THE MOHAVE

HABITAT, HOME LIFE, AND SOCIAL CUSTOMS

A BARREN earth and a sunless sky came together, begetting gods and people.

Such, according to the myth, is the genesis of the Mohave,[1] one of the principal branches of the Yuman family, possibly the parent people of the stock. Study of their myths and cult soon tells us that, compared with such other groups as the Navaho, the Pueblos, and the Plains tribes, their life is quite barren of ceremony and ritualism. Their home is now, and was in traditional times, on the banks of the Colorado river, an environment into which they have so fitted themselves that they seem to have been always a vital part of it. To describe the Mohave without first speaking of their river would be like telling of the Makah of wind-swept Cape Flattery without alluding to the sea that beats the sands at their very feet.

The Colorado is a river like unto no other. Even the murmur of its waters in their never-ceasing flow to the Southern sea is unlike the sound of other streams. Others tell of clear brooks, grass-grown, pebble-strewn. One reverts to the waters of the Mississippi and the Falls of Saint Anthony; the green, translucent flow of the Hudson; the beautiful Columbia, fed from snowy mountains, and a hundred others; but the Colorado is one unto itself.

To look upon its yellow surface and hear its low, sullen lap as its silt-laden waters flow by, is to think of a river of paint. For five hundred miles, gathering tribute from the rock-walled gorge, it winds its deep and mighty course through the desert. In watching its forceful flow one forgets that it was born as other rivers; forgets the countless meadow and mountain brooks that contribute to its making; forgets

[1] The name *Mohave,* after the Spanish manner spelled *Mojave,* is a contraction of the name by which they are known to themselves and other Yuman tribes, Hummahába, which means "Going Wrong," from *ham,* wrong, and *mahába,* going. Among the Mohave and their kindred the explanation is made that when the creator brought them forth and sent them all to different quarters, the Mohave started "the wrong way"- hence the name. Father Garcés called them "Jamajabs," and after hearing the Indians speak the word one sees that the v in Mohave should be pronounced as *b,* in accordance with this old Spanish form.

the song of birds, and sees only its relentless, devouring strength. Stand on the last precipice overlooking the chasm of the Colorado Cañon, watch the waters beat and lash themselves about in their mad rush to be through and out of this grewsome rift in the earth, and to one comes the thought that though this may have been born as other rivers, in passing through these awful depths its very life and soul have been transformed: it has emerged broken in spirit and laden with a wearying burden.

The hour is the end of day; its spell is over the earth. The sun in a sea of gold and crimson is sinking behind mountain crests of copper hue; the shadows are creeping stealthily across sierra, valley, and plain; motionless our giant bronze Mohave is watching the scene as his forefathers for generation after generation watched the same sunsets and the same river flow. Does the gorgeous coloring of yonder clouds, the current of the stream, and the spell of the hour mean anything to him? Perhaps far more than we dream. Ask him, he could not tell; but take him from it and he would die of longing.

Physically the Mohave are probably superior to any other tribe in the United States. Men and women alike are big-boned, well-knitted, clear-skinned. Mentally they are dull and slow — brothers to the ox. The warm climate and the comparative ease with which they obtain their livelihood seem to have developed a people physically superb; but the climate and the conditions that developed such magnificent bodies did not demand or assist in the building up of an equivalent mentality. So far as can be gleaned from their mythology, legends, and tradition, their home has always been in the valley of the Colorado; careful study reveals no hint of a time when they and their Yuma brothers, who are so like them in general characteristics, were one tribe. The creation story of each places their origin at the same spot, Avikomé, a mountain above Needles and opposite Fort Mohave. In fact, none of the Yuman tribes has any tradition of a common habitat, which certainly argues that the segregation of these tribes occurred at a very early period.

The early tribal range of the Mohave was on both sides of the Colorado from Black Cañon down to The Needles. Within historic time the tribe became divided into two factions. One was headed by Yiratéwa, Shakes Himself as he Flies, and the other by Hamosekwahóta, Good Star; one advocated peace, the other war. The latter had the larger following and was really the head-chief, and he determined to oppose the whites and to make war upon neighboring tribes. This opposition

to the whites was less from a desire to preserve their homeland from invasion than to find an excuse for fighting. In spite of the protests of Yiratéwa and his followers, the news that a train of ox-wagons was approaching set the war party aflame, and Hamosekwahóta with a large following of braves went forth to annihilate the whites. Their arrows proved ineffective, and the execution of the enemy's muskets caused a speedy retreat. Their thirst for warfare, however, remaining unquenched, the leader of the peace party, after exhausting argument and eloquence on the hostile band, told of a good land farther down the river and announced his intention of leading thither whomsoever would go. His arguments against war were simple but well-founded: "Wake up in the night, hear the owl hoot, run to the mesquite. No good. In morning look out, far off see a cloud of dust, run to the mesquite. No good. All tribes same color, all tribes brothers. Live in peace, have farms, plenty to eat. That good." So he instructed his nephew, the present chief of the southern division of the tribe. With about two hundred and fifty people he left on tule rafts for the new home. Landing near La Paz, they informed the agent of their peaceable intentions and sent word to Washington that they desired a school. At the present time there are the three settlements: Fort Mohave in Arizona, Needles in California, and the one formed by this progressive division at Parker, Arizona.

The Mohave live in rancherias, their houses scattered about wherever the conditions are favorable for small farms. In prehis toric times their food consisted largely of mesquite and mescrew bean-pods and fish, the latter being caught in weirs, as well as by hooks made of cactus thorns heated and bent to shape. Rabbits, rats, ducks., and quail were also captured and eaten, but large game they never hunted, preferring to take such of the smaller animals as came to hand with a minimum of effort. The Colorado, like the Nile, is subject to annual overflow; after the water subsides, usually in July, the Mohave plant their small crops of corn, beans, squashes, pumpkins, and melons. Great quantities of melons are grown, and for months of each year are a principal article of food. The water leaves the soil in a soft, mellow state, and the crop is often planted by merely putting the seed into the ground, tillage being unnecessary.

The dress of the Mohave was extremely simple. The men used only the breech-cloth, and the women a short skirt made of the fibrous inner layer of willow bark softened in water and woven into a coarse

cloth. Moccasins were unknown to either sex. Sandals were made of badger skin, and in cold weather a blanket woven from strips of rabbit or rat skins was worn. Many such blankets are still in existence. At present the men wear fanciful combinations of white men's clothing, usually a pair of overalls and a tight-fitting undershirt, which is always painted, sometimes black, sometimes in stripes of several colors. A bright handkerchief adorns the neck; the hair hangs loose, or in numerous small twists held together with mesquite gum. Both men and women have their faces tattooed, generally in streaks across the forehead or down the chin. Face painting is also practised to a limited extent.

The primitive Mohave dwelling was built by excavating a shallow, circular space in the sand, and erecting four interior posts to support the roof timbers, on which rested brush-thatched poles that sloped to the edges of the pit. The slightly sloping roof was constructed of small willow poles, covered with arrow-brush thatching and a thick layer of mud, which was also spread over the walls. The interior height was about five feet, nearly half under ground. The entrance, which also provided the only means of escape for smoke from the fire, was a low door in the eastern side. The Mohave house of today is rectangular and flat-roofed. To upright posts small horizontal poles are fastened closely together on each side, and the space between them is filled with mud, making very durable walls. Window openings are sometimes left in the sides. The roof is constructed of poles, brush thatching, and mud.

The weaving of skirts from the inner bark of the willow, the making of stone-pointed arrows and stone axes, rough willow burden baskets, pottery with rude conventional designs but of good form, and beadwork, constitute all the Mohave ever knew about the crafts or arts, and what little they once knew about basketry is now forgotten. Work with glass beads is extensively practised by the women, and the results show great skill and oftentimes considerable taste. Before the white man brought beads the material for this work was obtained from the necks of certain black insects, probably beetles.

Nothing could illustrate the lack of ingenuity and thrift of this people better than the fact that, notwithstanding their home has always been on the banks of a navigable stream, they have never fashioned a boat or canoe for the purpose of navigation, although their neighbors, the Chemehuevi and the Serranos of Mohave river, according to Father Garcés, floated corn and other provender across streams in large water-

tight baskets, or *coritas*. The nearest approach to water-craft was a very rude balsa made of bundles of tules or small logs tied together. Log rafts are still occasionally seen on the river, but modern skiffs are universally used by these Indians now.

Chieftainship is hereditary, understanding this term in the loose sense usually applicable to Indian customs. The nearest male relative of a deceased chief is the logical candidate, though if there be no one of sufficiently strong personality in the family, the voice of the tribe would ignore the succession and select a man satisfactory to the majority. In the old days there were war-chiefs, who, however, were always subordinate to the head-chiefs.

Marriage among the Mohave may be said to be without ceremony. A youth exhibits his fancy by bearing frequent presents to the maid of his choice, continued acceptance of which is regarded as betrothal. The young man then goes to live with her at the home of her parents until he can build a home of his own. A clearly defined clan or gentile organization does not exist. All female descendants of a given male line bear the same name, which may possibly indicate a decadent clanship system. These names, totemic in origin, are said to have been given by the god Matevílye, who said, for instance, to the origin ator of the Nyolch, or Deer, group, "You shall have a deer and shall name your daughters Nyolch." Seventeen such totemic names have been determined., and there are probably others. If this clan system, so to term it, ever prohibited intermarriage within the clan, its laws have passed into disuse; yet it is certain that among the Yuma, kindred people with the same system of totemic names, marriage within the clan was once tabooed.

Matevílye, before dying, instructed his people as to the disposition of his body. They were to dig a hole in the ground, put quantities of fuel over it, and when he was dead place his body on the top of all, kindle the pyre, and gather about to mourn and watch his departure to the after-world. And so they do with their dead to this day. Their god taught them what disposal to make of the body, and no missionary can divert them from this so-termed pagan practice. When it is certain that death is to come, the funeral pyre is prepared. As soon as life is extinct the body is wrapped in a blanket, carried out, and placed on the pyre. Relatives and friends follow the remains, all seeming equally grief-stricken. In the language of the Indian, "Why not? We are all brothers. When my brother is happy, I am happy with him. When he weeps, I

weep with him." So, gathered around the blazing pile, the tribe wails until corpse and fuel have been consumed, and the ashes have dropped into the pit below. Four days after the cremation the spirit goes to Névthi Chuváchu, Spirit House, in Se1yáita, the Sand Hills, along the Colorado south of Topock. This place of spirits they believe to be prolific in melons, beans, pumpkins, and game. When one melon is plucked from the vine, another immediately takes its place; when an ear of corn is picked, another shoots forth. Every Mohave who dies goes to this place, no matter how he has lived, whether bravely or cravenly. Even those who in life have wrought evil through sorcery are not debarred. No Mohave can be induced to tarry in that region — that world of departed spirits. If one were to sleep in Selyáita, the spirits of his relatives who have gone before would take his own spirit from him.

The names of the dead are never uttered. If a Mohave dies before his child has learned to speak, that child will never know what name its father bore. In this may be seen a potent reason for the weakness of this people in hunting and fighting. The custom of the Sioux, for example, of singing their babes to sleep with songs recounting the mighty deeds of great ancestors and of encouraging the boys to emulate their exploits, furnished notable incentive for attaining prowess in war and the chase.

The medicine-man's power is derived through dreams, which are sent before birth or in early childhood by Tinyám, The Night, who, in the form of a man, stands beside the chosen one as he sleeps, telling him how to cure. Medicine-men, therefore, are conceived of as foreordained. They are both good and evil; that is, they both cure and cause illness. Every physical or mental ill is attributed to some medicine-man whose identity is usually revealed to the sufferer in a dream; and tradition relates that in former times the relatives of a dead person would take summary vengeance upon the medicine-man who caused the illness. This evil power is supposed to emanate from a poison in the breast, transmitted through the breath, which is healing or blighting as the medicine-man's thoughts are good or evil.

As most sickness is accompanied by a feverish condition of the body, the usual method of cure is by blowing the breath and by spraying saliva. Sometimes, especially when the seat of the disease is indicated by a swelling, the doctor sucks the affected part to extract the evil. In no case is medicine of any kind administered. The medicine-men believe

that the white man's remedies are decoc tions of the skins of lizards, frogs, and snakes, and regard them with the greatest distrust. They explain their inability to inflict disease on a white man by saying that the breath, when it strikes white skin, divides and passes by on either side. But the influence of the Mohave medicine-men is now waning, owing chiefly to the hostile attitude of the Government authorities.

Not only in the foreordination of the medicine-men, but in every phase of Mohave life, dreams play a most important role. Whatever is dreamed will inevitably happen. To dream of illness is to become ill; to dream of death is to die within a short time.

Related to this belief is the passive submission of the Mohave to what he believes is fated to occur. If a child becomes ill, though the illness be of the most trivial character, let the parents form the idea that the child is going to die, and die it will from determination and utter neglect. It is going to die, so why trouble? And this does not arise from any lack of affection for the child, for after its death the grief of the parents is poignant indeed.

In relating some of his dreams, Ahweyáma, an old medicine-man, said:

"Honyaré, the bug who causes the mirage, came to me one night when I was a small child, and said to me: 'I will give you my breath; my breath is cold, my breath is warm, my breath is hot. I will give you my breath, that you may be able to cure sickness.'

"A female bug came to me and said: 'I am the one who made the sun, the moon, the stars. I will give you something. My breath is blue, my breath is green, my breath is red. I give you my breath to cure sickness.' This was Mastamhó, the creator, speaking through the bug, for Mastamhó never speaks to men himself.

"A buzzard came; but his color was not the color of a buzzard, for he was brown. He sang this song to me: 'I blow my breath at the darkness, and it disappears like a mist before the sun, and day comes. When you sing this song and blow your breath at the darkness of disease, it will disappear.'

"In a dream I went to the mountains and built a house. There came a tarantula with a great long beard. It pulled some of the hair from its body and laid it on the ground to represent a sick man. Then it sang: 'Come and stand beside me, Boy, and I will teach you how to cure sickness. I blow my breath over the sick one, and he is well.'"

In the beginning the Earth was here, and the Sky; but all was dark

and the Earth was barren. Earth and Sky came together, and from this union were born Matevílye and Mastamhó. People, too, were born, but they were nearly inanimate, speechless, moving with difficulty. This was at the sacred mountain Avikomé.

The god Matevílye conceived a plan for making the sun and the moon, for giving speech to the people and naming them, and for supplying the earth with streams, mountains, and fields, and all things good for food.

At the middle of the earth he built the Dark House, with its four doors, its posts, walls, and roof, which none could see because of the utter darkness. This house he made without effort, simply willing "Here is a house," and there it was. From its great central post the place was called Hawólpo. Without speaking, Matevílye caused all people to assemble in the Dark House; and he named its parts, still without speaking. The people crawled about in the darkness, feeling of the parts of the house, learning how it was built. About the southern door sat the people, and at the north were Matevílye and Mastamhó, with the two medicine-men, Matóchipa and Kókomat, who were to speak for the god in his instruction of the people.

Then Matevílye went forth from the Dark House, followed by his daughter, Hanyíko, Big Frog, who, practising witchcraft, afflicted him with fatal sickness. Hanyíko fled, and Matevílye crept back into the house to die. He called about him the great men: Maskotái, Bird That Builds a Hanging Nest; Maschimqamécha, Bug That Throws Dirt Far; Tukseqinyóra, Badger; Tinyamqihnána, Mole; Soqílik tai, Hawk; Tálpo, Road-runner. These he made to understand what they were to do with his body.

Maschimqamécha took four steps and there dug a hole in the sand. Tukseqinyóra was sent to bring wood, which he piled up near the hole. Then they laid the body of Matevílye on the wood, covering it with other sticks. Fire was made with fire-sticks and the pyre lighted. All the people stood about it in a circle, but they could not speak, nor even cry. Before the body was quite consumed, Hokthára, Coyote, leaped over the heads of the people, seized the heart of Matevílye, and dashed away. Mastamhó then created a strong wind, which blew the sand and filled up the grave of the god.

After this came rain for four days, and the water rose higher and higher until there seemed no place of safety. But Mastamhó led the people back to Avikomé, where they were out of danger. Then he

blew hard upon the water four times, until it was all gone, and in its place remained a vast stretch of mud covering all the earth. Over this Mastamhó walked far and wide with great strides, everywhere planting seeds of trees and other vegetation in order to make the earth a good place in which to live. Afterward he made the sun, the moon, and the stars. Then, because the people were in need of more space, he made the earth larger by walking successively in the four directions: wherever he stepped the earth extended.

One day, desiring fresh water, Mastamhó struck the ground with his stick, and as he withdrew it water gushed forth. He led the stream to the south, through Hawólpo and the grave of Matevílye, and on to the ocean. This is the Colorado river. The great central post of the Dark House became a pinnacle of rock in the midst of the stream.

Mastamhó separated the people into tribes, and gave to each a language and a home. For this he is also called Páhochach, The One Who Placed The People.

CEREMONIES

There is very little in the life of the Mohave that can strictly be called ceremonial. The Scalp Dance and the celebration of the maturity of girls, — both now obsolete — the cremation, Tománpa, or Mourning Chant following the death of a prominent person, and many songs, constitute all they have ever had of a ceremonial character. The songs are not necessarily of a religious nature, but may be given for entertainment. In fact, even the Tománpa, always the one sung during the mourning rites, may also be sung on social occasions. The songs are in every case the narration of a dream supposed to have been experienced by the singer personally, regardless of the fact that they have been given in identically the same words for generations, and that there may be several singers of the same songs. Twenty-two of these songs were noted, and undoubtedly there are many others. They are all extremely long, most of them requiring two full nights in their rendition.

A brief description of the Tománpa will give a good idea of the other songs. This is sung when a prominent person is about to die, or at a considerable time after cremation, in honor of the dead. Several men, who both sing and dance, take part. The complete chant consists of more than three hundred and fifty short songs, each a repetition

of a few words, oftentimes obsolete, which do not make connected sense but serve as an index to the story upon which the group of songs is built. For example, one of the component songs consists of the following two lines repeated many times:

Emé kaiyovák kánga Tiyám óngo kánga

Emé is leg; *vak,* step; *tiyám,* go. The other words are obsolete terms, or mere vocables. To the singer, however, they convey a meaning, for a story is connected with the lines, and the three significant words

suffice to recall it to mind. In this instance the story tells how, after the burning of the body of Matevílye, the people returned to the mountain Avikomé. But there were two, Tománpa and his sister, Qakoisavapóna, whose sorrow could not be assuaged. These left the others and journeyed to the south, singing of their grief.

Therefore, after the two lines have been sung, a pause is made, and this part of the story is related to the younger assisting singers, and to the listeners.

Tománpa and his sister, so the story runs, travel slowly down the bank of the Colorado, now and then meeting strangers, usually animals or insects, whom they never fail to mock in song; now deluded by a mirage, or wondering at the curious trail of the beaver; and always filled with sorrow when anything occurs to remind them of their dead god, Matevílye. Their journey takes them almost to the ocean, where they sink into the ground and become locusts.

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