

nials" among the Paiute.<sup>1</sup> This was discouraging, but not entirely convincing, and I set out once more for the west. After a few days with the Omaha and Winnebago in Nebraska, and a longer stay with the Sioux at Pine Ridge, where traces of the recent conflict were still fresh on every hand, I crossed over the mountains and finally arrived at Walker Lake reservation in Nevada.

On inquiry I learned that the messiah lived, not on the reservation, but in Mason valley, about 40 miles to the northwest. His uncle, Charley Sheep, lived near the agency, however, so I sought him out and made his acquaintance. He spoke tolerable—or rather intolerable—English, so that we were able to get along together without an interpreter, a fact which brought us into closer sympathy, as an interpreter is generally at best only a necessary evil. As usual, he was very suspicious at first, and inquired minutely as to my purpose. I explained to him that I was sent out by the government to the various tribes to study their customs and learn their stories and songs; that I had obtained a good deal from other tribes and now wanted to learn some songs and stories of the Paiute, in order to write them down so that the

<sup>1</sup> The letter is given as a sample of the information possessed by some agents in regard to the Indians in their charge:

"UNITED STATES INDIAN SERVICE,  
"Pyramid Lake, Nevada Agency, October 12, 1891.

"JAMES MOONEY, Esq.,  
"Bureau of Ethnology.

"MY DEAR SIR: Your letter of September 24 in regard to Jack Wilson, the 'Messiah,' at hand and duly noted. In reply will say that his Indian name is Ko-wee-jow ('Big belly'). I do not know as it will be possible to get a photo of him. I never saw him or a photo of him. He works among the whites about 40 miles from my Walker Lake reserve, and never comes near the agency when I visit it. My headquarters are at Pyramid lake, about 70 miles north of Walker. I am pursuing the course with him of nonattention or a silent ignoring. He seems to think, so I hear, that I will arrest him should he come within my reach. I would give him no such notoriety. He, like all other prophets, has but little honor in his own country. He has been visited by delegations from various and many Indian tribes, which I think should be discouraged all that is possible. Don't know what the 'Smoholler' religion, you speak of, is. He speaks English well, but is not educated. He got his doctrine in part from contact, living in and with a religious family. There are neither ghost songs, dances, nor ceremonials among them about my agencies. Would not be allowed. I think they died out with 'Sitting Bull.' This is the extent of the information I can give you.

"Very respectfully, yours,

C. C. WARNER, *United States Indian Agent.*"

Here is an agent who has under his special charge and within a few miles of his agency the man who has created the greatest religious ferment known to the Indians of this generation, a movement which had been engrossing the attention of the newspaper and magazine press for a year, yet he has never seen him; and while the Indian Office, from which he gets his commission, in a praiseworthy effort to get at an understanding of the matter, is sending circular letters broadcast to the western agencies, calling for all procurable information in regard to the messiah and his doctrines, he "pursues the course of nonattention." He has never heard of the Smohalla religion of the adjacent northern tribes, although the subject is repeatedly mentioned in the volumes of the Indian Commissioner's report from 1870 to 1879, which were, or should have been, on a shelf in the office in which the letter was written. He asserts that there are no ghost songs, dances, or ceremonies among his Indians, although these things were going on constantly and had been for at least three years, and only a short time before a large delegation from beyond the mountains had attended a Ghost dance near Walker lake which lasted four days and nights. Chapman in 1890, and the author in 1891, saw the cleared grounds with the willow frames where these dances were being held regularly at short intervals. I found the ghost songs familiar to all the Indians with whom I talked, and had no special trouble to find the messiah and obtain his picture. The peaceful character of the movement is sufficiently shown by the fact that while the eastern papers are teeming with rumors of uprising and massacre, and troops are being hurried to the front, the agent at the central point of the disturbance seems to be unaware that there is anything special going on around him and can "silently ignore" the whole matter.