

SARAH WARNER BROOKS

ALAMO RANCH: A STORY
OF NEW MEXICO

Sarah Brooks

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TO LEON

Across the silence that between us stays,
Speak! I should hear it from God's outmost sun,
Above Earth's noise of idle blame and praise, —
The longed-for whisper of thy dear "Well done!"

CHAPTER I

It is autumn; and the last week in November. In New Mexico, this land of sunshine, the season is now as kindly as in the early weeks of our Northern September.

To-day the sky is one cloudless arch of sapphire! The light breeze scarce ruffles a leaf of the tall alamo, the name tree of this ranch. Here any holding bigger than a kitchen garden is known as a ranch. The alamo, Spanish for poplar, lends here and there its scant, stiff shade to this roomy adobe dwelling, with its warm southern frontage and half-detached wings. Behind the house irregular out-buildings are scattered about.

A commodious corral, now the distinguished residence of six fine Jersey cows, lies between the house and the orchard, – a not over-flourishing collection of peach, apricot, and plum trees.

Here and there may be seen wide patches of kitchen garden, carefully intersected by irrigating ditches.

Near and afar, wide alfalfa fields with their stiff aftermath stretch away to the very rim of the mesa, where the cotton-tail makes his home, and sage-brush and mesquite strike root in the meagre soil. Cones of alfalfa hay stacked here and there outline themselves like giant beehives against the soft blue sky; and over all lies the sunny silence of a cloudless afternoon with its smiling westering sun.

Basking in this grateful warmth, their splint arm-chairs idly tilted against the house-front, the boarders look with sated invalid eyes upon this gracious landscape.

Alamo Ranch is a health resort. In this thin, dry air of Mesilla Valley, high above the sea level, the consumptive finds his Eldorado. Hither, year by year, come these foredoomed children of men to fight for breath, putting into this struggle more noble heroism and praiseworthy courage than sometimes goes to victory in battle-fields.

Of these combatants some are still buoyed by the hope of recovery; others are but hopeless mortals, with the single sad choice of eking out existence far from friends and home, or returning to native skies, there to throw up hands in despair and succumb to the foe.

Sixteen miles away the Organ Mountains – seeming, in this wonderfully clear atmosphere, within but a stone's throw – loom superbly against the cloudless sky; great hills of sand are these, surmounted by tall, serrated peaks of bare rock, and now taking on their afternoon array in the ever-changing light, rare marvels of shifting color, – amethyst and violet, rosy pink, creamy gold, and dusky purple.

The El Paso range rises sombrely on the gray distance, and on every hand detached sugar-loaf peaks lend their magnificence to the grand mesa-range that cordons the Mesilla Valley.

And now, out on the mesa, at first but a speck between the loungers on the piazza and the distant mountain view, a single pedestrian, an invalid sportsman, comes in sight. As he nears the ranch with the slowed step of fatigue, he is heartening himself by the way with a song. When the listeners hear the familiar tune, – it is "Home, Sweet Home," – one of them rallying his meagre wind whistles a faint accompaniment to the chorus. It is not a success; and with a mirthless laugh, the whistler abandons his poor attempt, and, with the big lump in his throat swelling to a sob, rises from his chair and goes dejectedly in. A sympathetic chord thrills along the tilted piazza chairs.

The discomfited whistler is but newly arrived at Alamo; and his feeble step and weary, hollow cough predict that the poor fellow's journey will not take him back to the "Sweet Home" of the song, but rather to the uncharted country.

And now the invalid sportsman steps cheerily on the piazza.

"Here, you lazy folks," mocks he, holding high his well-filled game-bag, "behold the pigeon stew for your supper!" And good-naturedly hailing a Mexican chore-boy, lazily propped by a neighboring poplar trunk, he cries, "Catch!" and deftly tossing him the game (pigeons from the mesa)

goes in to put away his gun. When later he returns to the piazza, bathed and refreshed, it is as if, in a room dim-lit by tallow candles, the gas had suddenly been turned on to a big chandelier.

Seating himself in the vacant arm-chair, he fills a briar-wood pipe. Some of the loungers do likewise; and now, while they smoke and chat, look at the new-comer, Leonard Starr. Though not robust, he has the substantial mien and bearing of one who finds it good to live, and makes those about him also find it good. It is not long before most of these dispirited loungers are laughing at his lively stories and sallies, and cheerily matching them with their own.

Well is it for this troublous world of ours that some of its children are "born to turn the sunny side of things to human eyes."

CHAPTER II

It is the middle of December; the Alamo boarders are now well arrived.

First and foremost, Mr. John Morehouse – the one lion of the ranch – makes his bow. He is conspicuous for his able research in Archæology, and among his fellow boarders is familiarly known as "the Antiquary."

Mr. Morehouse has come to New Mexico in the interest of science; he is not, however, a mere dry-as-dust collector of knowledge, and is very much inclined to unbend himself to the lighter moods and pursuits of his less scholarly fellow-men.

This well-groomed, handsome man of forty is James Morley of Bangor.

He has come to try this healing air for a slight, but persistent, lung affection.

Mr. Morley is known to be a man of means, with all the advantages thus implied; but all the same, he is given to railing at most things under the sun; hence by the boarders he is surreptitiously dubbed "the Grumbler." Mr. Morley's growl is a foregone conclusion, and one may safely reckon on his bark; but as for his bite, it is simply nowhere.

Already he has manifested a most considerate kindness for this gray-eyed little lady from Marblehead, Miss Mattie Norcross, – a sweet-mannered, quiet gentlewoman, who is currently reported as scant of filthy lucre, and hence compelled to content herself with a cramped, inexpensive bedroom for herself and her invalid sister, who has one hopelessly diseased lung. This cheery-faced Irishman, who with his shy little wife is, for a stubborn bronchial trouble, making the grand tour of the world's health resorts, and is now trying New Mexico, is, strange as it may seem, a Methodist minister. His name is Patrick Haley. It may be said of Mr. Haley that he has the genial temperament indigenous to Green Erin, and he has already won golden opinions at Alamo Ranch by the considerate brevity of his grace before meat.

Among the invalids attended by their wives are Mr. Bixbee, from Ohio, and Mr. Fairlee, from New York City.

Mr. Bixbee has been bidden by his medical dictator to repair his damaged vitality by rest and nourishing food. It is predicted that this surfeited "lunger," in escaping his Scylla of consumption, bids fair to strand upon the Charybdis of liver complaint, since Mrs. Bixbee, in her wifely zeal, not only plies him all day long with lunches, but makes night hideous by the administration of raw eggs throughout its drowsy hours.

Mr. Roger Smith, an over-worked Harvard athlete, is taking as a restorative a lazy winter in this restful land. He has also other irons in the fire, of which, later, we shall hear more. Roger Smith is known in Boston society as one having heaps of money, but badly off for pedigree. All the same, he is, in manner and appearance, a gentleman, and has distinctly the hall-mark of Beacon Hill. He is here known as the "Harvard man."

Also, among the sound-lunged invalids, is Mr. Harry Warren, a brilliant Chicago journalist. Mr. Warren is taking a vacation in Mesilla Valley, where he is said to be collecting material for future articles, and possibly for a book.

The Browns have also two table-boarders from Boston, – Miss Paulina Hemmenschaw and her beautiful niece, Louise, a superbly healthy brunette. Their friend, Mr. Henry Hilton, during an absence abroad, has lent for the winter to these ladies his toy ranch, with its aesthetically fashioned dwelling-house.

The Hemmenshaws dine and sup at Alamo Ranch, and the aunt, a cooking-school graduate, is known to make at Hilton Ranch for herself and niece wonderful blazer breakfasts, consisting mainly of dishes new-fangled of name, and eminently trying to mortal digestion. There are, besides, some half-dozen male lungers unaccompanied by friends; and two impecunious invalids to whom the kind-

hearted landlord, George Brown, allows bed and board in return for light-choring about the ranch. These latter are democratically counted in with the dining-room boarders.

Leon Starr, by common consent the "star boarder" of Alamo Ranch, has already been presented to the reader. He has taken the large two-windowed room on the ground-floor commanding a glorious view of the distant Organ Mountains. After getting his breath in this unaccustomed altitude, Leon's next care has been for the depressed lungers who daily gather on the boarding-house piazza and wonder if life is still worth living. To get them outside themselves by cheery good-fellowship, to perform for them little homely services, not much in the telling, but making their lives a world easier, has been a part of his method for uplifting their general tone.

Of an inventive turn of mind, and an amateur mechanic, he has brought with him a tiny tool chest; and it soon becomes the family habit to look to Leon Starr for general miscellaneous tinkering, as the mending of door and trunk locks, the regulating watches and clocks, the adjustment of the bedevilled sewing-machine of their good landlady, and the restoration of harmonious working to all disgruntled mechanical gear, from garret to cellar. He it is who, on rainy days, manufactures denim clothes-bags for clumsy-fingered fellows; who fashions from common canes gathered on banks of irrigating ditches, photo-frames for everybody, and shows them how to arrange the long cane tassels with decorative effect above door and window, and how to soften the glare of kerosene lamps by making for them relieving shades of rose-colored paper.

Pessimistic indeed is that lunger who, succumbing to the charm of this gracious nature, does not feel the cheery lift in his heavy atmosphere.

From the landlord and his wife, both worn by the strain of doing their best for chronically discontented people, down to Fang Lee, the Chinese chef, Dennis Kearney, the table-waiter, the over-worked Mexican house-maids, and the two native chore-boys – one and all rise up to call the star boarder blessed.

Out on the mesa the air is finer and brighter than on the lower plane of the ranch, and full of the life and stir of moving things, – quail, rabbits, and doves.

Leon had at first found the thin air of this altitude somewhat difficult; but since time and use have accustomed his lungs to these novel atmospheric conditions, shooting on the mesa has become a part of his daily programme, and his quail, rabbits, and pigeons prove a toothsome contribution to the already excellent ranch table.

A small, shy Mexican herd-boy, pasturing his lean goats on the mesa, gradually makes friends with the tall, kindly sportsman. As they have between them but these two mutually intelligible words, *bueno* (good) and *mucho calor* (very warm), their conversation is circumscribed. Kind deeds are, however, more to the point than words, and go without the saying; and when Leon instructed the ragged herd-boy in the use of his bow, and made and weighted his arrows for him, he *understood*, and became his devoted henchman, following in his path all through the week-day tramps, and on Sundays coming to the ranch with clean face and hands to adore his fetich, and watch, with admiring eyes, his novel works and ways.

CHAPTER III

After a protracted interval of tranquil sunshine, a stormy wind came blustering from the west, bringing to Mesilla Valley, in its wintry train, sunless days, light flurries of snow, and general dreariness.

The boarders, weather-bound and dull, grew sullenly mutinous; and on the third of these stormy days, gathering in the ranch parlor after the mid-day meal, their discontent found vent in banning right and left this "land of sun, silence, and adobe."

"Beastly weather!" muttered the Grumbler, drawing into the stove with a discontented shiver.

"A precious sample, this, of your fine climate, Brown," jeered Bixbee, turning mockingly to the disheartened landlord, who, reckless of expense, commanded of the chore-boy fresh relays of fuel, and incontinently crammed the parlor air-tight, already red-hot.

"I say, fellows," drolled the Harvard man, "let's make tracks for Boston, and round up the winter with furnace heat and unlimited water privileges, as the house-broker has it."

"And with cut-throat plumbers thrown in," suggested the Grumbler with a malicious grin.

"See here, you folks, draw it mild," laughed the star boarder, crossing the room with a finger between the leaves of a volume which he had been reading by the dim afternoon light of this lowering day. "Here, now, is something that fits your case to a T. Let me read you how they doctored your complaint in these parts, æons before you were born."

"Anything for a change," muttered Bixbee, and, with the general consent, Leon read the following:

"When the people came out of the cold, dark womb of the underworld, then the great sun rose in the heavens. In it dwelt Payatuma, making his circuit of the world in a day and a night. He saw that the day was light and warm, the night dark and cold. Hence there needed to be both summer and winter people.

"He accordingly apportioned some of each to every tribe and clan, and thus it is down to the present day. Then those above (that is, the Sun-father and the Moon-mother), mindful lest the people on their long journey to the appointed abiding-place succumb to weariness and fall by the way, made for them a koshare, a delight-maker. His body was painted in diagonal sections of black and white, and his head, in lieu of the regulation feather-decorations, was fantastically arrayed in withered corn-leaves.

"This koshare began at once to dance and tumble. Then the people laughed, and were glad. And ever from that day, in their wanderings in search of a satisfactory settling-place in the solid centre of the big weary world, the koshare led them bravely and well.

"He it was who danced and jested to make happiness among the people. His it was to smile on the planted maize till it sprouted and flowered in the fertile bottoms, to beam joyously on the growing fruit, that it might ripen in its season.

"From that day there have been delight-makers in all the Pueblo tribes. The koshare became in time with them an organization, as the Free-masons, or the Knights of Pythias, with us. This necessity, we are told, arose from the fact that among the Pueblos there were summer people who enjoy the sunshine, and winter people, – people who determinedly prefer to live in the dark and cold."

"Is it not so," said Leon, turning down a leaf and closing his book, "with every people on the face of the earth?

"Is not the 'delight-maker,' – the koshare, – under various names and guises, still in demand? It has struck me," continued he, looking quizzically at this disgruntled assemblage, "that the koshare might be an acceptable addition to our despondent circle."

"Amen!" fervently responded the Methodist minister.

"Right you are," said the Harvard man. "Write me as one who approves the koshare!"

"Yes! yes!" eagerly exclaimed approving voices. "Let us have the koshare here and at once!"

"A capital move," said Miss Paulina Hemmenschaw (born and reared in the climatic belt of clubdom, and regent of a Chapter of Daughters of the Revolution). "Let us have a Koshare Club."

"Good!" echoed Mrs. Fairlee, among her intimates surnamed "the Pourer," because of her amiable readiness to undertake for her friends the helpful office that among afternoon tea-circles has been distinguished by that name. "We might give afternoon teas to the members."

"And why not have recitations, with humorous selections?" bashfully suggested the gray-eyed school-mistress, who rejoiced in a fine-toned voice and in a diploma from the School of Oratory.

"Yes, indeed; and music, acting, and dancing, and all manner of high jinks," exclaimed Miss Louise, who, an accomplished musician, and distinguished for her amateur acting, with her superb health and unfailing flow of spirits, might be counted in as a born koshare.

"And we might unite improvement with diversion, and have, now and then, a lecture, to give interest to our club," suggested Mrs. Bixbee; and here she looked significantly at Mr. Morehouse, "the Antiquary," who as a lecturer was not unknown to fame.

"Lectures," observed the Minister, "though not strictly kosharean, would be highly entertaining, and we can, no doubt, count upon our friend, Mr. Morehouse, to give us the result of some of his research in Mexican Antiquities."

The Antiquary, with a smile, accepted the part assigned him by his fellow-boarder. Here the boarders went to supper, after which the more sleepy sought their beds. The evening blew stormily in; but, gathered about the centre table in the warm parlor, the leading spirits of Alamo Ranch bade the storm go by, while they inaugurated the Club of The New Koshare.

The star boarder was chosen president. The Minister was elected vice-president, Miss Paulina secretary, and the Harvard man treasurer. These preliminaries well arranged, a programme was voted on, and by general approval carried.

Mrs. Fairlee – the Pourer – was to give to the club-members a weekly afternoon tea. An entertainment open to the entire household was, on every Thursday evening, to be given in the ranch dining-room by the Koshare, consisting of music, tableaux, and recitations. A shooting-match, under the direction of Leon, was to come off weekly on the grounds of the establishment. There should be among the clubbists a fund collected for magazines; and on fortnightly Saturday evenings Mr. Morehouse promised to give them lectures, the result of his antiquarian researches in Mexico, New and Old; and during this course papers and talks relating to this subject should supplement his own.

"The Pueblo," commented the Grumbler, "would not have found magazines strikingly kosharean; let us by all means have them," and suiting deed to word, he subscribed to the book-fund on the spot, and paid surreptitiously the subscription of the little school-ma'am, who had previously withdrawn in the interest of her invalid sister.

In this fashion was inaugurated "The New Koshare" of Mesilla Valley; thereafter the Hemmenschaws bundled themselves in winter wraps and, handed into their vehicle by the Harvard man, set out in the storm for their ride to Hilton Ranch, and the Koshare betook themselves to rest.

CHAPTER IV

On the morrow the sun shone warm and bright, and on the mesa, and on all the desert-stretches of mesquite and sage-brush, on the broad alfalfa fields and outlying acres of Alamo Ranch, there was no longer a flake of snow.

Early in this sunny day the star boarder and the Pourer, driven by a leisurely chore-boy, might have been seen taking their way to Las Cruces, the nearest village and postal centre, intent on the procurement of sundry wafers, biscuit, and other edibles pertaining to an afternoon tea.

El Paso, the Texan border-town, some forty miles distant, is properly the emporium of that region. Between it and Las Cruces lies a stretch of desert more barrenly forlorn than the Long Island pine-lands, since it is totally void of forest growth, and has but here and there a sprinkle of mesquite-bushes about three feet in height, the rest being bare sand-ridges.

At El Paso one may ride in street cars, luxuriate in rain-proof dwellings, lighted by electricity, and pretty with lawns and flower-pots. But even at its best, modern civilization, with its push and bustle, ill becomes the happy-go-lucky native Mexican sunning himself in lazy content against the adobe of his shiftily built dwelling.

In a land of well-nigh perpetual blue sky, why need mortal man scramble to make hay while the sun shines? Yesterday has already taken care of itself. To-day is still here, and always there is *mañana*— to-morrow.

As for our own upstart civilization, in this clime of ancient Pueblo refinements one must own that it takes on the color of an impertinence, and as incongruously exhibits itself as a brand-new patch on a long-worn garment.

But to return to Las Cruces, which is "fearfully and wonderfully made." To look at the houses one might well fancy that the pioneer settlers had folded their hands and prayed for dwellings, and when the answering shower of mud and adobe fell, had contentedly left it where it stuck. All these structures are one-storied, and square-built; each has its one door, a window or two, and a dumpy roof, fashioned for the most part of wattles, for, as it seldom rains here, the Las Crucean has no troublesome prejudice in favor of water-tight roofs. When the sun shines he is all right; and when it rains, he simply moves from under the drip. Here, among confectionery that had long since outlived its desirability, among stale baker's cookies and flinty ginger snaps, the Koshare commissariat foraged discouragedly for the afternoon tea.

Duly supplied with these time-honored sweets, Leon and the Pourer, thus indifferently provisioned, turned their faces homeward, at such moderate pace as seemed good in the eyes of an easy-going Mexican pony and his lazy Indian driver.

On the afternoon of that day Mrs. Bixbee, in her airy bed-chamber, where the folding-bed in the day-time masqueraded as a black walnut bookcase, gave the first Koshare afternoon tea.

Mrs. Fairlee poured from a real Russian Samovar brought over from the Hilton Ranch for this grand occasion. Somewhat to the general surprise, the Grumbler made his bow to the hostess in evening clothes, and though not exuberantly Koshare, he was in an unwontedly gracious mood; partaking with polite zest of the stale chocolates, tough cookies, and flinty ginger snaps; munching long-baked Albert biscuit; serenely bolting puckery Oolong tea; and even handing the cups, – large and substantial ones, kindly furnished from their landlady's pantry, – and commending their solidity and size as far preferable to the Dresden and Japanese "thimbles" commonly appearing on afternoon tea-tables. As for the Pourer, it must be recorded that her grace, facility, and charm of manner gave even stone china tea-cups an air of distinction, and lent to Oolong tea and stale cakes a flavor of refinement. It was on Monday that this function came off successfully.

The next Koshare festivity in regular order was the shooting-match.

Leon, who had inherited from some Nimrod of his race, long since turned to dust, that *true eye* and steady hand which make gunning a success, was here master of ceremonies as well as contributor of prizes.

The first of these, a pair of gold sleeve-links, he, himself, easily won, and subsequently donated to Dennis the dudish table-waiter. Of the five prizes, two others were won by the two impecunious lungers, one by the Harvard man, and another by the Antiquary. The shooting-match, enjoyed as it was by the near population of Mesilla Valley, proved a big success, and weekly grew in grace with the aborigines as having a fine flavor of circus shows and Mexican bull-fights, and was considered by the Koshare as one of their happiest hits.

Equally successful was the Thursday entertainment, held in the big dining-room, under the auspices of the landlord and his wife, with the cook, waiter, maids, and chore-boys gathered about the open door.

It consisted of vocal and instrumental music, and recitations in prose and rhyme; and, at a late hour, wound up with a bountiful supper contributed to the occasion by the generous landlord.

Miss Hemmenschaw, the star performer, gave, with admirable Rachelesque gesture and true dramatic fire, "The Widow of the Grand Army," recited with exquisite delicacy Shelley's "Cloud," and sent shivers down the backs of the entire assemblage, by a realistic presentation of Rossetti's "Sister Helen." The grey-eyed school-marm recited with genuine "School of Oratory" precision and finish "Barbara Frietchie," Holmes' "Chambered Nautilus," Longfellow's "Sandalphon," and "Tom O'Connor's Cat." Leon read, with admirable humor, some of Mr. Dooley's best; and the Harvard man brought down the house with Kipling's "Truce of the Bear."

There was some fine piano and banjo playing, and the singing of duets; and the Journalist rendered, in his exquisite tenor, Ben Jonson's rare old love-song, "Drink to me only with thine eyes."

"Strange," commented the Antiquary (who in his miscellaneous mental storage had found room for some fine old Elizabethan plays), turning to Miss Hemmenschaw in the pause of the song, "Ben Jonson is dust these three hundred years, and still his verses come singing down the ages, keeping intact their own immortal flavor. The song-maker's is, indeed, an art that 'smells sweet, and blossoms in the dust.' Well might they write him, 'O rare Ben Jonson.'"

"And how exquisitely," responded the lady, "is the air married to the words!" And now the Minister brought forward his Cremona. He was a finished violinist, with a touch that well-nigh amounted to genius. All praised his performance. At its close the Grumbler, in an aside to the Antiquary, thus delivered himself: —

"To *some*, God giveth common-sense; to *others*, to play the fiddle!"

From the entry audience the fiddler won rousing rounds of applause, and Dennis, the waiter, ventured on the subdued shuffle of an Irish jig.

This it was that suggested to the Koshare an impromptu dance, and thereupon the young people straightway took the floor. The Minister, kindly oblivious of his cloth, fiddled on; Miss Paulina called off the figures, and so, merrily, ended the first Koshare evening entertainment.

CHAPTER V

As it is not proposed to give this record of the doings of the "New Koshare" the circumstantiality of a diary, the chronicler may be allowed to include the ensuing teas, shooting-matches, and all the lighter kosharean festivities in the one general and final statement, that they each came off duly and successfully; and leaving their details "unhonored and unsung," proceed to a more extended account of the Saturday evening entertainments, – as all members of the club were invited to contribute to these evenings, and it was expected that the Minister would, from the storehouse of his travelling experience, contribute liberally to their delectability; and that the Journalist (who naturally thought in paragraphs, and, like the fairy who "spoke pearls," conversed in exquisitely fashioned sentences) would supplement the papers of the Antiquary by his own brilliant talks.

And so it was that on the initial Saturday evening, with a full attendance and great expectations, the Koshare found themselves convened, the president in the chair, the secretary with notebook in hand, and all in dignified attention.

The Antiquary – with this apt quotation from Cumming's "Land of Poco Tiempo" – began his first lecture before the club.

"'New Mexico,'" quoted he, "'is the anomaly of the Republic. It is a century older in European civilization than the rest, and several centuries older still in a happier semi-civilization of its own. It had its little walled cities of stone before Columbus had grandparents-to-be; and it has them yet.'

"There are," stated Mr. Morehouse, "three typical races in New Mexico. The American interpolation does not count as a type.

"Of Pueblo Indians there are nine thousand, 'peaceful, home-loving, and home-dwelling tillers of the soil.' Then, here, and in Arizona, there are about twenty thousand Navajo Indians, – nomad, horse-loving, horse-stealing vagrants of the saddle, modern Centaurs. Then come the Apaches, an uncounted savage horde, whose partial civilization has been effected by sheer force of arms, and inch by inch: who accept the reservation with but half a heart, and break bounds at every opportunity. Last of all come the Mexicans, shrunken descendants of the Castilian world-finders; living almost as much against the house as in it; ignorant as slaves, and more courteous than kings; poor as Lazarus, and more hospitable than Croesus; and Catholics from A to izzard.

"The Navajos and Apaches," said Mr. Morehouse, "have neither houses nor towns; the Pueblos have nineteen compact little cities, and the Mexicans several hundred villages, a part of which are shared by the invader.

"'The numerous sacred dances of the Pueblos,' says Cummings, 'are by far the most picturesque sights in America, and the least viewed by Americans, who never found anything more striking abroad. The mythology of Greece and Rome is less than theirs in complicated comprehensiveness; and they are a far more interesting ethnological study than the tribes of inner Africa, and less known of by their white countrymen.'

"The Pueblos of New Mexico," explained the Antiquary, "are by no means to be confounded with the Toltecs or Aztecs. It is, however, barely possible that in prehistoric ages the race in possession of Mexico may have had some tribal characteristics of the latter-day Pueblo. As of that remote time, there is not even a traditionary record; this supposition is absolutely conjectural.

"By investigation and comparison it has, however, been proved that the Pueblos have racial characteristics connecting them with some mysterious stage of human life even older than that of the more barbarous Toltecs or Aztecs.

"This race has from time immemorial had its book of Genesis. It is not, like that of the Hebrew, a written record, but has been orally handed down, and with careful precision, beginning with their original emergence, as half-formed human beings, from the dark of the mystic underworld of 'Shipapu' to the world of light.

"After the fashion of most barbarous races, the Pueblo appears originally to have 'pitched his moving tent' in various parts of Mexico; and it may be inferred that he endured many casualties before settling himself in life. It was to tide over this trying epoch in his existence that 'Those Above,' according to tradition, made for the tribes that quaint 'Delight-Monger,' with whom we have already made acquaintance, who led them in their wanderings from the womb of Shipapu to the solid centre of their world; but, as has been already stated, this record, going back to an indefinite period of time, and having only the dubious authority of folk-lore, is only of traditional value.

"The Pueblo, no less than the Aztec, is the most religious of human beings. His ceremonial, like that of the age of Montezuma, is wonderfully and minutely elaborated; and though originating in a civilization less splendid and refined, it is really less barbarous, since its rites have never, like those of the Aztec, included the horrors of human sacrifice and cannibalism.

"The Pueblo, since his exit from the womb of mother Earth, seems to have given his principal attention to the cultivation of its soil. All the same, he appears never to have shirked the less peaceful responsibilities of his tribe, – putting on his war-paint at the shortest notice, to settle the quarrels of his clan.

"Although like most men of savage birth and breeding, cruel in warfare, he seems never to have been abstractedly blood-thirsty, never to have killed, like his ever-belligerent neighbor, the Apache, purely for killing's sake; but, his quarrel once ended, and the present security of his clan well achieved, he has contentedly returned to the peaceful ways of life; diligently sowing, weeding, and harvesting his crops of maize, melons, squashes, and beans, and – ever mindful of the propitiative requirements of 'Those Above' – taking careful heed of his religious duties.

"For a succinct account of the Pueblo cave (or cliff) dwellers," said the Antiquary, "I am largely indebted to Bandelier, from whose valuable Pueblo researches I shall often take the liberty to quote.

"The imperfectly explored mountain range skirting the Rio Grande del Norte is picturesquely grand.

"Facing the river, the foundation of the chain is entirely volcanic.

"Colossal rocks form the abrupt walls of the gorges between these mountains, and are often so soft and friable that, in many places they were easily scooped out with the most primitive tools, or even detached with the fingers alone.

"In these gorges, through many of which run unfailing streams of water, often expanding to the proportions of regular valleys, the Pueblo Indian raised the modest crop that satisfied his vegetable craving.

"As it is easier to excavate dwellings than to pile up walls in the open air, the aboriginal Mexican's house-building effort was mostly confined to underground construction. He was, in fact, a 'cave-dweller,' yet infinitely of more advanced architectural ideas than our own remote forbears of Anglo Saxon cave-dwelling times.

"Most of these residences might boast of from three to four rooms. They were arranged in groups, or clusters, and some of them were several stories high.

"Rude ladders were used for mounting to the terrace or roof of each successive story. The Pueblo had, literally, a hearthstone in his primitive home. His fireplace was supplied with a hearth of pumice-stone. A rudely built flue, made of cemented rubble, led to a circular opening in the front wall of his cave-dwelling. Air-holes admitted their scanty light to these dusky apartments, in which there were not only conveniences for bestowing wearing-apparel, but niches for ornamental pottery, precious stones, and the like Indian bric-à-brac. The ground-floor entrance was a rude doorway closed by a hide, or mat. Plaited mats of Yucca leaves, and deer-hide, by day rolled up in corners of the sleeping-apartments, served for mattresses at night. A thick coating of mud, washed with blood, and carefully smoothed, gave to the floor a glossy effect. Some of the rooms are known to have been in dimension ten feet by fourteen. Their walls were whitewashed with burnt gypsum.

"Though the time when these traditional cliff-dwellers wooed and wed, lived and died in the Rialto vale is long, long gone by, the ruins of their homes may still be seen. Some of them are tolerably intact; others are crumbled away to mere shapeless ruins.

"And now, having described their dwellings, let us note some of the most marked and interesting characteristics of the men and women who made in them their homes.

"We are apt," said the Antiquary, "to accord to our more enlightened civilization the origin of communism; yet, antedating by ages our latter-day socialistic fads, the communal idea enthused this unlettered people, and to a certain extent seems to have been successfully carried out.

"Let not the strong-minded Anglo-Saxon woman plume herself upon the discovery of the equality of the sexes. While our own female suffragists were yet unborn, the Pueblo wife had been accorded the inalienable right to lord it over her mankind.

"Among the Mexican cliff-dwellers, 'woman's rights' seem to have been as indigenous to the soil as the piñon and the prickly pear.

"In the primitive Pueblo domicile, the wife appears, by tribal consent, to have been absolutely 'cock of the walk.' The husband had no rights as owner or proprietor of the family mansion, and, as an inmate, was scarcely more than tolerated.

"The wife, in those ever-to-be-regretted days, not only built and furnished the house, – contributed to the kitchen the soup pot, water jars, and other primitive domestic appliances, – but figured as sole proprietor of the entire establishment.

"The Pueblo woman, though married, still had, with her children, her holding in her own clan. In case of her death, the man's home being properly with *his* clan, he must return to it.

"The wife was not allowed to work in the fields. Each man tilled the plot allotted him by his clan. The crops, once housed, were controlled by the woman, as were the proceeds of communal hunts and fisheries.

"The Pueblos had their system of divorce. It goes without saying that it was not attended by the red-tape complications of our time. As the husband's continuance under the family roof-tree depended absolutely on his acceptability to the wife, at any flagrant marital breach of good behavior she simply refused to recognize him as her lord. In vain he protested, stormed, and menaced; the outraged better half bade him *go*, and he *went*! Thus easily and informally were Pueblo marriages dissolved; and, this summary transaction once well concluded, each party had the right to contract a second marriage.

"The Pueblo Indian is historically known as a Catholic; that is to say, he told his beads, crossed his brow with holy water, and duly and devoutly knelt at the confessional. This done, he tacitly reserved to himself the privilege of surreptitiously clinging to the Paganism of his forbears, and zealously paid his tithe of observances at the ancient shrine of 'the Sun Father' and 'the Moon Mother.'

"Some of the Pueblo tribes are said still to retain the use of that ancient supplicating convenience, 'the prayer-stick.'

"'Prayer-sticks, or plumes,'" explained the Antiquary, "are but painted sticks tufted with down, or feathers, and, by the simple-minded Indian, supposed especially to commend him to the good graces and kindly offices of 'Those Above.' In a certain way, the aboriginal prayer-stick seems to have been a substitute for an oral supplication.

"The Pueblo, pressed for time, might even forego the hindering ceremonial of verbal request, adoration, or thanksgiving, and hurriedly deposit, as a votive offering to his easily placated gods, this tufted bit of painted wood; and, furthermore, since prayer-sticks were not always within reach, it was permitted him in such emergencies to gather two twigs, and, placing these crosswise, hold them in position by a rock or stone. And this childish make-shift passed with his indulgent gods for a prayer!

"The most trivial commonplace of existence had, with the superstitious Pueblo, its religious significance; and it would seem to have been incumbent on him literally to 'pray without ceasing.' Hence the prayer-plume, or its substitute, was, with him, one of the necessities of life. Time would fail

me to tell of the ancient elaborate religious rites and superstitions of the Mexican Indian; to recount his latter-day ceremonials, wherein Pagan dances, races, and sports are like the jumble of a crazy quilt, promiscuously mixed in with Christian festas and holy saint-days; and indeed the subject is too large for my sketchy handling. It may not, however, be amiss to notice the yearly celebration of the festival of San Estevan. It may be still witnessed, and seems to have been the original Harvest-home of the Mexican Indian, the observance of which has been handed down in various ways from all times, and among all peoples, and is probably the parent of our Thanksgiving holiday.

"The monks of the early Catholic church, in their missionary endeavor to commend the Christian religion to the pagan mind, took care to graft upon each of the various festas of the Pueblo one of their own saint-day names. Thus it was that the Acoma harvest-home masquerades under the guise of a saint-name, though an absolutely pagan ceremonial.

"It is still observed by them with genuine Koshare delight. There are dances, races, and tumbling, and the carnival-like showering of Mexican confetti from the roofs of adobe houses. In summing up this brief account of the sedentary New Mexican, I quote literally the forceful assertion of Cummings. 'The Pueblos,' says this writer, 'are Indians who are neither poor nor naked; who feed themselves, and ask no favors of Washington; Indians who have been at peace for two centuries, and fixed residents for perhaps a millennium; Indians who were farmers and irrigators, and six-story housebuilders before a New World had been beaten through the thick skull of the Old. They had,' he continues, 'a hundred republics in America centuries before the American Republic was conceived.'

"This peaceably minded people, as has already been stated, are by no means to be confounded with the roving New Mexican aborigines, with the untamed Navajo scouring the plains on the bare back of his steed, or the fierce Apache, murderous and cruel.

"We must not," said Mr. Morehouse, "take leave of the Pueblo, without some reference to the great flat-topped, slop-sided chain of rock-tables that throughout the length and breadth of his territory rises from the sandy plains, the most famous and best explored of which is known as 'La Mesa Encantada,' – 'the Enchanted Mesa.'

"According to tradition the Mesa Encantada gains its romantic name from an event which centuries ago – declares the legend – destroyed the town, then a well-populated stronghold of the Acomas. As a prelude to this legend, let me state that the Pueblo cliff-dwellers often perched their habitations on lofty, sheer-walled, and not easily accessible mesas, a natural vantage-ground from which they might successfully resist their enemies, the nomadic and predatory tribes formerly over-running the country.

"The steep wall of the Acoma Mesa, with its solitary trail, surmounted by means of hand and foot holes pecked in the solid rock, was so well defended that a single man might keep an army at bay. What fear, then, should these Acomas have of their enemies?

"The Acomas, like other Pueblo Indians, have from time immemorial been tillers of the soil.

"From the fertile sands of their valley and its tributaries they won by patient toil such harvests of corn, beans, squashes, and cotton as secured them a simple livelihood; and 'their granaries,' it is asserted, 'were always full enough to enable them, if need be, to withstand a twelvemonth's siege.' How long the top of Katzimo, the site of the Enchanted Mesa, had been inhabited when the catastrophe recorded in the legend befell, no man may say, not even the elders of the tribe; this much is, however, known, – the spring-time had come. The sun-priest had already proclaimed from the housetops that the season of planting was at hand. The seeds from last year's harvest had been gathered from the bins; planting-sticks had been sharpened, and all made ready for the auspicious day when the seer should further announce the time of repairing to the fields. On that day (so runs the tale), down the ragged trail, at early sunrise, clambered the busy natives; every one who was able to force a planting-stick into the compact soil, or lithe enough to drive away a robber crow, hurried to the planting. Only a few of the aged and ailing remained on the mesa.

"While the planters worked in the hot glare of the valley below, the sun suddenly hid his face in angry clouds. The busy planters hastened their work, while the distant thunder muttered and rolled about them. Suddenly the black dome above them was rent as by a glittering sword, and down swept the torrent, until the entire valley became a sheet of flood. The planters sought shelter in the slight huts of boughs and sticks from which the crops are watched.

"The elders bodingly shook their heads. Never before had the heavens given vent to such a cataract.

"When the sudden clouds as suddenly dispersed, and the sun-lit crest of Katzimo emerged from the mist, the toilers trudged toward their mountain home. Reaching the base of the trail, they found their pathway of the morning blocked by huge, sharp-edged pieces of stone, giving mute testimony of the disaster to the ladder-trail above.

"The huge rock mass, which had given access to the cleft by means of the holes pecked in the trail-path, had in the great cloud-burst become freed from the friable wall, and thundered down in a thousand fragments, cutting off communication with the mesa village. The Acomas, when asked why their ancestors made no desperate effort to reach the sufferers whose feeble voices were calling to them from the summit for succor, but left their own flesh and blood to perish by slow starvation, gravely shook their heads.

"The ban of enchantment had already, for these superstitious pagans, fallen upon the devoted table-land; it had become 'La Mesa Encantada.'

"The publication by Mr. Charles F. Lummis, who resided for several years at the pueblo of Iselta, of the story of Katzimo, the tradition of which was repeated to him by its gray-haired priests some twelve years ago, aroused the interest of students of southwestern ethnology in the history of 'La Mesa Encantada,' and, subsequently, Mr. F. W. Hodge was directed by the Bureau of American Ethnology, of the Smithsonian Institute, to scale the difficult height of this giant mountain, for the purpose of supplementing the evidence already gained, of its sometime occupancy as a Pueblo town. His party found decided evidence of a former occupancy of the mesa, such as fragments of extremely ancient earthenware, a portion of a shell bracelet, parts of two grooved stone axes, lichen-flecked with age. Here, too, was an unfeathered prayer-stick, a melancholy reminder of a votive offering made, at the nearest point of accessibility, to 'Those Above.'

"'When I consider,' says Mr. Hodge, in his charming paper, 'The Enchanted Mesa,' published in the 'Century Magazine,' some three or four years ago, 'that the summit of Katzimo, where the town was, has long been inaccessible to the Indians, that it has been swept by winds, and washed by rains for centuries, until scarcely any soil is left on its crest, that well-defined traces of an ancient ladder trail may still be seen pecked on the rocky wall of the very cleft through which the traditionary pathway wound its course; and, above all, the large number of very ancient potsherds in the earthy talus about the base of the mesa, which must have been washed from above, the conclusion is inevitable that the summit of 'La Mesa Encantada' was inhabited prior to 1540, when the present Acoma was discovered by Coronado, and that the last vestige of the village itself has long been washed or blown over the cliff.'"

With this account of the Enchanted Mesa, Mr. Morehouse, amid general applause, ended his interesting paper on the Pueblo Indians; and after a short discussion by the Club of the ancient and modern characteristics of these remarkable aborigines, the Koshare, well pleased with the success of its endeavor to combine improvement with delight, adjourned to the next Monday in January.

Little dreamed Roger Smith as, that night, after the Club entertainment, he handed the Hemmenschaw ladies to their wagon, for the return ride to Hilton Ranch, that the very next week he was to undertake, on their behalf, a hand-to-hand encounter with a blood-thirsty Apache. Yet so was it ordained of Fate.

It has already been stated that these ladies were but day-boarders at Alamo Ranch, occupying, together with Sholto, a Mexican man-of-all-work, the Hilton Ranch, a good mile distant from the boarding-house.

Louise Hemmshaw, usually in exuberant health, was ill with a severe influenza. It was the third and cumulative day of this disease. Sholto had already been despatched to Brown's for the dinner; Miss Paulina had, in this emergency, undertaken to turn off the breakfasts and suppers from her chafing-dish.

After replenishing, from the wood basket, the invalid's chamber fire, Miss Paulina administered her teaspoonful of bryonia, gave a settling shake to her pillow, and hurried down to fasten the back door behind Sholto.

Lingering a moment at the kitchen window, the good lady put on her far-off glasses for a good look across the mesa, stretching – an unbroken waste of sage-brush and mesquite-bush – from the Hilton kitchen garden to the distant line of the horizon.

As she quietly scanned the nearer prospect, Miss Paulina's heart made a sudden thump beneath her bodice, and quickened its pulses to fever-time; for there, just within range of her vision, was the undoubted form of an Apache savage, clad airily in breech-clout, and Navajo blanket. Skulking warily along the mesa, he gained the garden fence and sprang, at a bound, over the low paling. For a moment the watcher stood paralyzed with wonder and dismay.

Meantime, under cover of a rose-trellis, the Apache, looking bad enough and cunning enough for any outrage, coolly made a reconnoissance of the premises. This done, still on all-fours, he gained the bulkhead of the small dark vegetable cellar beneath the kitchen. It chanced to have been inadvertently left open.

With a satisfied grunt (and eschewing the paltry convenience of steps) he bounded at once into its dusky depths.

Summoning her failing courage, this "Daughter of the Revolution" resolutely tiptoed out the front door, and, with her heart in her mouth, whisking round the corner of the devoted house, shot into place the stout outside bolt of the bulkhead door.

This feat accomplished, she made haste to gain the safe shelter of the adobe dwelling. She next looked well to the bolt fastening the trap-door at the head of the ladder-like stairway leading perilously from the kitchen to the dim region below, where the Apache might now be heard bumping his head against the floor-planks, in a fruitless endeavor to discover some outlet, from this underground apartment, to the family circle above. With the frightful possibility of a not distant escape of her prisoner, the good lady lifted her heart in silent prayer, and hurrying promptly to the chamber of her niece, gave a saving punch to the fire, a glass of port wine to the invalid, and, feigning an appearance of unconcern, left the room, and slipped cautiously down to the kitchen. Here she dragged an ironing-table, a clothes-horse, and a wood-box on to the trap-door, and breathlessly waited for the Apache's next move.

And now, a step might be heard on the driveway, followed by a rap at the front door.

Prudently scanning her visitor through the sidelight, and assuring herself that he was no breech-clouted savage, but a fellow white man, Miss Paulina let in through the narrowest of openings, – who but their friend the Harvard man! "Dear soul!" tearfully exclaimed the good lady, while Roger Smith stood in mute wonder at the warmth of her greeting.

It was but the work of a moment to explain the situation and acquaint him with the peril of the moment.

Sholto, at his leisurely Mexican pace, now opportunely appeared at the back door with the hot dinner.

"There is a time for all things," said the "president of Chapter 18th," as (having pulled the bewildered Mexican inside) she vigorously shot the door-bolt in place, deposited the smoking viands on the sideboard, and thus addressed him. "Sholto," said Miss Paulina, "I have an Apache here in the

cellar. For the time being his ability to work us harm is limited; but an Apache is never nice to have round; and, besides, he must have terribly bumped himself poking round there all this time in the dark. One would not unnecessarily hurt even a savage. We must therefore let him up, bind him fast, and take measures for delivering him to the police at Las Cruces. Here is a clothes-line: it is good and strong; make up a lasso, and when I open the trap-door, as his head bobs in sight, throw it, and then help Mr. Smith haul him out, and tie him."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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