

The Photographic Times

VOL. XXXIX

MAY 1907

No. 5

MY WORK IN INDIAN PHOTOGRAPHY.

BY EDWARD S. CURTIS.

YOU ask me to tell you something of my work that would be of interest to photographers. I question anything in connection with it or information in regard to it being of much help to my fellow photographer, unless it would be to convince him that his life is one of comparative ease and comfort. To begin with, for every hour given to photography two must be given to the word picture part of this record of the vanishing Indian. True, many of the hours given to the writing are those of the night time, and the light is not a 32 candle power stand lamp, but most likely two or a half dozen tallow candles fastened with their own wax to a scrap of plate or grub box. The everlasting struggle to do the work, do it well and fast, is such that leisure and comfort are lost sight of. To the oft-asked question, "What camera or lens do you use," I can only reply, I couldn't tell to save my soul; it is enough for me to know that I have something that will make pictures and that it is in working order." And as to chemicals, I have almost forgotten that they are a necessary part of photography. With us it is seven days in a week, twenty-

four hours in each day and thirty-one days in most months. We sleep when we can't work, and here is one place where we are most particular. Our beds must be as comfortable as human ingenuity can make a camp bed, for while we do rest we want to rest well. Most likely the roof to our apartment is the sky blue dome, but to sleep in the open is real rest.

The field season of 1906 was nine months long, beginning in the mountains of Apacheland, with snow still in sight, and long before the season ended we were snow bound in the mountainland of the Hawalapai. The field party for the season was, firstly, —Justo, our Mexican cook; two helpers, who could best be called ethnologists, collecting the lore logic and history of the people, one of whom acted as my stenographer—and myself, I doing the photography. There being three of us at work there had to be three interpreters, which, of course, we secured from each group with which we were working. During the season we have worked with fourteen languages and no end of dialects. Our camp equipment weighing from a thousand pounds to a ton, depending on distance from a

source of supplies; in photographic and other equipment there were several $6\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$ cameras, a motion picture machine, phonograph for recording songs, a typewriter, a trunk of reference books, correspondence files covering over a year of business affairs, as being always on the move it is necessary to keep up my regular correspondence in connection with the work, its publication and the lectures all from the field. Tents, bedding, our foods, saddles, cooking outfit, four to eight horses—such was the outfit. Someone has to boss the job; usually that falls to me. Everything must be kept on the move that no time is lost. Teams have to be bought, supplies secured, both commissary and photographic, arrangements made for getting and sending mail. On long stretches the whole outfit has to be shipped. At times the nature of the country does not permit of wagon travel and a pack train has to be made up and managed, or, perhaps it is water transportation, boats to be bought or built, and when secured and loaded must be handled, be it rough or smooth water, and withal, the one thing that must never be lost sight of, the purpose of the work; a picture and word history of the Indian and his life. But at times the handling of the material side of the work almost causes one to lose sight of art and literature.

During the field season of 1905 sixty thousand miles of railroad mileage were used. The totals of 1905 are not yet made up. And then come the elements. The rains pour down. What was an arid desert when you made your evening camp is soon a lake. Perhaps in the darkness of the night you have been compelled to gather your camp equipage and carry it to higher ground; or, perhaps it is a fierce wind striking your camp, and if strong enough it will either blow the tents to the ground or whip them to

shreds. And then comes the sand storm. No horse can travel against it. If en route you can but turn your wagon to one side to furnish as much of a wind break as possible, throw a blanket over your head and wait for its passing. It may be two hours or it may be ten, and when it is passed your equipment is in sorry shape. Nothing can keep it out. Cameras, plate box, plate holders, motion machines, food—everything is sifted full of this fine, powdery sand. Hail storms will beat down on you and whip your camp into tatters. At another time it may be the heat, so intense that a furnace seems cool in comparison. I have a keen recollection of a ten day trip through the desert and mountains when each day the thermometer registered 122 or more in the shade and water was more precious than gold. And, on the other hand, it may be snow storms and cold that will cause you to forget that you were ever warm. We have just passed through one. We went into the high mountains with a hunting party of Indians. Soon the snow began to fall—and when it snows in these mountains it does that and nothing else. When the snow nearly reached our wagon hubs we decided it was time to retreat. The road, hard to find at any time, was lost in the snow. Mountain peaks and land marks were invisible in the falling, drifting, swirling mass of white. The horses floundered and fell, regained their feet and struggled on, only to give out completely and lay down in the harness. Food ran low, and we had the added misery of hunger along with bitter cold. At another time a stubborn driver rushed his four-horse team down a bank and into a freshet torrent, where, in the fragment of a minute all you could see of that wagon was its canvas top, and a muddy stream for a quarter of a mile was strewn with the wreckage. From a

half dozen cameras scarcely one could be patched up out of that wreck; and plates—well, the shortest time to get a new supply was ten days and a trip to cost hundreds of dollars. Another day the pack mule with my only camera fastened to his back slipped and rolled down the canon a mile. The camera was spread out on the mountain side seeming to be nothing but fragments. Twelve hours steady, patient work and it was patched up so it could be used. But such a sight! No camera worker before ever saw anything quite its equal. On the outside it was a bunch of ropes bound and twisted in every direction to hold it together.

All this has not happened in one season. There have been nine of them, each having its good share, and yet I have not spoken of the people with whom we have to deal. Each tribe or village is like unto no other, but all have their full share of superstition and secretiveness, to say nothing of stubbornness. Each tribe visited is a new situation to be taken up and mastered, and that quickly. Every phase of their life must be noted and, as far as possible, pictured, and the gathering of this lore, logic and myth must go hand-in-hand with the picture making, as without the knowledge of their life, ceremony, domestic, political and religious, one cannot do the picture work well.

How do I manage the portraits and the handling of the life! In every way. Conditions cannot be changed. I must fit myself to them. Some of the portraits can be made in my tent, which is a fair sized one made for photographic work. Many more are made in the open, in the soft light of the morning or the intense glare of the mid-day sun. The subject secured, it matters not the time or conditions. The picture must be made. My fine picture of Alchasa, the Apache chief,

was made in the strong light of the mid-day sun, the back ground a juniper tree. The picture of Red Cloud, the Sioux, was made in strong sunlight on the open prairie. The particularly fine one of the Jicarilla chief was also made in the strongest glare of open sun and the back-ground a red blanket. A certain fortunate picture caused the question, "How did you get that beautiful soft effect?" It is easy to answer. The picture was made in a blinding snow storm and the falling snow between the lens and the sitter caused the semi foggy effect. The results were satisfactory but the doing of it exceedingly uncomfortable.

My mood to-night seems to have been to tell of the difficulties and hardships. Do not think that this is the only side of the work. For every hour of misery I could tell you on one of delight, and the most stormy days have had glorious sun sets, and for every negative that is a disappointment there is one which is a joy, and for every page of these trials I could write you countless ones of the beauties of Indian-land and Indian life.

You may ask how long the field work will last? When the Navaho does not know the answer, he says, "Whoola," which is, perhaps, the only answer. This I do know. That for six years more the work will be driven to the limit of human endurance. After that there will be a little more leisure.

OUTLINE OF THE CURTIS PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN.

The publication will consist of twenty volumes of text, and bound in with the text of these twenty volumes will be fifteen hundred of the small pictures, each one of the fifteen hundred being a full page photogravure of the best quality. Several of the photogravures in each volume will be hand-colored plates of

ceremonial subjects. The book in size will be a page $9\frac{1}{2} \times 12\frac{1}{2}$, three hundred or more pages in each volume. The paper used will be the best quality imported hand-made paper, a paper that will be as lasting as can be made. As a supplement to the twenty volumes there will be twenty portfolios, each containing thirty-six of the large pictures 14×17 or in the complete set there will be seven hundred and twenty large pictures. These also are to be of the very best photogravure work. Every care will be taken to make the book the very finest sample of the bookmaker's art.

Mr. Frederick Webb Hodge of the Smithsonian Institution, and editor of the *American Anthropologist*, will be the editor of the work. President Theodore Roosevelt will write the Foreword Introduction. It will be published in

parts, each part being complete in itself, as it will treat of certain tribes. It is proposed in the complete work to take up all the tribes, both in pictures and in text, of our North American Indians who are yet in a primitive condition, picturing every phase of their life.

Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan's assistance in the work is in the form of an advance subscription to twenty-five sets of the work, this fund to be subject to my draft at the rate of fifteen thousand dollars a year. Most of these copies will be presented to foreign individuals and libraries. The use of this fund entails no restrictions or even suggestions in handling the work, I being simply supposed to do as I have in the past—work to the best advantage for the welfare of the work and publication.



PORTRAIT

By Studebaker