THE BASKET DRUM.

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To most observers the object shown in Fig. 1 may seem a simple basket, but it is much more to many an untutored savage. The art of basket-making is today little cultivated among the Navajos. In developing their blanket-making to the highest point of Indian art, the women of this tribe have neglected other labors. The much ruder, but cognate Apaches, who know not how to weave woolen fabrics, make more baskets than the Navajos and make them in greater variety of form, color, and quality. The basket illustrated is, however, of Navajo make, and it is skillfully fabricated, yet it is almost the only form and pattern of basket now made in the tribe. They buy most of their baskets from other tribes; but, having generally let the art of basketry fall into disuse, they still continue to make this form for the reason that it is essential to their sacred rites and must be supplied by women of the tribe who know what is required. It is made of twigs of aromatic sumac—a shrub which has many sacred uses—wound in the form of a helix. The fabricator must always put the butt end of the twig toward the center of the basket and the tip toward the periphery. A band of red and black, with zigzag edges, is the sole decoration. This band is not continuous, but is intersected at one point by a narrow line of uncolored wood. When I first observed this, years ago, I fancied that it had some relation to the "line of life" observed in ancient and modern Pueblo pottery, and that its existence might be explained by reasons as metaphysical as those which the Pueblos give for their "line of life;" but the Navajo has at least one reason of a more practical character. The line is put there to assist in the orientation of the basket at night in the medicine-lodge when the fire has burned low and the light is dim. In an article published in the *American Anthropologist* (October, 1892) I explained the law of butts and tips in Navajo ceremonies and may not now repeat the explanation. It must suffice to say that throughout their ceremonies careful discrimination is made between the butt and the tip, the central and the

peripheral ends, and that the butt has precedence over the tip. This law applies to the basket in question as well as to other sacred things. The butt of the first twig, placed in the center, and the tip of the last twig, in the edge, must lie in the same radial line, and this line is marked by the hiatus in the ornamental band. The rim of the basket is often so neatly finished that the medicine-man could not easily tell where the helix

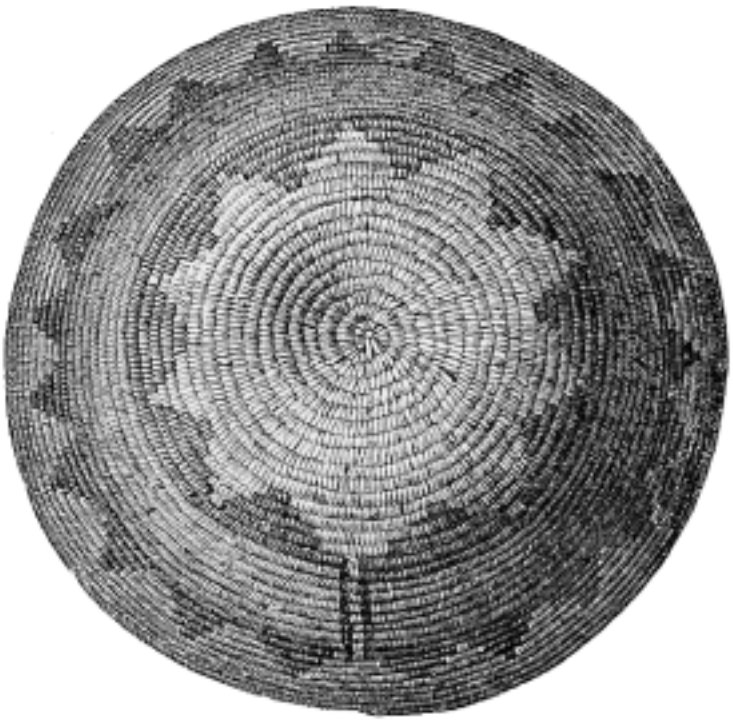

FIG. 1.

ended were not the pale line there to guide him. This line must lie due east and west when the basket is employed in the ceremonies.

The most important use of the basket is as a drum. In none of the ancient Navajo rites is a regular drum or tomtom employed. The inverted basket serves the purpose of one, and the way in which it is used for this simple object is rendered devious

and difficult by ceremonious observances. To illustrate, let me describe a few of these observances belonging to the ceremony of the night-chant. This ceremony lasts nine nights and nine days. During the first four nights song is accompanied only by the rattle. During the last five nights noises are elicited from the basket-drum by means of the yucca drumstick. This drum is beaten only in the western side of the lodge. For four of these five nights the following methods are pursued: A small Navajo blanket is laid on the ground, its longer dimension extending east and west. An incomplete circle of meal, open in the east, of the diameter of the basket, is traced on the blanket near its eastern end. A cross in meal, its ends touching the circle near the cardinal points, is then described within the circle. In making this cross a line is first drawn from east to west, and then a line is drawn from south to north. Meal is then applied sunwise to the rim of the upturned basket so as to form an incomplete circle with its opening in the east. A cross similar to that on the blanket is drawn in meal on the concavity of the basket, the east-and-west line of which cross must pass directly through the hiatus in the ornamental band. The basket is then inverted on the blanket in such a manner that the figures in meal on the one shall correspond in position to those on the other. The western half of the blanket is then folded over the convexity of the basket and the musicians are ready to begin; but before they begin to beat time to a song they tap the basket with the drumstick at the four cardinal points in the order of east, south, west, and north. The Navajos say, "We turn down the basket" when they refer to the commencement of songs in which the basket-drum is used, and "We turn up the basket" when they refer to the ending of the songs for the night. On the last night the basket is turned down with much the same observances as on the previous nights, but the openings in the ornamental band and in the circles of meal are turned to the west instead of to the east, and the eastern half of the blanket is folded over the concavity of the basket. There are songs for turning up and for turning down the basket, and there are certain words in these songs at which the shaman prepares to turn up the basket by putting his hand under its eastern rim, and other words at which he does the turning. For four nights, when the basket is turned down, the eastern part is laid

on the outstretched blanket first and it is inverted toward the west. On the fifth night it is inverted in the opposite direction. When it is turned up, it is always lifted first at the eastern edge. As it is raised an imaginary something is blown toward the east, in the direction of the smoke-hole of the lodge, and when it is completely turned up hands are waved in the same direction, to drive out the evil influences which the sacred songs have collected and imprisoned under the basket.

The border of this, as of other Navajo baskets, is finished in a diagonally woven or plaited pattern. These Indians say that the Apaches and other neighboring tribes finish the margins of their baskets with simple circular turns of the investing fibre like that in the rest of the basket. The Navajo basket, they believe, may always be known by the peculiar finish described, and they say that if among other tribes a woman is found who makes the Navajo finish she is of Navajo descent or has learned her art of a Navajo. They account for this by a legend which is perhaps not wholly mythical. In the ancient days a Navajo woman was seated under a juniper tree finishing a basket in the style of the other tribes, as was then the Navajo custom, and while so engaged she was intently thinking if some stronger and more beautiful margin could not be devised. As she thus sat in thought the god Qastceyelçi tore from the overhanging juniper tree a small spray and cast it into her basket. It immediately occurred to her to imitate in her work the peculiar fold of the juniper leaves and she soon devised a way of doing so. If this margin is worn through or torn in any way the basket is unfit for sacred use. The basket is given to the shaman when the rites are done. He must not keep it, but must give it away, and he must be careful never to eat out of it, for, notwithstanding its sacred use, it is no desecration to serve food in it.

The Drumstick.

The next thing to be examined is the drumstick with which this drum is beaten. I shall describe now only the stick used in one rite—that of the night-chant. The task of making this stick does not necessarily belong to the shaman; any assistant may make it; but so intricate are the rules pertaining to its construction that one shaman has told me he never found any one

who could form it merely from verbal instructions. Practical instructions are necessary. The drumstick is made anew for each ceremony and destroyed, in a manner to be described, when the ceremony is over. It is formed from the stout leaves of *Yucca baccata*, a species of Spanish bayonet, but not every plant of this kind is worthy to furnish the material. I have seen an hour spent in search for the proper plant on a hillside bristling with *Yucca baccata*. Four leaves only can be used, and they must all come from the same plant, one from each of the cardinal points of the stem. All must be of the proper length and absolutely free from wound, stain, withered point, or blemish of any kind. These conditions are not fulfilled on every yucca. The leaves may not be cut off, but must be torn off downward at their articulations. The collector first pulls the selected leaf from the east side of the plant, making a mark with his thumb nail on the east or dorsal side of the leaf near its root, in order that he may know this leaf thereafter. He walks sunwise around the plant to the west side, marks the selected leaf near the tip on its palmar (east) surface, and culls it. He then retreats to the south side of the plant and collects his leaf there, but does not mark it. Lastly, he proceeds sunwise to the north and culls his last leaf, also without marking it. When the leaves are all obtained the sharp, flinty points and the curling marginal cilia are torn off and stuck, points upward, in among the remaining leaves of the plant from which they were culled. The four leaves are then taken to the medicine-lodge to be made up. The leaves from the east and west are used for the center or core of the stick and are left whole. The leaves from the north and south are torn into long shreds and used for the wrapper; but since the shaman cannot adequately explain in words to the devotees who assist him how the stick is made, I shall not attempt the task in this paper. I have learned how to make it, and at some future time may describe the method of making with the aid of illustrations. In Fig. 2, which represents the drumstick, it will be observed that the core of the stick is divided by a suture of yucca-shred into five compartments, one for each night during which the stick is used. Into each of these sections are usually put one or more grains of corn, which, during the five nights that the implement is in use, are supposed to imbibe some sacred properties. When the ceremony is all over

these grains are divided among the visiting medicine-men, to be ground up and put in their medicine-bags. On the last morning of the ceremony, at dawn, when the last song of sequence has been sung and the basket turned up, this drumstick is pulled to pieces in an order the reverse of that in which it was put together. This work may only be done by the shaman who conducted the rites, and, as he proceeds with his work, he sings the song of the unravelling. As each piece is unwrapped it is straightened out and laid down with its point to the east. The débris which accumulated in the manufacture of the drumstick and which has been carefully laid away for five days is now brought forth and one fascicle is made of all. This is taken out of the lodge by an assistant, carried in an easterly direction, and laid in the forks of a cedar tree (or in the branches of some other large plant, if a cedar tree is not at hand), where it will be safe from the trampling feet of cattle. There it is left until destroyed or scattered by the forces of nature. The man who sacrifices these fragments takes out with him in the hollow of his left hand some corn-meal, which he sprinkles with the same hand on the shreds from butt to tip. He takes out also, in a bag, some pollen, which he sprinkles on them in the same direction with his right hand. As he does this he repeats in a low voice the following prayer or benediction:

FIG. 2.

Qojolel kòçe.
(Thus will it be beautiful.)
Qojogo nacaco koçe citsoi.
(Thus walk in beauty, my grandchild.)

The drumstick soon loses its freshness and becomes withered, shriveled, and loose. A few taps of one in this condition on the

basket would knock it all to pieces. Even during the short time that the stick is in use for its sacred purpose it would shrivel and become worthless were it not buried in moist earth all day and taken forth from its hiding place only when needed for the ceremonies of the night.

I have said that the drumstick, when the ceremonies are done, must be pulled apart while a song is sung, and that its fragments must be deposited, with prayer and ceremony, in the fork of a cedar tree or other secure place. How, then, it may be asked, have I come into possession of my drumstick? It was made for my instruction by a shaman, not in the medicine-lodge, but in my own study. Such it is his privilege to do for any recognized student of the rites. I have had several drumsticks made and pulled apart for my instruction, and I have made them myself, under the observation and criticism of the shaman. This one I was allowed to retain intact. No one had ever sung or prayed over it. It had never been used in the rites. It was therefore unnecessary to tear it apart, to release its soul and sacrifice its substance to the gods.