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THE INDIAN MESSIAH CRAZE.

The messiah craze and the death of Sitting Bull, writes Alice C. Fletcher, in the *New York Independent*, recall incidents coming under my personal knowledge which may be of interest.

While in the Missouri Valley, last spring, an Indian said to me :

"I wish you would go and see the messiah and tell me what you think of him."

My friend was untouched by the excitement, being a sober-minded, hard-working man, but withal something of a philosopher who liked to look into the nature of things.

I did not go and see the messiah; but my friend's wish stimulated me to talk with different Indians, and what I then heard, together with what had come to me upon this subject during the past few years, make up the following story.

Some five or six years ago a nominal convert to Christianity among the Cheyennes lost a near relation, and wandering forth alone with his sorrow fell into a trance. He fancied that he travelled on over the country, seeing buffalo and deer but no human beings; at last he caught sounds as if a camp was near. As he listened, he distinguished the barking of dogs, the cries of children at play, the chatter of women and the songs of the men; following these sounds he came upon a village, and recognized among the people there his lost relations. Every one seemed happy and enjoying plenty. Buffalo meat was hanging up to dry, and the roast over the fire sent forth a savory stimulant to his appetite. While he stood glancing about, his eye caught sight of a faint line of light just beyond the encampment, which slowly increased in width and brilliancy until a luminous way stretched from the village up to the sky. Down the shining path, walking slowly toward him, came a figure clad

in a robe. The person did not look like an Indian, nor yet like a white man; but when he came near he told him that he was the God who long ago came to the white men, but they rejected him and put him to death. As he said this he opened his robe and showed the marks on his hands, feet and side. He recounted the continued disobedience of the white men, their persecution of the Indians, and said he was coming to earth once again, this time to succor his red children. He would take the land from the white people and give it back to the Indians; restore the buffalo and other

game, so that there would be no more crying from hunger; and the dead and the living would be re-united. All this he would do; but the Indians must wait for him to do it, and take him for their God.

Here the Cheyenne awoke and remembered his dream. By-and-by he told it; a few of those who heard it had a like vision; others fell into fainting fits and talked with their dead relations, who told about the new messiah; and the dead sent messages to the living, bidding them have hope, for all the dead were busy getting ready to return to earth. Before long these dream-

ers heard new songs, and societies were started to sing these songs to rhythmic movement of the body. Thus the ghost dance began, so called because the people were supposed to talk with the dead when they dropped from the dance into a trance. As the excitement waxed it took on mythic forms; and finally some one declared that the messiah had been seen otherwise than in a vision, that he was dwelling in the White Mountains, near Mexico; again, he was said to be in the mountains of the North-West.

Delegates from the Sioux and northern

Cheyennes of Dakota and from some other tribes in the South went to see and talk with the new messiah. On their return home, although their accounts were mixed with visions, they declared that they had met him, that they had seen and talked with the dead, and had tasted their buffalo meat. Some of the men brought back bits of meat, and ornaments belonging to the dead, that unbelievers might be led to have faith in the new messiah.

The methods by which the white men were to be destroyed were revealed; it was not to be by any act of the Indians, but a convulsion of Nature. According to one version a cyclone would clear the earth of our race. Another stated that an earthquake would begin at the Atlantic coast, tossing the people and swallowing them up, and would gradually travel west, rolling and gaping as it advanced; it might take two years to thus cross the continent. A third said, there would come a mighty land-slide, and the Indians were told that they must all gather at a locality in South Dakota; men, women and children were to go there naked, taking with them nothing connected with their present life; there, naked and unarmed, they were to dance, waiting for the great land-slide,



SITTING BULL IN HIS WAR BONNET.

W M Poyer 231291
GALLION QUE
AUBERT