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A WINTU·' GIRLS' PUBERTY CEREMONY

D. DEMETRACOPOULOU LEE

The following account was dictated to me in Wintu·', by Sadie Marsh, a full-blood Wintu·' of the McCloud area, born about 1890. Sadie Marsh participated in the ceremony as the pre-adolescent companion of the pubescent girl for whom the ceremony was held. The text was recorded under the auspices of Claremont Colleges, Claremont, California, in July, 1938.

Pat Silverthorne's wife, she whose name was wai'iBo·qi,¹ menstruated for the first time in the region of the Middle-river.² So, when she had her first menstruation, many people sang puberty³ songs, after they had made her dwell in a small hut. After they had made her dwell in there, they sang puberty songs for her for one month. So now they called a dance. And they danced every evening. Just then, as the people were coming, he whose name was wa·su, a chief, got out and spoke:

"O you people, be welcome," he said. "There are stones, take care lest you stumble. There are sticks, take care lest you trip. O you people, go northward and sit down," he said. "The country is becoming desolate. There shall be no one to talk to when you come here," he said. "You⁴ shall not see children playing before you, as you did yesterday. Yet only yesterday, when children played before you, in your sight, it seemed as if all were to be well; or when men brought home salmon, it seemed as if all were to be well.

"I never said to myself, 'Perhaps I shall see such a ceremony take place again.' Instead, 'I shall never talk with people again,' thus I said. Because the country is growing desolate. In the region of the Middle River long ago there were many people; I saw them. But now the country is growing desolate; yet long ago all the flats were filled with people. So, O you who call yourselves Wintu·', sit down carefully. You are destined to go hungry.⁵ There are no youths, no class of hunters; yet, long ago, it is said, there were young men who were procurers of food.

"So sit down carefully, O you!"

In the fall, they invited people again, for the same occasion. And I saw many people arrive. As before, wa·su went out and said:

"O you people, approach in welcome. You shall go hungry, O you; the procurers of food are no more. The people of long ago, they who were the procurers of food, are no more. And if you happen to have

1. Northern Sparkle.

2. McCloud River.

3. I use *puberty* only because it is less clumsy than the literal *first menstruation*.

4. Here the chief uses the second person singular, a rhetorical device.

5. Conventional belittlement.

anything with you, put it here on the north on the west side up the slope, if you have come from the Land-on-the-west.⁶ And if you have come from the Land-in-front to the south⁷ put it down here, up the slope on the north side. And from the region of the Eastern-river⁸ if you have come, put it here in the east, up the slope on the east side. And you, I know you are travellers from far away; when you have gone down the slope, when you have bathed in the river, you shall eat a little bit.⁹ You must all be tired."

So now the many people all went east down the slope. And they bathed and came back. And the chief's wife was preparing food, all who were related to the pubescent also helped. My elder brother had made a big table for them. So now the people, after they had arrived, ate. As for wa·su, he was speaking:

"O you people, eat carefully! Take care lest you choke to death; for water is by nature a killer. When you have bitten off a mouthful do not talk, lest you choke on it and die! Eat carefully! This is White Man's food. As long as you eat this food of the White Man, you shall never be satisfied. On this you shall go hungry, O you people. Your children shall go hungry. Your¹⁰ horses, those which were brought here by you, shall go hungry. Indeed, there is no hay anywhere. Yet long ago there was much grass in all the flats. Since the people from the edge of the world¹¹ came into view, indeed, you and I have nothing. We can see for ourselves how they have stolen everything and stripped us of our possessions. And, indeed, we can have nothing. This is what must have been destined.

"So, O you, when you have brought your eating safely to a close, take the pubescent girl by the hand to the dancing ground. Let me look on your dance! These affinal connections, these people from the edge of the world—there are many here, indeed—shall look on, or they shall put themselves in our midst while you and I are dancing."

And now her grandmother led Northern Sparkle out by the hand and took her to the dancing ground. Then her grandmother made her stand there. And me also they made stand with her. Behold, there were no men there; but many women came to look on. After a long while we heard them coming from the east, we heard them in the east, we heard them come singing, alternately advancing and standing still. In the midst of this they uttered a great whoop. In the meantime they were coming nearer. And when they had approached us, one man came dancing on. He would come that far and go back, he would dance up and dance back, he would dance stamping his feet, he would go back to the original spot. Now he approached the girl who was

6. The region near Antler.

7. The Stillwater region.

8. The Pit River region.

9. Conventional belittlement.

10. Singular used rhetorically instead of the plural.

11. The Whites.

pubescent and here he stamped around us, saying, "A man, an old man who came into being long ago, is coming with a big penis. Control yourself hard, lest you smile," he said. "He wants to sniff at adolescent girls," he said. "If your blood stinks, he will perish before you," he said.

So they came; and he who had come into being long ago had been made to wear a cloth blanket over his head. And he was dressed in funny things. A big stick had been tied on him there below. And it would swing about horribly when he danced. And they who were stamp-dancing were singing over the man with the big penis as they brought him along.

And a great fire had been lit. Then the man who was dressed in a cloth blanket came and went around us sniffing. So I shoved him away from me and ran to where Mamma was. So now the people were dancing; this dance is called elxanumes (stamping-up-to). The one to be danced is the waiBani·ki (Northern-pace). Then the people danced the waiBani·ki till daylight. And early in the morning they said to the pubescent girl, "There is wood over there in the west," they said. "Go there and gather it in your arms and bring it." So, after she had brought the wood there, they made her sit, in her little house—first menstruation house, it is called—all day long, even though it was hot. Mamma used to prepare food for us and would send it by me. And I used to go in and stay with the pubescent girl.

In the meantime, they danced for a number of days, for three weeks. So all day long, all night long, they danced. And then they rested for two weeks. So now the people who had brought along food, brought it and presenting it to the pubescent girl's grandmother, handed it to her: the inhabitants of the Middle-river region, salmon and salmon-flour; then, the inhabitants of the land-in-front, manzanita berries and manzanita flour; then, the people of the East-river region, grapes. From the land-on-the-west, further, they had brought deer jerky. So they put all in front of her. And the old woman distributed¹² the manzanita flour out of a great back-carrying basket, to those who had come from the land-on-the-west. And then she distributed the venison to those who had come from the land-in-front; the same was done with the grapes. And the inhabitants of the Middle-river distributed salmon flour and salmon to everyone. And, now, when they had brought this to an end, they danced the waiBani·ki that evening, as before.

Then, early in the morning, they sent the adolescent girl for water. So, hurriedly, she dipped it up and brought it running. And after she had brought it back she gave the water to the young men to drink. And now they sent her back to her house. And now Mamma dressed up Northern Sparkle, the girl who was pubescent; because they were about to dance the xiwi·li¹³ for her. And I was to stand beside her.

12. Lit. gave to many as a gift.

13. Cora DuBois. "Wintu Ethnography," University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, v. 36, No. 1. Berkeley, California, University of California Press, 1935, pp. 41-42.

They took us two to the dancing ground as the sun was sitting on the west side of the sky.¹⁴ So we two stood in the midst of the sunshine; but Mamma had given me a small sun-shade. And being very small, I was terribly bashful. So while we were standing there, the young men crowded up in front of us. And they said all kinds of things, trying to make us laugh. "I want to possess both these women tonight. All night long I shall not allow these two to sleep. I shall certainly copulate with both of them till the break of day. I shall not allow them to sleep." Thus they said all kinds of things. And some said, "It is I who has the big penis. When I possess these two, I shall become a he-man." And others said, "No, that is I," they said. "Only if I possess them, will it be right." And others said, "I shall be on the watch; this evening I shall run away with the big one," thus said some. So they kept winking at one another and laughing. Then I heard one say, "As for me that little one shall be mine before she has her first menstruation," so he said. He said thus and they all laughed. And I cried. Then Mamma came and said to me, "Go and bring water. Your grandfather thirsts for water," she said. Now I was glad. Carrie¹⁵ and I went and brought water. And when we had brought it back, again they sent me to stand with her who was pubescent.

Then, when I looked to the south, there were many people, only men, coming. Behold, grandfather¹⁶ was leading them. He was dressed in elk skin and had arrows in the quiver on his back. He came giving a whoop alone, with a little boy whom he had dressed like himself, both of them with swansdown headdresses. And the many came behind with bows and rifles carried on their shoulders, yelling together they came. They came to the dancing ground where we two were standing and they all yelled together, all at once. Now there in front of us a post sat stuck in the ground, that which is named olBili¹⁷ (wrapped-upward). So now they finished yelling together and they shot, all at once, at the olBili, several times.

And many Whites were looking on. So now they were through and after they were through, someone got hold of that one man and said, "Take these two and run with them to the house of first menstruation." Now the pubescent one ran, she ran with that man who had hold of her arm. And I did not run. So now after they let her rest a while, they fed the people. And there were many Whites there. In the evening they danced, as before. Then in the morning, they sent her running fast down the slope to the river, sending her to bathe. Then they brought her back home.

14. About one o'clock.

15. The younger sister of the informant.

16. Black-mouth, chief in the McCloud area.

17. A small pine tree, used as a target. An upward-winding thong holds the branches close against the thin trunk.