

THE HOPI SNAKE-DANCE¹

BY D. H. LAWRENCE

THE HOPI country is in Arizona, next the Navaho country, and some seventy miles north of the Santa Fé Railroad. The Hopis are Pueblo Indians, village Indians, so their reservation is not large. It consists of a square tract of grayish, unappetizing desert, out of which rise three tall arid mesas, broken off in ragged pallid rock. On the top of the mesas perch the ragged broken grayish pueblos, identical with the mesas on which they stand.

The nearest village, Walpi, stands in half-ruin high, high on a narrow rock-top where no leaf of life ever was tender. It is all gray, utterly dry, utterly pallid, stone and dust, and very narrow. Below it all the stark light of the dry Arizona sun. Walpi is called the 'first mesa.' And it is at the far edge of Walpi you see the withered beaks and claws and bones of sacrificed eagles, in a rock-cleft under the sky. They sacrifice an eagle each year, on the brink, by rolling him out and crushing him so as to shed no blood. Then they drop his remains down the dry cleft in the promontory's farthest gray tip.

The trail winds on, utterly bumpy and horrible, for thirty miles, past the second mesa, where Chimopova is, on to the third mesa. And on the Sunday afternoon of August 17 black automobile after automobile lurched and crawled across the gray desert, where low gray sage-scrub was coming to pallid yellow. Black hood followed crawling after black hood, like a funeral cortege. The motor-cars, with all the

tourists, wending their way to the third and farthest mesa, thirty miles across this dismal desert where an odd water-windmill spun, and odd patches of corn blew in the strong desert wind, like dark-green women with fringed shawls blowing and fluttering, not far from the foot of the gray up-piled mesa.

The snake-dance, I am told, is held once a year, on each of the three mesas in succession. This year of grace 1924 it was to be held in Hotevilla, the last village on the farthest western tip of the third mesa. On and on bumped the cars. The lonely second mesa lay in the distance. On and on, to the ragged ghost of the third mesa.

The third mesa has two main villages, Oraibi, which is on the near edge, and Hotevilla, on the far. Up scrambles the car, on all its four legs, like a black beetle, straddling past the schoolhouse and store down below, up the bare rock and over the changeless boulders, with a surge and a sickening lurch to the sky-brim, where stands the rather foolish church. Just beyond, dry, gray, ruined, and apparently abandoned, Oraibi, its few ragged stone huts. All these cars come all this way, and apparently nobody at home.

You climb still, up the shoulder of rock, a few more miles, across the lofty wind-swept mesa, and so you come to Hotevilla, where the dance is, and where already hundreds of motor-cars are herded in an official camping-ground, among the piñon bushes.

Hotevilla is a tiny little village of gray little houses, raggedly built with undressed stone and mud around a

¹ From the *Adelphi* (London literary monthly), January and February

little oblong plaza, and partly in ruins. One of the chief two-story houses on the small square is a ruin, with big square window-holes. It is a parched gray country of snakes and eagles, pitched up against the sky. And a few dark-faced, short, thickly built Indians have their few peach trees among the sand, their beans and squashes on the naked sand under the sky, their springs of brackish water.

Three thousand people came to see the little snake-dance this year, over miles of desert and bumps. Three thousand, of all sorts, cultured people from New York, Californians, onward-pressing tourists, cowboys, Navaho Indians, even Negroes; fathers, mothers, children, of all ages, colors, sizes of stoutness, dimensions of curiosity.

What had they come for? Mostly to see men hold live rattlesnakes in their mouths. 'I never did see a rattlesnake, and I'm crazy to see one!' cried a girl with bobbed hair. There you have it. People trail hundreds of miles, avidly, to see this circus-performance of men handling live rattlesnakes that may bite them any minute—even do bite them. Some show, that!

There is the other aspect, of the ritual dance. One may look on from the angle of culture, as one looks on while Anna Pavlova dances.

Or there is still another point of view, the religious. Before the snake-dance begins, on the Monday, and the spectators are packed thick on the ground round the square, and in the window-holes, and on all the roofs, all sorts of people greedy with curiosity, a little speech is made to them all, asking the audience to be silent and respectful, as this is a sacred religious ceremonial of the Hopi Indians, and not a public entertainment. Therefore, please, no clapping or cheering or applause, but remember you are; as it were, in a church. The audience accepts the im-

plied rebuke in good faith, and looks round with a grin at the 'church.' But it is a good-humored, very decent crowd, ready to respect any sort of feelings. And the Indian with his 'religion' is a sort of public pet.

From the cultured point of view, the Hopi snake-dance is almost nothing, not much more than a circus turn, or the games that children play in the street. It has none of the impressive beauty of the corn dance at Santo Domingo, for example. The big pueblos of Zuni, Santo Domingo, Taos, have a cultured instinct which is not revealed in the Hopi snake-dance. This last is grotesque rather than beautiful, and rather uncouth in its touch of horror. Hence the thrill, and the crowd.

As a cultured spectacle, it is a circus turn: men actually dancing round with snakes, poisonous snakes, dangling from their mouths.

And as a religious ceremonial: well, either you can be politely tolerant like the crowd to the Hopis, or you must have some spark of understanding of the sort of religion implied.

'Oh, the Indians,' I heard a woman say, 'they believe we are all brothers, the snakes are the Indians' brothers, and the Indians are the snakes' brothers. The Indians would never hurt the snakes; they won't hurt any animal. So the snakes won't bite the Indians. They are all brothers, and none of them hurts anybody.'

This sounds very nice, only more Hindu than Hopi. The dance itself does not convey much sense of fraternal communion. It is not in the least like Saint Francis preaching to the birds.

The animistic religion, as we call it, is not the religion of the Spirit. A religion of spirits, yes. But not of Spirit. There is no One Spirit. There is no One God. There is no Creator. There is strictly no God at all, because all is alive. In our conception of religion

there exists God and His Creation: two things. We are creatures of God; therefore we pray to God as the Father, the Saviour, the Maker.

But strictly, in the religion of aboriginal America, there is no Father, and no Maker. There is the great living source of life—say the Sun of existence, to which you can no more pray than you can pray to Electricity. And emerging from this Sun are the great potencies, the invincible influences which make shine and warmth and rain. From these great inter-related potencies of rain and heat and thunder emerge the seeds of life itself, corn, and creatures like snakes. And, beyond these, men, persons. But all emerge separately. There is no oneness, no sympathetic identifying oneself with the rest. The law of isolation is heavy on every creature. . . .

On the Sunday evening is a first little dance in the plaza at Hotevilla, called the antelope dance. There is the hot, sandy, oblong little place, with a tuft of green cottonwood boughs stuck like a plume at the south end, and on the floor at the foot of the green a little lid of a trapdoor. They say the snakes are under there.

They say that the twelve officiating men of the Snake clan of the tribe have for nine days been hunting snakes in the rocks. They have been performing the mysteries for nine days in the kiva, and for two days they have fasted completely. All these days they have tended the snakes, washed them with repeated lustrations, soothed them, and exchanged spirits with them. The spirit of man soothing and seeking and making interchange with the spirits of the snakes. For the snakes are more rudimentary, nearer to the great convulsive powers. Nearer to the nameless Sun, more knowing in the slanting tracks of the rain, the patter-

ing of the invisible feet of the rain-monster from the sky. The snakes are man's next emissaries to the rain-gods. The snakes lie nearer to the source of potency, the dark, lurking, intense sun at the centre of the earth. For to the cultured animist—and the Pueblo Indian is such—the earth's dark centre holds its dark sun, our source of isolated being, round which our world coils its folds like a great snake. The snake is nearer the dark sun.

They say—people say—that rattle-snakes are no travelers: They haunt the same spots on earth, and die there. It is said also that the snake-priests—so-called—of the Hopi probably capture the same snakes year after year.

Be that as it may. At sundown, before the real dance, there is the little dance called the antelope dance. We stand and wait on a house-roof. Behind us is tethered an eagle; rather disheveled he sits on the coping, and looks at us in unutterable resentment. See him, and see how much 'brotherhood' the Indian feels with animals—at best the silent tolerance that acknowledges dangerous difference. We wait without event. There are no drums, no announcements. Suddenly into the plaza, with rude, intense movements, hurries a little file of men. They are smeared all with gray and black, and are naked save for little kilts embroidered like the sacred dance-kilts in other pueblos, red and green and black on a white fibre-cloth. The fox-skins hang behind. The feet of the dancers are pure ash-gray. Their hair is long.

The first is a heavy old man with heavy, long, wild gray hair and heavy fringe. He plods intensely forward, in the silence, followed in a sort of circle by the other gray-smeared, long-haired, naked, concentrated men. The oldest men are first; the last is a shorthaired boy of fourteen or fifteen. There are only eight men—the so-called ante-

lope-priests. They pace round in a circle, rudely, absorbedly, till the first heavy intense old man, with his massive gray hair flowing, comes to the lid on the ground, near the tuft of kiva-boughs. He rapidly shakes from the hollow of his right hand a little white meal on the lid, stamps heavily, with naked right foot, on the meal, so the wood resounds, and paces heavily forward. Each man, to the boy, shakes meal, stamps, paces absorbedly on in the circle, comes to the lid again, shakes meal, stamps, paces absorbedly on, comes a third time to the lid, or trap-door, and this time spits on the lid, stamps, and goes on. And this time the eight men file away behind the lid, between it and the tuft of green boughs. And there they stand in a line, their backs to the kiva-tuft of green; silent, absorbed, bowing a little to the ground.

Suddenly paces with rude haste another file of men. They are naked, and smeared with red 'medicine,' with big black lozenges of smeared paint on their backs. Their wild heavy hair hangs loose; the old heavy gray-haired men go first, then the middle-aged, then the young men, then last, two short-haired, slim boys, schoolboys. The hair of the young men, growing after school, is bobbed round.

The grown men are all heavily built, rather short, with heavy but shapely flesh, and rather straight sides. They have not the archaic slim waists of the Taos Indians. They have an archaic squareness, and a sensuous heaviness. Their very hair is black, massive, heavy. These are the so-called snake-priests, men of the snake clan. And to-night they are eleven in number.

They pace rapidly round, with that heavy wild silence of concentration characteristic of them, and cast meal and stamp upon the lid, cast meal and stamp in the second round, come round and spit and stamp in the third. For

to the savage, the animist, to spit may be a kind of blessing, a communion, a sort of embrace.

The eleven snake-priests form silently in a row, facing the eight gray-smeared antelope-priests across the little lid, and bowing forward a little, to earth. Then the antelope-priests, bending forward, begin a low sombre chant or call, which sounds wordless, only a deep, low-toned, secret *Ay-a! Ay-a! Ay-a!* And they bend from right to left, giving two shakes to the little flat white rattle in their left hand at each shake, and stamping the right foot in heavy rhythm. In their right hand, which held the meal, is grasped a little skin bag, perhaps also containing meal.

They lean from right to left, two seedlike shakes of the rattle each time and the heavy rhythmic stamp of the foot, and the low sombre secretive chant-call each time. It is a strange low sound, such as we never hear, and it reveals how deep, how deep the men are in the mystery they are practising, how sunk deep below our world, to the world of snakes, and dark ways in the earth, where are the roots of corn, and where the little rivers of unchanneled, uncreated life-passion run like dark, trickling lightning, to the roots of the corn and to the feet and loins of men, from the earth's innermost dark sun. They are calling in the deep, almost silent snake-language, to the snakes and the rays of dark emission from the earth's inward 'Sun.'

At this moment a silence falls on the whole crowd of listeners. It is that famous darkness and silence of Egypt, the touch of the other mystery. The deep concentration of the 'priests' conquers, for a few seconds, our white-faced flippancy, and we hear only the deep *Háh-ha! Háh-ha!* speaking to snakes and the earth's inner core.

This lasts a minute or two. Then the antelope-priests stand bowed and still,

and the snake-priests take up the swaying and the deep chant, which sometimes is so low it is like a mutter underground, inaudible. The rhythm is crude, the swaying unison is all uneven. Culturally there is nothing. If it were not for that mystic, dark-sacred concentration.

Several times in turn the two rows of daubed, long-haired, insunk men facing one another take up the swaying and the chant. Then that too is finished. There is a break in the formation. A young snake-priest takes up something that may be a corncob — perhaps an antelope-priest hands it to him — and comes forward, with an old, heavy, but still shapely snake-priest behind him dusting his shoulders with the feathers, eagle-feathers presumably, which are the Indians hollow prayer-sticks. With the heavy, stamping hop they move round in the previous circle, the young priest holding the cob curiously, and the old priest prancing strangely at the young priest's back, in a sort of incantation, and brushing the heavy young shoulders delicately with the prayer-feathers. It is the God-vibration that enters us from behind, and is transmitted to the hands, from the hands to the corncob. Several young priests emerge, with the bowed head and the cob in their hands and the heavy older priests hanging over them behind. They tread round the rough curve and come back to the kiva, take perhaps another cob, and tread round again.

That is all. In ten or fifteen minutes it is over. The two files file rapidly and silently away. A brief, primitive performance.

The crowd disperses. They were not many people. There were no venomous snakes on exhibition, so the mass had nothing to come for. And therefore the curious immersed intensity of the priests was able to conquer the white crowd.

VOL. 325 — NO. 4213

By afternoon of the next day the three thousand people had massed in the little plaza, secured themselves places on the roofs and in the window-spaces, everywhere, till the small pueblo seemed built of people instead of stones. All sorts of people, hundreds and hundreds of white women, all in breeches like half-men, hundreds and hundreds of men who had been driving motor-cars, then many Navahos, the women in their full, long skirts and tight velvet bodices, the men rather lanky, long-waisted, real nomads. In the hot sun and the wind which blows the sand every day, every day in volumes round the corners, the three thousand tourists sat for hours, waiting for the show. The Indian policeman cleared the central oblong, in front of the kiva. The front rows of onlookers sat thick on the ground. And at last, rather early, because of the masses awaiting them, suddenly, silently, in the same rude haste, the antelope-priests filed absorbedly in, and made the rounds over the lid, as before. To-day the eight antelope-priests were very gray. Their feet ashed pure gray, like suede soft boots, and their lower jaw was pure suede-gray, while the rest of the face was blackish. With that pale-gray jaw, they looked like corpse-faces with swathing-bands. And all their bodies ash-gray smeared, with smears of black, and a black cloth to-day at the loins.

They made their rounds, and took their silent position behind the lid, with backs to the green tuft: an unearthly gray row of men with little skin bags in their hands. They were the lords of shadow, the intermediate twilight, the place of after-life and before-life, where house the winds of change. Lords of the mysterious fleeting power of change.

Suddenly, with abrupt silence, in paced the snake-priests, headed by the same heavy man with solid gray hair

like iron. To-day they were twelve men, from the old one down to the slight, short-haired, erect boy of fourteen. Twelve men, two for each of the six worlds, or quarters: east, north, south, west, above, and below. And to-day they were in a queer ecstasy. Their faces were black, showing the whites of the eyes. And they wore small black loin-aprons. They were the hot living men of the darkness, lords of the earth's inner rays, the black sun of the earth's vital core, from which dart the speckled snakes, like beams.

Round they went, in rapid, uneven, silent absorption; the three rounds. Then in a row they faced the eight ash-gray men, across the lid. All kept their heads bowed toward earth, except the young boys.

Then, in the intense, secret, muttering chant the gray men began their leaning from right to left, shaking the hand, one-two, one-two, and bowing the body each time from right to left; left to right, above the lid in the ground, under which were the snakes. And their low, deep, mysterious voices spoke to the spirits under the earth, not to men above the earth.

But the crowd was on tenterhooks for the snakes, and could hardly wait for the mummery to cease. There was an atmosphere of inattention and impatience. But the chant and the swaying passed from the gray men to the black-faced men, and back again, several times.

This was finished. The formation of the lines broke up. There was a slight crowding to the centre, round the lid. The old antelope-priest — so-called — was stooping. And before the crowd could realize anything else a young priest emerged, bowing reverently, with the neck of a pale, delicate rattlesnake held between his teeth, the little naïve birdlike head of the rattlesnake quite still, near the black cheek, and

the long, pale, yellowish, spangled body of the snake dangling like some thick, beautiful cord. On passed the black-faced young priest, with the wondering snake dangling from his mouth, pacing in the original circle, while behind him, leaping almost on his shoulders, was the oldest heavy priest, dusting the young man's shoulders with the feather prayer-sticks, in an intense, earnest anxiety of concentration such as I have seen only in the old Indian men during a religious dance.

Came another young black-faced man out of the confusion, with another snake dangling and writhing a little from his mouth, and an elder priest dusting him from behind with the feathers; and then another, and another, till it was all confusion, probably, of six, and then four young priests with snakes dangling from their mouths, going round, apparently, three times in the circle. At the end of the third round the young priest stooped and delicately laid his snake on the earth, waving him away, away, as it were, into the world. He must not wriggle back to the kiva bush.

And after wondering a moment, the pale, delicate snake steered away with a rattlesnake's beautiful movement, rippling and looping, with the small, sensitive head lifted like antennæ, across the sand to the massed audience squatting solid on the ground around. Like soft, watery lightning went the wondering snake at the crowd. As he came nearer, the people began to shrink aside, half-mesmerized. But they betrayed no exaggerated fear. And as the little snake drew very near, up rushed one of the two black-faced young priests, who held the snake-stick poised a moment over the snake, in the prayer-concentration of reverence which is at the same time conquest, and snatched the pale, long creature delicately from the ground, waving him in

a swoop over the heads of the seated crowd, then delicately smoothing down the length of the snake with his left hand, stroking and smoothing and soothing the long, pale, birdlike thing; and, returning with it to the kiva, handed it to one of the gray-jawed antelope-priests.

Meanwhile, all the time, the other young priests were emerging with snakes dangling from their mouths. The boy had finished his rounds. He launched his rattlesnake on the ground, like a ship, and, like a ship, away it steered. In a moment, after it went one of those two young black-faced priests who carried snake-sticks and were the snake-catchers. As it neared the crowd, very close, he caught it up and waved it dramatically, his eyes glaring strangely out of his black face. And in the interim that youngest boy had been given a long, handsome bull-snake, by the priest at the hole under the kiva boughs.

The bull-snake is not poisonous. It is a constrictor. This one was six feet long, with a sumptuous pattern. It waved its pale belly, and pulled its neck out of the boy's mouth. With two hands he put it back. It pulled itself once more free. Again he got it back, and managed to hold it. And then, as he went round in his looping circle, it coiled its handsome folds twice round his knee. He stooped, quietly, and as quietly as if he were untying his garter he unloosed the folds. And all the time an old priest was intently brushing the boy's thin straight shoulders with the feathers. And all the time the snakes seemed strangely gentle, naïve, wondering, and almost willing, almost in harmony with the men. Which of course was the sacred aim. While the boy's expression remained quite still and simple, as it were candid, in a candor where he and the snake should be in unison. The

only dancers who showed signs of being wrought-up were the two young snake-catchers, and one of these, particularly, seemed in a state of actorlike uplift, rather ostentatious. But the old priests had that immersed, religious intentness which is like a spell, something from another world.

The young boy launched his bull-snake. It wanted to go back to the kiva. The snake-catcher drove it gently forward. Away it went, toward the crowd, and at the last minute was caught up into the air. Then this snake was handed to an old man sitting on the ground in the audience, in the front row. He was an old Hopi of the Snake clan.

Snake after snake had been carried round in the circles, dangling by the neck from the mouths of one young priest or another, and writhing and swaying slowly, with the small, delicate snake-head held as if wondering and listening. There had been some very large rattlesnakes, unusually large, two or three handsome bull-snakes, and some racers, whipsnakes. All had been launched, after their circuits in the mouth, all had been caught up by the young priests with the snake-sticks, one or two had been handed to old Snake clan men in the audience, who sat holding them in their arms as men hold a kitten. The most of the snakes, however, had been handed to the gray antelope-men who stood in the row, with their backs to the kiva bush. Till some of these ash-smeared men held armfuls of snakes, hanging over their arms like wet washing. Some of the snakes twisted and knotted round one another, showing pale bellies.

Yet most of them hung very still and docile. Docile, almost sympathetic, so that one was struck only by their clean slim length of snake nudity, their beauty, like soft, quiescent lightning. They were so clean, because they had

been washed and anointed and lustrated by the priests, in the days they had been in the kiva.

At last all the snakes had been mouth-carried in the circuits, and had made their little outrunning excursion to the crowd, and had been handed back to the priests in the rear. And now the Indian policemen, Hopi and Navaho, began to clear away the crowd that sat on the ground, five or six rows deep, around the small plaza. The snakes were all going to be set free on the ground. We must clear away.

We recoiled to the farther end of the plaza. There two Hopi women were scattering white cornmeal on the sandy ground. And thither came the two snake-catchers, almost at once, with their arms full of snakes. And before we who stood had realized it the snakes were all writhing and squirming on the ground, in the white dust of meal, a couple of yards from our feet. Then immediately, before they could writhe clear of each other and steer away, they were gently, swiftly snatched up again, and with their arms full of snakes the two young priests went running out of the plaza.

We followed slowly, wondering, toward the western or northwestern edge of the mesa. There the mesa dropped steeply, and a broad trail wound down to the vast hollow of desert brimmed up with strong evening light, up out of which jutted a perspective of sharp rock and further mesas and distant sharp mountains: the great, hollow, rock-wilderness space of that part of Arizona, submerged in light.

Away down the trail, small dark naked rapid figures with arms held close, went the two young men, running swiftly down to the hollow level, and diminishing, running across the hollow toward more stark rocks of the other side. Two small, rapid, intent, dwindling little human figures. The tiny

dark sparks of men. Such specks of gods.

They disappeared, no bigger than stones, behind rocks in shadow. They had gone, it was said, to lay down the snakes before a rock called the snake-shrine, and let them all go free. Free to carry the message and thanks to the dragon-gods who can give and withhold. To carry the human spirit, the human breath, the human prayer, the human gratitude, the human command which had been breathed upon them in the mouths of the priests, transferred to them from those feather prayer-sticks which the old wise men swept upon the shoulders of the young, snake-bearing men, to carry this back, into the vaster, dimmer, inchoate regions where the monsters of rain and wind alternated in beneficence and wrath. Carry the human prayer and will power into the holes of the winds, down into the octopus heart of the rain-source. Carry the cornmeal, which the women had scattered, back to that terrific, dread, and causeful dark sun which is at the earth's core, that which sends us corn out of the earth's nearness, sends us food or death, according to our strength of vital purpose, our power of sensitive will, our courage.

It is battle, a wrestling all the time. The Sun, the nameless Sun, source of all things, which we call sun because the other name is too fearful, this, this vast dark protoplasmic sun from which issues all that feeds our life, this original One is all the time willing and unwilling. Systole, diastole, it pulses its willingness and its unwillingness that we should live and move on, from being to being, manhood to further manhood. Man, small vulnerable man, the farthest adventurer from the dark heart of the first of suns, into the cosmos of creation. Man, the last god won into existence. And all the time he is sustained and threatened, menaced and sus-

tained, from the Source, the innermost sun-dragon. And all the time he must submit and he must conquer. Submit to the strange beneficence from the Source, whose ways are past finding out. And conquer the strange malevolence of the Source, which is past comprehension also. For the great dragons from which we draw our vitality are all the time willing and unwilling that we should have being. Hence only the heroes snatch manhood, little by little, from the strange den of the Cosmos.

Man, little man, with his consciousness and his will, must both submit to the great origin-powers of his life and conquer them. Conquered by man, who has overcome his fears, the snakes must go back into the earth with his messages of tenderness, of request, and of power. They go back as rays of love to the dark heart of the first of suns. But they go back also as arrows shot clean by man's sapience and courage, into the resistant, malevolent heart of the earth's oldest, stubborn core. In the core of the first of suns, whence man draws his vitality, lies poison as bitter as the rattlesnake's. This poison man must overcome; he must be master of its issue. Because from the first of suns come traveling the rays that make men strong and glad, and gods who can range between the known and the unknown. Rays that quiver out of the earth as serpents do, naked with vitality. But each ray charged with poison for the unwary, the irreverent, and the cowardly. Awareness, wariness, is the first virtue in primitive man's morality. And his awareness must travel back and forth, back and forth, from the darkest origins out to the brightest edifices of creation.

And amid all its crudity, and the sensationalism which comes chiefly out of the crowd's desire for thrills, one cannot help pausing in reverence before the delicate, anointed bravery of

the snake-priests — so-called — with the snakes.

They say the Hopis have a marvelous secret cure for snake-bites. They say the bitten are given an emetic drink, after the dance, by the old women, and that they must lie on the edge of the cliff and vomit, vomit, vomit. I saw none of this. The two snake-men who ran down into the shadow came soon running up again, running all the while, and, steering off at a tangent, ran up the mesa once more, but beyond a deep, impassable cleft. And there, when they had come up to our level, we saw them across the cleft distance washing, brown and naked, in a pool; washing off the paint, the medicine, the ecstasy, to come back into daily life and eat food. Because for two days they had eaten nothing, it was said. And for nine days they had been immersed in the mystery of snakes, and fasting in some measure.

Men who have lived many years among the Indians say they do not believe the Hopi have any secret cure. Sometimes priests do die of bites; it is said. But a rattlesnake secretes his poison slowly. Each time he strikes he loses his venom, until if he strike several times he has very little wherewithal to poison a man. Not enough, not half enough to kill. His glands must be very full charged with poison, as they are when he merges from winter-sleep, before he can kill a man outright.

Therefore, during the nine days of the kiva, when the snakes are bathed and lustrated, perhaps they strike their poison away into some inanimate object. And surely they are soothed and calmed with such things as the priests, after centuries of experience, know.

We dam the Nile and take the railway across America. The Hopi smooths the rattlesnake and carries him in his mouth, to send him back into

the dark places of the earth, an emissary to the inner powers.

To each sort of man his own achievement, his own victory, his own conquest. To the Hopi, the origins are dark and dual, cruelty is coiled in the very beginnings of all things, and circle after circle creation emerges toward a flickering, revealed Godhead. With Man as the godhead so far achieved, waveringly and forever incomplete, in this world.

To us, and to the Orientals, the Godhead was perfect to start with, and man makes but a mechanical excursion into a created and ordained universe, an excursion of mechanical achievement, and of yearning for return to the perfect Godhead of the beginning.

To us, God was in the beginning, Paradise and the Golden Age have been long lost, and all we can do is to win back. To the Hopi, God is not yet, and the Golden Age lies far ahead. Out of the dragon's den of the cosmos we have wrested only the beginnings of our being, the rudiments of our godhead.

Between the two visions lies the gulf of mutual negations. But ours was the quickest way, so we are conquerors for the moment.

The American aborigines are radically, innately religious. The fabric of their life is religious. But their religion is animistic, their sources are dark and impersonal, their conflict with their 'gods' is slow, and unceasing.

This is true of the settled Pueblo Indians and the wandering Navaho, the ancient Maya, and the surviving Aztec. They are all involved at every moment in their old, struggling religion.

Until they break in a kind of hopelessness under our cheerful, triumphant

success. Which is what is rapidly happening. The young Indians who have been to school for many years are losing their religion, becoming discontented, bored, and rootless. An Indian with his own religion inside him *cannot* be bored. The flow of the mystery is too intense all the time — too intense, even, for him to adjust himself to circumstances which really are mechanical. Hence his failure. So he, in his great religious struggle for the Godhead of man, falls back beaten. The Personal God who ordained a mechanical cosmos gave the victory to his sons, a mechanical triumph.

Soon after the dance is over, the Navahos begin to ride down the Western trail, into the light. Their women, with velvet bodices and full, full skirts, silver and turquoise tinkling thick on their breasts, sit back on their horses and ride down the steep slope, looking wonderingly around from their pleasant, broad, nomadic, Mongolian faces. And the men — long, loose, thin, long-waisted, with tall hats on their brows and low-sunk silver belts on their hips — come down to water their horses at the spring. We say they look wild. But they have the remoteness of their religion, their animistic vision, in their eyes; they can't see as we see. And they cannot accept us. They stare at us as the coyotes stare at us, the gulf of mutual negation between us.

So in groups, in pairs, singly, they ride silently down into the lower strata of light, the aboriginal Americans riding into their shut-in reservations. While the white Americans hurry back to their motor-cars, and soon the air buzzes with starting engines, like the biggest of rattlesnakes buzzing.

TOTOTA

A STORY OF OLD BUENOS AIRES

BY MANUEL UGARTE

[THIS story is translated from the author's tales of Argentine life published under the title *Cuentos de la Pampa* by Calpé, Madrid, in 1920.]

I AM far from professing that Buenos Aires was at this time only a big village. The prophecy of a great metropolis was already evident in a thousand subtle ways. But at the time I am about to record many reminders of the colonial period survived. This was particularly true in respect to religion. In high society, to be sure, church attendance was already becoming largely a matter of good form, and many of the common people were drifting away from the faith; but an immense majority still professed and practised the ancient piety. The modest one-story houses that bordered in endless lines the ill-paved streets still sheltered families whose entire lives were passed in the shadow of the parish church. Sermons, vespers, matins, rosaries, fasts, and masses absorbed most of the women's time. The rest was devoted to making vestments, embroidering altar cloths, preparing for christenings, and discussing behind deceptive shutters, that allowed one to see without being seen, such exciting themes as the neighborhood quarrels, the clothes of the passers-by, and the innocent love-affairs of the girls, who even then managed to escape the vigilance of their duennas long enough to accept a flower through a window-grating.

In this simple atmosphere lived the Pedriels. No family in Montserrat Parish stood higher in neighborhood esteem. Everyone praised the perfect harmony and sweet temper of the three elderly maiden sisters who composed the adult household. The youngest of them had already passed fifty. To see them in their eternal mourning, their black-alpaca dresses, their black shawls pinned hoodlike under their chins, one would have said that they never had been young. To be sure, back in the time of the tyrant Rozas the youngest had had a girlhood engagement with a young doctor, who wrote verses and who died fighting against the *Unitarios*. But the elder sisters had never deviated even that far from the straight and narrow path of their conventual life. An old Negro mammy who had seen 'the girls' born, and who still served them faithfully in spite of her seventy years, dusted daily the ancestral rep-upholstered chairs, the gray rugs, and the fireside brasses that perpetuated the family memories of an earlier generation.

Only one ray of sunshine illumined that sombre circle — a cheery young niece who had come to live with her aunts after the death of her father, a gallant and adventurous colonel, whom no one would have imagined to be a Pedriel. Carlota, whom they called Totota because that is the way she pronounced her name when a baby, was a slender, bright-eyed, buoyant-