HOPI INDIANS—GENTLE FOLK: A PEOPLE WITHOUT NEED OF COURTS, JAILS OR ASYLUMS: BY LOUIS AKIN

In the vague North of Arizona, beyond that clean-cut horizon of keenest blue, and yet two days’ travel through the Painted Desert—a spot that has felt less of the White Man’s influence than any inhabited place in America—lies the land where the Hopi and his ancestors have dwelt in contented independence for unknown centuries; where ruin upon ruin, older than Egypt, verifies the oral traditions of archaic times, and where to-day these good people live, love and labor in ways but little changed from the utmost simplicity of prehistoric ages.

To those few in the outer world who ever heard of them at all they are mostly known as Moquis—this through the publicity gained by their annual Snake Dance. But Moqui or Moki is a misnomer. Hopi is how they would have us know them—because it is right, and because it means something to them and is justly symbolic of their racial characteristics. Peaceful—gentle is its significance—and the worst word they know to apply to an offender is ka-hopi—the negative of Hopi—or pas-ka-hopi, the superlative of this; and anyone as bad as this is hopeless. Moki in their language means dead, and the accepted theory of its first application to them as a tribal name is that the Navajo, their long-time enemy, in a spirit of derision so called them on account of their distaste for warfare, and love of a quiet-stay-at-home life. According to the Navajo code they were “dead ones.” From the Navajo, whose country entirely surrounds the Hopi, the early traders and settlers acquired the word Moki before ever seeing the Hopi; and from the trader it easily passed without question to the Government representatives, so it now stands as the official appellation in the Indian Department. But ask a Hopi if he is a Moqui—his quick resentment will be convincing enough.

The Hopi Reservation, about fifty miles square, is entirely within the boundaries of the great Navajo Reservation, but under separate administration. There are seven villages through which two thousand Indians are scattered. The first faint view of Oraibi, the largest village, is gained five or six miles down the trail, where by close attention the block-like houses can be picked out and distinguished above the like-formed rock of the mesa which they crown.

In following the horse trail directly, the view grows plainer and
MR. AKIN IN INDIAN DRESS AT THE DOOR OF HIS HOPI HOUSE
SQUASH BLOSSOM HAIR-DRESSING OF THE HOPI GIRLS—THE BUD, FULL-BLOWN FLOWER AND SEED POD, FOR THE YOUNG GIRL, DEBUTANTE AND MATRON
A HOPI MATRON PREPARING CORN FOR THE MILL STONE
then is lost, as the way winds closer, up through scrubby peach orchards and melon patches, past a deep, Oriental-looking spring, then squarely up a narrow, precipitous passage where your pony climbs like the goat he has to be, and out on the summit full into the village street. At once everybody in town knows there are strangers within the walls. It isn’t wireless—it’s dogs.

BAHANA (White Man) has no reason to complain of his reception, for the Hopi has a strong, fine sense of hospitality. Appear at his door, and a courteous form of welcome awaits you. He bids you enter, expresses ‘thanks that you have come,” shows you to a seat and then adds a phrase to the effect that “you are welcome to remain forever.” The mother or daughter brings food and you eat whether it looks inviting or not, if you’d retain their utmost goodwill and respect. But it’s all good, take my word for it, and don’t wait for knives and forks; it’s good form to dip or gouge into anything with your own original tools. And then, when you go, you are asked most cordially to “come again very soon.”

My first visit was on a flat hunting expedition, accompanied by youthful Mah-si’-wa, who could speak a little English, and the first place I entered was the one I wanted and finally secured. It was the upper floor of a two-story house, occupied then by the family, but Nav-ah-hong-a-ni-ma was willing to rent it out and move downstairs, as it was nearing autumn when they all move into the lower stories for more warmth. So, upon my quickly agreeing to pay her seventy-five cents a week for two or three weeks—all she asked and which astonished her, for she had expected me to offer her twenty-five cents, and have an hour’s joyous haggling before coming to an agreement at fifty—she moved her few chattels out and swept the floor. The room was about eighteen by thirty-five feet, a door at each end and a couple of small windows of one pane of glass set directly into adobe. The front ten feet of the floor was some two feet above the rest, with stone steps to reach it, and that higher part half partitioned off by a low wall part way, giving it a gallery effect. In three corners were tiny, quaint fireplaces, one a sunken oven, and in the other corner the mealng stones, set in a shallow trough in the adobe floor with a wee, unglazed window beside them. A broad, low banquette on one side offered a cozy couching place with another half partition at one end,
giving it semi-privacy. Then there were sundry cubby holes in the walls and a couple of storage bins which furnished seating space. The stone walls were smoothly plastered with adobe by hand, in a way that leaves no square corners or hard, straight lines, and all but the floor was neatly whitewashed with pure, white clay.

Hung to pegs near the ceiling, and forming almost a frieze around the room, were bunches of dried herbs, red peppers, dried muskmelon, dried boiled sweet-corn-on-the-cob, neat packages of corn-husks cured for various uses, and ears of choicest corn of many colors for next year’s seeding. All this I asked her to leave, for I liked it, and also I kindly permitted her to leave a large pile of cool, ripe watermelons in one corner. Then she brought water in a wikurra, I bought a load of scrubby fagots that Sah-ko’y-um-na had just brought in, unpacked my few food supplies from the traders, and my blankets and painting duffle, and was at home. “At home” is correct. That first day was my reception day though no cards were sent out. Nearly all the men in the village, some of the women and a few of the bolder or more curious children came. All were interested to know what object I could have in coming there and settling in such an apparently permanent way in the midst of them.

These gentle folk are very susceptible to gentle treatment and it wasn’t long till I began to feel highly gratified to see that I was winning their confidence to an unexpected degree, even in the conservative faction. Yes, even the children, playing about the streets in their little bronze pelts, soon reached a point of confidence where they wouldn’t run screaming for home or the nearest shelter when I appeared, and eventually the time came when they’d run joyously to me, calling me by name—my Hopi name—instead of scattering; then, indeed, was my pride unspeakable. The ambitions of a few recent school teachers to augment their roster had led them to drag their nets very closely for kindergartners, and the unnecessarily brutal means they employed were quite truly enough to justify all mothers and weaned infants in their terror of a Bahana.

M y two or three weeks lengthened into months, and yet into nearly a year, before I finally jogged down the trail for the last time toward the outer world, with a very small roll of canvases, but a great wealth of happy memories; for I didn’t do
much actual work, the conditions were against it. There was too
much of living interest in this new world that I found myself a part
of. How could I paint when Ke-wan-i-um'-ti-wa came to spend an
afternoon in my education, making me get up and "act out" things
to be sure I had my lessons right? How could I paint when an old
grandmother wanted me to see by every detail how much better than
modern methods was the good old way of building up the clay for a
piece of pottery? Or, when Pu-hu'-nim-ka, with a tiny yucca-fiber
brush in her deft, tapering fingers, permitted me to watch her pencill-
ing the old, intricate design on one of her gracefully modeled bowls?
Or, when Ku-ku-ti'-ti-wa, the lame boy, came to borrow tools and get
advice in fashioning a finger-ring of lead, set with a rough, blue stone,
the model for one he planned to make in silver and turquoise when
he had acquired the necessary tools and knowledge for that advanced
work? How could I paint when there was a rabbit drive to join,
or the spinning "bee" for the bridal robes of some good friend's
daughter, or a ceremonial foot-race, or when our Katcinas were going
to Shungopavi to dance, to show "those Shungopavis" how easy it is
to make the rain come when a people have superior knowledge and
stand high with the Cloud Spirits, or when there was a nine days'
cer-
emony on at home and never a minute of it, day or night, that hadn't
some real interest in it.

So I didn't paint and there are no regrets. When old Ho-ve'-ima,
the crier,—he of the great voice—stood on the highest house-top
and announced that on the third day all were invited to come to the
fields of one who was too old and feeble to get his planting done
alone, and help him to finish it, it was worth more to me to join the
groups that trailed down into the plains before sunrise and see two
weeks' work done in a few hours by people who live very near to the
Golden Rule. And the charm of it is that such communal work
is done with the utmost cheerfulness; song and laughter are every-
where, and when the task is done there's always a big dinner ready
at the home of the one benefited, in which also the woman of the
house has had the co-operation of her friends. Such occasions come
often, as when a man wishes to start a new blanket. If he were to spin
all the yarn alone he'd spend weeks at it; but let him invite his
friends to come to a kiva on a certain day to help him, and presto! all
the yarn is spun in no time, everybody has a good, social time and a
dinner, and he is ready to set up his loom next day. An odd feature of Hopi life is this, that the men do all the spinning, weaving, embroidering of ceremonial robes, knitting of leggings and the sewing of the garments made popular by the advent of calicoes and velvets. This, too, in addition to cultivating the fields, herding the flocks, gathering the fire-wood and taking their part in the many ceremonies. So they are a busy people.

The Hopi were the original weavers of the Southwest and taught the Navajo the craft that has made him famous—“her,” rather, for it’s the Navajo women who do their weaving, the men devoting their time and energies toward the business end, disposing of the women’s products at the trading posts. Very few specimens of the Hopi’s exquisite work reach civilization, for nearly everything they make is for their own use. The women of the tribe are most conservative and adhere to the native dress woven in one piece, folded, laced together with colored yarns and belted in with a long woven sash of bright hue. It is black, a diagonal weave, with a ten inch border at top and bottom of dark blue in an embossed diamond pattern. This is caught over the right shoulder, leaving the left bare, and they generally wear a mantle of a smaller blanket, or of calico, caught over the left shoulder and flowing free behind. With this arrangement of costume and their own odd method of hair-dressing it would be a long trip to find anything more picturesque than a group of women and girls gathered for their daily trading bee and “mothers’ meeting” on a kiva roof, or on a house terrace, weaving their bright-colored trays and lunching, or particularly on the house tops, viewing a “dance” in the plaza, when each one wears her best. At such times the unmarried girls are supposed to retire modestly to their homes before the close of the ceremony that they may not have to mingle with the dispersing crowd.

Every man is an artist unto himself, in a way, in Hopi-land, for every man has his part in religious rites some time each year, which requires of him the painting of various symbolic designs; so every man is able to go out and gather from Mother Earth his own necessary colors, grind and prepare them, make his brushes of yucca-fiber, and finish his work neatly and artistically.

Then, too, they make for one festal occasion many Katcina dolls,
MARKET PLACE IN THE HEART OF A HOPI VILLAGE
OFFERING SACRED CORN MEAL TO THE RISING SUN IN GRAND CAÑON
"THE SPIRIT HOME OF THE HOPI IS GRAND CANON"
THE HOPI WERE THE ORIGINAL WEAVERS OF THE SOUTHWEST

MUSIC IS A PART OF ALL THEIR RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES
carved from cottonwood in very simple forms that have come down to them as correct from the days when stone and bone tools superinduced simplicity of treatment, then painted in the detail of costume of some particular variety of Katchina. There are about two hundred and fifty separate and distinct Katchina personages, each of whom has some special influence with some of the various Elemental Spirits. In the Katchina ceremonies, which last all through the planting and growing season, these mythical beings are impersonated by variously masked and costumed groups of dancers who, for the time, lose their own identity and are consecrated to the rites of the occasion and spend days in song and prayer for the successful growth and maturity of the crops. These dolls are given to the little girls, with decorated bows and arrows for the boys, on the last morning of the Powamu ceremony which marks the opening of the Katchina season in February. More than mere gift, they symbolize the good-will of the Katchina represented and are more highly prized as blessings than as toys.

In all forms of craftmanship the Hopi excels; although the Navajo has practised silversmithing a hundred years or more, getting it from the Mexicans, the few Hopi who have taken it up recently are proving themselves vastly superior workers. Their combined artistic and mechanical sense enables them to provide pieces that are without crudeness, yet show strong individuality in form and finish. When Lo-mah'-wi-na of Shungopavi finishes a ring or bracelet, it isn't like anything anyone ever saw anywhere, and it is perfect!

In pottery, which only the women work in, the lines and proportions couldn't be improved on by a hair's breadth, while the composition and balance of the painted decoration on a pot or bowl are entirely satisfying, even though we haven't the slightest idea of the meaning of any one of the endless variety of graceful designs, nearly all of which have religious significance. Their drawing is developed to a state of finished conventionality and symbolism that is beyond the comprehension of a Bahana. In basketry their productions are not wonderful. Pottery takes the place that highly finished basketry fills in other tribes. So they only make the flat tray of twigs, generally with a symbolic design, perhaps a Katchina, woven into it in
the soft-toned colors of their native dyes. These they use for any household purpose that a loosely woven tray will serve.

It would seem as though there is hardly an act in the day’s work or play that hasn’t some religious association, and it is all sincere to the very utmost, not thoughtless form. When a man smokes a cigarette or pipe, each puff of smoke is a cloud symbol and implies a prayer for rain—and he means it. When a man brings home from the hunt a rabbit or two, his wife or mother takes them at the door, lays them on the floor, gets a pinch of sacred meal and breathes a prayer of gratitude while scattering it over the game—and she means it. It is distinctly a religion of environment. As life and happiness depend upon the success of the agricultural crops, each of the elements that has any part in their germination, growth and maturity is represented by a spirit to whom supplication is made to that end in many ways, all with the utmost fervor and sincerity. They do not recognize one Great Spirit, but there is the “Sun Spirit,” the “Moon Spirit,” “Cloud,” “Thunder,” “Lightning,” “Wind,” and “Fire” spirits, “Spirits of Germination,” of the “Underworld” who keeps the springs running, and yet a few more. At any rate they live it day by day, and it has been effective enough to keep them a gentle, peaceful, honest, industrious people, with a pure blood and no necessity for courts of justice, jails or orphan asylums for untold ages.

In all my time there I never saw the remotest sign of a quarrel between men, women, or children, and though my house was open most of the time and littered over with things that every visitor coveted, I never had a theft but through one man. There must be exceptions to even the Golden Rule. He got away with a pipe and some silver buttons once when posing for me, and though I forbade him coming to my house and denounced him in well-defined terms, he came cheerfully along just the same, bearing no malice for my harsh words.

THE Paradise or Spirit House of the Hopi is in Grand Cañon, and there is sent, during certain important ceremonies, a messenger priest who makes a votive deposit in the shrine erected there, tenders a prayer offering of sacred corn meal to the rising sun and carries back with him certain waters and herbs for use in further rites. Shrines are everywhere in the vicinity of Hopi towns. Some are shrines to distant mountains, rivers, the ocean, some to prehistoric
or traditional homes of ancestors or clans, and in nearly every field
is some manner of shrine in which to deposit especial prayer offerings
prepared by the priests for the purpose, which the fortunate ones
proudly carry to the fields with perfect confidence in their efficacy.
The indoor religious ceremonies are held in underground chambers
known as kivas, of which there are fourteen in Oraibi. Each man
belongs to some one of the fraternities occupying these kivas.

There are songs for every work-a-day act or occupation, for any
mood, for any weather. It may be Nah-si'-kwap-ti-wa, off before
sunrise on his old burro after a load of scrubby wood, from six or
eight miles back on the higher mesas, whose vocal expression of the
joy of living comes drifting back to you in the gray dawn, or it may
be a shepherd on his early way to the corrals, or two or three young
gods in breech-clouts, astride one burro, “pegging it” toward the
fields. It may be a group of little animate bronzes playing in the
sand, or Mrs. Masho'-hong-wa crooning over her youngest, or per-
haps an ardent youth who stands alone and stalks out on the rocks
towards the sunset, yet within good hearing of “Her” who is of a
bevy of maidens taking the twilight hour away from the corn-grind-
ing. It may even be Her back later at her task where she spends so
many tedious hours, but always there is song.

Then if it really be Her, back at the mealings stones again, and the
fire has flickered low, and her weird song comes haltingly, inter-
mittently, perhaps even ceases, you may have an idea that a lithe,
blanketed young form has quietly appeared at the tiny open window
just by her side, and though the meal must be ground, what he has to
whisper may be too interesting to lose a breath of.

But always there is someone, somewhere, singing at her grinding.