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NEW MEXICAN ODYSSEY

DEAR FRIENDS:



THE AUTHORS' CLUB WAS FOR MANY YEARS a Hollywood institution. The literary elite met for luncheon once a week, and there was always a guest speaker. Mr. Rupert Hughes, whose life of George Washington resulted in considerable controversy, usually presided, although sometimes Irvin S. Cobb did the honors. Hughes wore a hearing aid and, having introduced the speaker, would then turn it off. One week, the guest of honor was Ernest Thompson Seton, a world-famous artist-naturalist. Mr. Seton was a tall, rangy man who obviously belonged to the great outdoors. He was a fluent talker and combined nature lore with personal anecdotes. After the Club luncheon, we met and discovered many subjects of mutual interest. As a result, Seton invited me to visit his home in the suburbs of Santa Fe, and for several years I spent vacations in what was generally referred to as Seton Village.

Forty years ago, Santa Fe was a picturesque community populated mostly by Spanish-Americans and local Indian tribes. Its only hotel was named La Fonda, which was originally the terminal for wagon trains traveling west. The first thing that I noticed was the amount of activity going on in the hotel lobby. Mysterious persons came and went, and a circle of quiet men apparently engrossed in the local newspaper was always present. Part of the secret came out one time when Einstein hurried through and was picked up by a large automobile. I was told later that the newspaper readers were government agents, while those who came and went were usually foreign spies. It all had to do with the Los Alamos project, but even the local inhabitants had little or no suspicion that the first atomic bomb was in preparation. The one knowledgeable man was a roving reporter for a Santa Fe newspaper. His name was Brian Boroihme Dunn, who claimed descent from the last king of Ireland (Brian Boroihme). He always wore a fringed buckskin jacket and was on intimate terms with another oldster who claimed to have been with Teddy Roosevelt on the famous climb of San Juan Hill. To prove it, he wore a small photograph of Roosevelt tucked in the front of his hatband.

Seton Village was a cluster of small houses at the foot of a slight rise on the crest of which was Seton's home, a large, rambling building respectfully dubbed "The Castle." Among the family and closer friends, Seton was always referred to as "The Chief," for his interest in American Indians dominated much of his thinking in his later life. We rode out to watch the ceremonial dances, and I was privileged to attend several of the rainmaking ceremonies. The roads to the pueblos were practically impassable when the rains came, but there were always groups of tourists anxious to watch the strange rites. Incidentally, photographing was forbidden. One day, I was sitting on the edge of an adobe roof next to a skeptic and his wife. He was explaining to her that the whole affair was nothing more than primitive superstition. The dance lasted for more than twelve hours, and never for one moment was the rhythmic beating of the drums interrupted. Teams of drummers took turns. There was not a cloud in the sky at the beginning of the dance, but later in the afternoon, a small cloud appeared and hovered in the sky above the mesa. The skeptic at my right looked up, was silent for a moment, and then remarked in a low voice, "Maybe we had better get out of here." About a half-hour later nearly everyone left, and by sundown there was a heavy storm accompanied by thunder and lightning.

On another occasion we flew in a small plane to a distant village to watch the coming of the gods. The folk deities were called "kachinas," and many small figures of these deities were carved out of cottonwood, then gaily painted and adorned with feathers and bits of cloth. Once a year the kachina godlings came down from the mountains to bestow favors upon the faithful. The kachinas were impersonated by members of the tribe who had spent many hours in prayer in the sacred kiva. Their final appearance was heralded by the inevitable drums. As the sound of the drumbeats echoed through the village, a sudden windstorm came up, and the dry sand swirled about like a dense fog. In the midst of this murky light, the gods appeared fantastically costumed and carrying rattles and wands while under the spell of the whirling, twisting dancers. It was easy to imagine that some kind of natural magic was being practiced. When the dance was finished, the kachinas faded away in the dusty air, and a few minutes later the wind subsided. All that remained were the rows of footprints in the sand which the gods had left behind.

One year while visiting at Seton's castle, I came into contact with another aspect of the local culture. I was invited to attend the Good Friday rites of the Penitentes. These were given in a different community each year, and visitors were definitely not welcome. Although I was properly sponsored for the occasion, I was stopped three times by groups of men carrying rifles. I watched the penitent brothers walk the Way of the Cross and was invited to walk with them. At the head of the procession were two Spanish-Americans stripped to the waist, their backs bleeding from self-inflicted blows of whips and each bearing a full-sized cross weighing two- or three-hundred pounds. They were reenacting the journey to Calvary. One of the brothers told me that I should watch carefully because usually the spirits of dead Penitentes accompany the living. You can tell if they are spirits because they have no feet.

I kept a kind of diary and made sketches of the principal scenes. Through an influential member of the Penitente order, I also secured a copy of the book of songs, which is a cherished possession of the Penitentes. According to local history, the flagellant rites were introduced by the Spanish conquistadores. Constantly threatened by surrounding Indian tribes, the soldiers and even their officers practiced extreme austerity to ask for divine



Santo Niño de Atocha

intercession. It is also believed that Aztec Indian rites contributed to the severity of the ordeal. A few years after I was in Santa Fe for the last time, all public ceremonies of the Penitentes were banned, but there is no doubt that the order has contributed to social justice in remote parts of the Southwest. For some strange reason, the Penitentes celebrated the crucifixion but not the resurrection. For many years there was a similar organization in the Philippines, and in medieval times penitents wandered about Europe. Women and small children walked in the processions in Italy and Spain, and thousands died in their frantic search for spiritual security. During World War II many young men from the area around Santa Fe were drafted into the army. As a result, their families performed special practices on their behalf. Some followed the Stations of the Cross, crawling across the rough ground on their hands and knees.

These villages were isolated from the changes that affected the lives of average Americans. Witchcraft flourished, and the "brujas" could always be identified because each of their eyes was a different color. Some took the form of owls, called wereowls, and there was a general situation resembling voodoo. Pins were stuck into dolls, a favorite practice of the Medicis in Italy; and to combat these evils,

the "santaros," or saintmakers, carved images of biblical characters. I secured one interesting example of the Holy Trinity in which the godhead was represented by three heads on one body. Another curious figure was a likeness of Job, his body covered with boils. In the old days, such pictures and statues were found in nearly all homes, often placed in a niche on an adobe wall. If the saint or other celestial being failed to protect the family, he was punished by having his face turned to the wall.

Carl Jung, the distinguished psychiatrist, stayed for quite a while in Santa Fe, studying the Indian sand paintings, which he compared with Oriental mandalas. I was also shown a house in which it was stated definitely that Madame Blavatsky had lived. The increasing interest in psychological phenomena and Indian forms of healing will be discussed in my next letter.

Always most sincerely;

Marilyn P. Hall

Meditation Disciplines and Personal Integration



The interest in meditation and prayer in daily life has increased rapidly in recent years. Many thoughtful persons seeking to strengthen their own inner natures are turning to mysticism in their search for practical wisdom and understanding.

We have had a number of requests from sincere students to publish in separate form a series of five articles which appeared in the PRS Journal several years ago. These provide background material on Eastern and Western meditation systems and symbols. Eastern and Western mandalas, myths, legends, and allegories which provide inspirational material to sustain the search for the essential truths necessary for a planned program of internal growth are discussed with appropriate illustrations.

This publication contains reproductions of the mystical symbols of Jacob Boehme, examples of Christian metaphysical pictures, and metaphysical paintings of esoteric Buddhism. The picture shown here, which also appears on the cover, is associated with the early writings of Jacob Boehme. The human heart is represented rising from the heart of a rose to signify love's sustaining faith, which in turn supports the cross, the symbol of dedication to truth.

Attractively presented, well printed on a good grade of paper, softbound, 76 pages. \$3.50 plus tax.