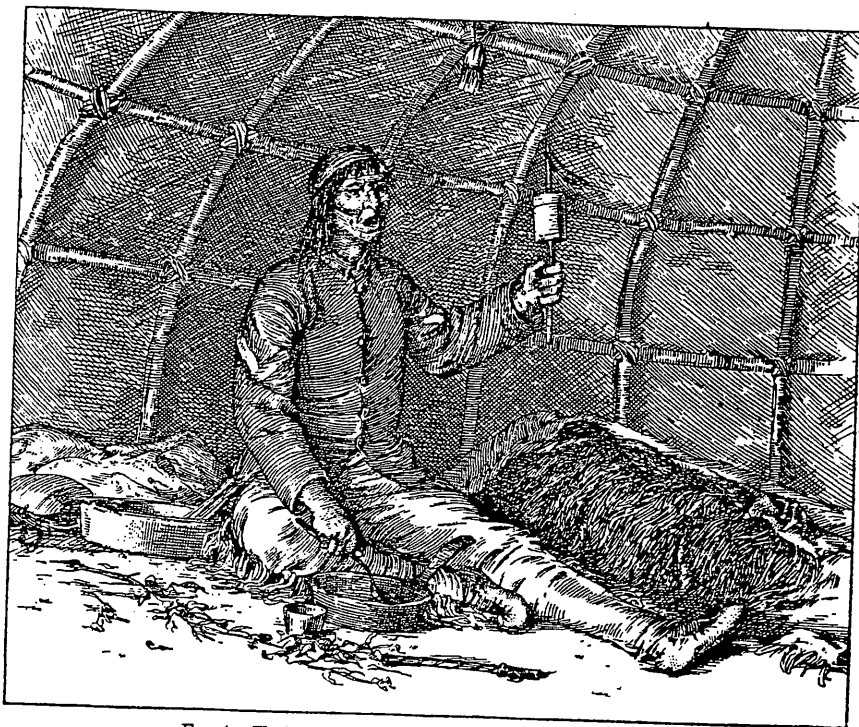


FIG. 1.—Herbalist preparing medicine and treating patient.

disorders of life. Although these herbalists are aware that certain plants or roots will produce a specified effect upon the human system, they attribute the benefit to the fact that such remedies are distasteful and injurious to the demons who are present in the system and to whom the disease is attributed. Many of these herbalists are found among women, also; and these, too, are generally members of the Midē'wiwin. In Fig. 1 is shown an herbalist preparing a mixture.

The origin of the MidĒ'wiwin or MidĒ' Society, commonly, though erroneously, termed Grand Medicine Society, is buried in obscurity. In the Jesuit Relations, as early as 1642, frequent reference is made to sorcerers, jugglers, and persons whose faith, influence, and practices are dependent upon the assistance of "Manitous," or mysterious spirits; though, as there is no discrimination made between these different professors of magic, it is difficult positively to determine which of the several classes were met with at that early day. It is probable that the Jĕs'sakkid', or juggler, and the MidĒ', or Shaman, were referred to.

The MidĒ', in the true sense of the word, is a Shaman, though he has by various authors been termed powwow, medicine man, priest, seer, prophet, etc. Among the Ojibwa the office is not hereditary; but among the Menomoni a curious custom exists, by which some one is selected to fill the vacancy one year after the death of a Shaman. Whether a similar practice prevailed among other tribes of the Algonkian linguistic stock can be ascertained only by similar research among the tribes constituting that stock.

Among the Ojibwa, however, a substitute is sometimes taken to fill the place of one who has been prepared to receive the first degree of the MidĒ'wiwin, or Society of the MidĒ', but who is removed by death before the proper initiation has been conferred. This occurs when a young man dies, in which case his father or mother may be accepted as a substitute. This will be explained in more detail under the caption of Dzhibai' MidĒ'wigân or "Ghost Lodge," a collateral branch of the MidĒ'wiwin.

As I shall have occasion to refer to the work of the late Mr. W. W. Warren, a few words respecting him will not be inappropriate. Mr. Warren was an Ojibwa mixed blood, of good education, and later a member of the legislature of Minnesota. His work, entitled "History of the Ojibwa Nation," was published in Vol. v of the Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, 1885, and edited by Dr. E. D. Neill. Mr. Warren's work is the result of the labor of a lifetime among his own people, and, had he lived, he would undoubtedly have added much to the historical material of which the printed volume chiefly consists. His manuscript was completed about the year 1852, and he died the following year. In speaking of the Society of the MidĒ',¹ he says:

The grand rite of Me-da-we-win (or, as we have learned to term it, "Grand Medicine," and the beliefs incorporated therein, are not yet fully understood by the whites. This important custom is still shrouded in mystery even to my own eyes, though I have taken much pains to inquire and made use of every advantage possessed by speaking their language perfectly, being related to them, possessing their friendship and intimate confidence has given me, and yet I frankly acknowledge that I stand as yet, as it were, on the threshold of the Me-da-we lodge. I believe, however, that I have obtained full as much and more general and true information

¹Op. cit., pp. 65, 66.

on this matter than any other person who has written on the subject, not excepting a great and standard author, who, to the surprise of many who know the Ojibways well, has boldly asserted in one of his works that he has been regularly initiated into the mysteries of this rite, and is a member of the Me-da-we Society. This is certainly an assertion hard to believe in the Indian country; and when the old initiators or Indian priests are told of it they shake their heads in incredulity that a white man should ever have been allowed *in truth* to become a member of their Me-da-we lodge.

An entrance into the lodge itself, while the ceremonies are being enacted, has sometimes been granted through courtesy; though this does not initiate a person into the mysteries of the creed, nor does it make him a member of the Society.

These remarks pertaining to the pretensions of "a great and standard authority" have reference to Mr. Schoolcraft, who among numerous other assertions makes the following, in the first volume of his *Information Respecting the Indian Tribes of the United States*, Philadelphia, 1851, p. 361, viz:

I had observed the exhibitions of the Medawin, and the exactness and studious ceremony with which its rites were performed in 1820 in the region of Lake Superior; and determined to avail myself of the advantages of my official position, in 1822, when I returned as a Government agent for the tribes, to make further inquiries into its principles and mode of proceeding. And for this purpose I had its ceremonies repeated in my office, under the secrecy of closed doors, with every means of both correct interpretation and of recording the result. Prior to this transaction I had observed in the hands of an Indian of the Odjibwa tribe one of those symbolic tablets of pictorial notation which have been sometimes called "music boards," from the fact of their devices being sung off by the initiated of the Meda Society. This constituted the object of the explanations, which, in accordance with the positive requisitions of the leader of the society and three other initiates, was thus ceremoniously made.

This statement is followed by another,¹ in which Mr. Schoolcraft, in a foot-note, affirms:

Having in 1823 been myself admitted to the class of a Meda by the Chippewas, and taken the initiatory step of a SAGIMA and JESUKAID in each of the other fraternities, and studied their pictographic system with great care and good helps, I may speak with the more decision on the subject.

Mr. Schoolcraft presents a superficial outline of the initiatory ceremonies as conducted during his time, but as the description is meager, notwithstanding that there is every evidence that the ceremonies were conducted with more completeness and elaborate dramatization nearly three-quarters of a century ago than at the present day, I shall not burden this paper with useless repetition, but present the subject as conducted within the last three years.

Mr. Warren truly says:

In the Me-da-we rite is incorporated most that is ancient amongst them—songs and traditions that have descended not orally, but in hieroglyphs, for at least a long time of generations. In this rite is also perpetuated the purest and most ancient idioms of their language, which differs somewhat from that of the common everyday use.

As the ritual of the Midē'wiwin is based to a considerable extent upon traditions pertaining to the cosmogony and genesis and to the thoughtful consideration by the Good Spirit for the Indian, it is looked upon by them as "their religion," as they themselves designate it.

In referring to the rapid changes occurring among many of the Western tribes of Indians, and the gradual discontinuance of aboriginal ceremonies and customs, Mr. Warren remarks¹ in reference to the Ojibwa:

Even among these a change is so rapidly taking place, caused by a close contact with the white race, that ten years hence it will be too late to save the traditions of their forefathers from total oblivion. And even now it is with great difficulty that genuine information can be obtained of them. Their aged men are fast falling into their graves, and they carry with them the records of the past history of their people; they are the initiators of the grand rite of religious belief which they believe the Great Spirit has granted to his red children to secure them long life on earth and life hereafter; and in the bosoms of these old men are locked up the original secrets of this their most ancient belief. * * *

They fully believe, and it forms part of their religion, that the world has once been covered by a deluge, and that we are now living on what they term the "new earth." This idea is fully accounted for by their vague traditions; and in their Me-da-we-wiwin or religion, hieroglyphs are used to denote this second earth.

Furthermore,

They fully believe that the red man mortally angered the Great Spirit which caused the deluge, and at the commencement of the new earth it was only through the medium and intercession of a powerful being, whom they denominate Man-ab-o-sho, that they were allowed to exist, and means were given them whereby to subsist and support life; and a code of religion was more lately bestowed on them, whereby they could commune with the offended Great Spirit, and ward off the approach and ravages of death.

It may be appropriate in this connection to present the description given by Rev. Peter Jones of the Midē' priests and priestesses. Mr. Jones was an educated Ojibwa Episcopal clergyman, and a member of the Missasauga—i. e., the Eagle totemic division of that tribe of Indians living in Canada. In his work² he states:

Each tribe has its medicine men and women—an order of priesthood consulted and employed in all times of sickness. These powwows are persons who are believed to have performed extraordinary cures, either by the application of roots and herbs or by incantations. When an Indian wishes to be initiated into the order of a powwow, in the first place he pays a large fee to the faculty. He is then taken into the woods, where he is taught the names and virtues of the various useful plants; next he is instructed how to chant the medicine song, and how to pray, which prayer is a vain repetition offered up to the Master of Life, or to some munedoo whom the afflicted imagine they have offended.

The powwows are held in high veneration by their deluded brethren; not so much for their knowledge of medicine as for the magical power which they are supposed to possess. It is for their interest to lead these credulous people to believe that they can at pleasure hold intercourse with the munedoods, who are ever ready to give them whatever information they require.

¹Op. cit., p. 25. ²History of the Ojebway Indians, London [1843(?)], pp. 143, 144.

The Ojibwa believe in a multiplicity of spirits, or man'idōs, which inhabit all space and every conspicuous object in nature. These man'idōs, in turn, are subservient to superior ones, either of a charitable and benevolent character or those which are malignant and aggressive. The chief or superior man'idō is termed Ki'tshi Man'idō—Great Spirit—approaching to a great extent the idea of the God of the Christian religion; the second in their estimation is Dzhe Man'idō, a benign being upon whom they look as the guardian spirit of the Midē'wiwin and through whose divine provision the sacred rites of the Midē'wiwin were granted to man. The Ani'miki or Thunder God is, if not the supreme, at least one of the greatest of the malignant man'idōs, and it is from him that the Jēs'sakkīd' are believed to obtain their powers of evil doing. There is one other, to whom special reference will be made, who abides in and rules the "place of shadows," the hereafter; he is known as Dzhibai' Man'idō—Shadow Spirit, or more commonly Ghost Spirit. The name of Ki'tshi Man'idō is never mentioned but with reverence, and thus only in connection with the rite of Midē'wiwin, or a sacred feast, and always after making an offering of tobacco.

The first important event in the life of an Ojibwa youth is his first fast. For this purpose he will leave his home for some secluded spot in the forest where he will continue to fast for an indefinite number of days; when reduced by abstinence from food he enters a hysterical or ecstatic state in which he may have visions and hallucinations. The spirits which the Ojibwa most desire to see in these dreams are those of mammals and birds, though any object, whether animate or inanimate, is considered a good omen. The object which first appears is adopted as the personal mystery, guardian spirit, or tutelary daimon of the entranced, and is never mentioned by him without first making a sacrifice. A small effigy of this man'idō is made, or its outline drawn upon a small piece of birch bark, which is carried suspended by a string around the neck, or if the wearer be a Midē' he carries it in his "medicine bag" or pinji'gosân. The future course of life of the faster is governed by his dream; and it sometimes occurs that because of giving an imaginary importance to the occurrence, such as beholding, during the trance some powerful man'idō or other object held in great reverence by the members of the Midē' Society, the faster first becomes impressed with the idea of becoming a Midē'. Thereupon he makes application to a prominent Midē' priest, and seeks his advice as to the necessary course to be pursued to attain his desire. If the Midē' priest considers with favor the application, he consults with his confrères and action is taken, and the questions of the requisite preliminary instructions, fees, and presents, etc., are formally discussed. If the Midē' priests are in accord with the desires of the applicant an instructor or preceptor is designated, to whom he must present him-

self and make an agreement as to the amount of preparatory information to be acquired and the fees and other presents to be given in return. These fees have nothing whatever to do with the presents which must be presented to the MidĒ' priests previous to his initiation as a member of the society, the latter being collected during the time that is devoted to preliminary instruction, which period usually extends over several years. Thus ample time is found for hunting, as skins and peltries, of which those not required as presents may be exchanged for blankets, tobacco, kettles, guns, etc., obtainable from the trader. Sometimes a number of years are spent in preparation for the first degree of the MidĒ'wiwin, and there are many who have impoverished themselves in the payment of fees and the preparation for the feast to which all visiting priests are also invited.

Should an Indian who is not prompted by a dream wish to join the society he expresses to the four chief officiating priests a desire to purchase a mī'gis, which is the sacred symbol of the society and consists of a small white shell, to which reference will be made further on. His application follows the same course as in the preceding instance, and the same course is pursued also when a Jĕs'sak-kīd' or a Wábĕnō' wishes to become a MidĒ'.

MIDĒ'WIWIN.

The MidĒ'wiwin—Society of the MidĒ' or Shamans—consists of an indefinite number of MidĒ' of both sexes. The society is graded into four separate and distinct degrees, although there is a general impression prevailing even among certain members that any degree beyond the first is practically a mere repetition. The greater power attained by one in making advancement depends upon the fact of his having submitted to "being shot at with the medicine sacks" in the hands of the officiating priests. This may be the case at this late day in certain localities, but from personal experience it has been learned that there is considerable variation in the dramatization of the ritual. One circumstance presents itself forcibly to the careful observer, and that is that the greater number of repetitions of the phrases chanted by the MidĒ' the greater is felt to be the amount of inspiration and power of the performance. This is true also of some of the lectures in which reiteration and prolongation in time of delivery aids very much in forcibly impressing the candidate and other observers with the importance and sacredness of the ceremony.

It has always been customary for the MidĒ' priests to preserve birch-bark records, bearing delicate incised lines to represent pictorially the ground plan of the number of degrees to which the owner is entitled. Such records or charts are sacred and are never exposed to the public view, being brought forward for inspection only when