

The Chemawa American.

VOL. VI.

CHEMAWA, ORE., AUGUST 7, 1903.

NO. 43

Among the Navahos.

EMMA P. TELFORD, in The Southern Workman.

Last winter the snows came early and stayed late on the San Francisco mountains and in Grand Canyon country. The early spring brought much rain, and the hearts of the Navahos sang within them, for their flocks would once more find green pastures and sweet waters. What this means can only be appreciated by those who live in a desert land. Owing to protracted drought, the last six years in the Navaho country have been like the "lean years" of Pharaoh's dream, and this people, brave, industrious and self-reliant, have, in many cases, been brought to the very verge of starvation. For upon the welfare of their flocks hang all the profits of the Navahos.

It has grown to be the fashion among people prone to discourse volubly upon things they know very little about, to talk largely of the wealth of the Navaho—of their wide domains, their flocks and herds, until popular fancy has credit with conditions analogous to those depicted in the pastorals of Virgil—shepherds watching their flocks in beautiful pastures, surrounded by lovely scenery and passing their time under beech trees playing on pipes while, for the women,

"The looms were set, the webs
Were hung; beneath their fingers, nimbly plied,
The subtle fabrics grew; and warp and woof
Transverse, with shuttle and with stay compact
Were pressed in order fair. The toll
Itself was pleasure to the skilful hands
That knew so well their task."

This is indeed a pretty picture of Arcadia—but the Navaho would not recognize it. In his daily life, the web of fancy gives way to the colder prose of facts. Though their reservation is the largest of all of the Indian reserves, including sev-

eral million acres lying in Northern Arizona, northwestern New Mexico and southeastern Utah, most of it is volcanic land, the abomination of desolation—the painted desert, waterless, treeless, plantless, lifeless. To secure even a meager living, the Navaho must be a nomad, leading his flocks over great stretches of arid desert, his keen eye ever scanning the foot of each rising mesa—in search of some tiny water seepage that shall promise ever so scanty a supply of grass and salt-brush. When this is exhausted, on he must go, his flocks frequently being decimated in the tedious passage.

It is on this account that the government has wisely permitted the Navahos to go upon the adjoining public domains to find pasturage for their flocks. Yet even so, they have steadily decreased during the past six years. While it is difficult to get an exact estimate of their possessions—the Navahos have a deep-rooted superstition against counting their flocks, believing that he who does so will die—official reports credit them with only 500,000 head of sheep and goats as against a million head ten years ago. As property is not held in common among the Navahos, there are gradations in the social scale even as among civilized people. When a few comparatively wealthy individuals may possess large flocks, the majority will not average over a hundred head—and many have but the "one ewe lamb" or none at all. In recent years, the fleece on the Navaho sheep has not averaged more than three or four pounds each, while last year it dropped to two and a half. Sold to the traders, this brought but six cents a pound for the black and eight