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HUMAN HAND OF SOLID STONE

Little Stories of a Strange People and Strange Customs

M. J. Brown, Courier, Oregon City

There is a junction at a little Arizona town where a branch of the Santa Fe runs north to the grand canyon. The train was two hours late and fifty or more passengers were killing time.

Three cowboys drove a big nail in the hard mud, and then from a mark ten or twelve feet away they began pitching nickles at the nail, the nearest one taking the three.

Soon some miners, ranchmen and passengers took a hand in the gambling and as there soon became a shortage of nickels as one or two made steady winnings, then someone would propose a quarter throw "to get the nickels back into circulation."

The quarters soon were bunched up as the nickels had been, when a ranchman about half drunk, dared the others to make it a dollar a throw. All dropped out but five. They marked their dollars and went to it, and five dollars changed hands about every five seconds.

After a few minutes the five selected a "banker." He had a box of safety matches. He sold each man 25 for as many dollars, and when the train came they were getting about as quick action on money as any gambling layout I ever saw, and I was told one man had lost \$100 and another \$50.

This incident is typical of Arizona and New Mexico. Gambling seems to be in the air, and about 90 per cent catch it. I remember three years ago of being at a cow camp for dinner, located on a mountain and overlooking a railroad about five miles away. There was a flag station on the desert. A train was coming, and every man, including the cook and myself, bet one way or another, on whether or not the train would stop that day. It was the daily gamble. One man took all bets, big or little, either way. I lost 50 cents. I gambled there was nothing the train should want to stop for.

In Needles, Cal., one hot night the last of September, there was a big crowd around the big depot, as the eastern train was in and stopped a half hour. There was a bunch of young fellows, plainly from the east, and they attracted much attention by their noisy ways and swagger tourist uniforms.

One of them was dolled up in English style, and he was certainly an advertiser.

This big station is a get together place for many Indians and squaws, who have all kinds of beads, robes, turquoise and like stuff to sell.

The "fresh" boys would go from one to another, pull over their stut, ask the price, try to "jolly" the Indian girls, and attract attention.

One fat squaw had some boys' bows and arrows. The English counterfeiter took a bow, looked at it, took an arrow and shot it away across the track. The other boys laughed loudly at the "blood" tricks. Then as he handed back the bow, the 200-lb. squaw threw her arms around him, hung on despite his struggles, and hugged him like a bear.

The fellow didn't object very strenuously for he appeared to rather like the attention and the crowd he was attracting.

Just then a baggage man, who was onto the game, sang out, just as a drill officer would call "present—arms." Only this fellow called—"Body—LICE."

In a second the boy "was on," and he struggled and cursed to get away. Then three other squaws joined in the hugging match, and it was only when the station policeman laughingly forced them to "break away," that the fellow was released, and he ran into his Pullman, followed by the jeering crowd.

It was my bet he didn't finish with that suit of clothes, and it was a bet with no takers. I long ago learned that "distance lends enchantment" and familiarity lends "seam squirrels."

Up in the Moqui country we stopped at a little trading store, and while we drank ginger ale the trader showed me a human stone hand, not mummified, not ossified, but stoned—petrified flesh.

It was but part of a hand, broken diagonally across from the thumb joint to the wrist joint. But it WAS a human hand.

He said some miners found it and traded it to him for groceries. They set of a blast to break up a big rock wall at the mouth of a shaft, and a few days later found this part of a hand many rods from the place of explosion.

The guess was that at the foot of this bluff an Indian had been buried years ago, and that the mineral substances that seep down many of these cliffs had turned the body to stone. The explosion probably blew open the grave and shattered the stone man. They searched in vain for other pieces.

The hand was perfect, partially closed, the color of iron rust, and the minute wrinkles and pores of the skin were almost as easily seen as on a living hand, and where the break was could be seen the ends of the cords and arteries.

I tried to buy it, but as he had written to a museum about it, he would not set any price until he heard from them. It was certainly a strange sight to see that human hand lying on the counter.

In the Moqui country one day, firing of the ride and taking a cross cut, I ran across two or three feathers, tied to a twig, and the twig bent over and stuck in the ground. These are "prayer sticks," the Indian's way of supplication, and they are always hidden in some obscure spot. And the driver told me he would not care for the contract to take me safely out of the reservation if I molested those sticks and the Indians knew it. I had a yearning to take that prayer medium home with me, but I lost the

yearn after the driver told me a scare story or two.

A one armed Indian is a sight you probably never saw. They are few. I met one, a Navajo, on horseback, or rather he stopped where we were lurching, and asked the driver to put some tobacco in a cigarette paper. After this was done the Indian with one hand gave the paper and tobacco a roll and he had a better product than I could have made with both hands, and sitting on the ground.

Years ago a trader and relic hunter came into the reservation, and made his home there the most of the time. Finally he married an Indian girl, but after a few months neglected her and was away from the reserve the most of the time. One day he returned, gathered together his belongings and at night attempted to slip out. His Indian brother-in-law, warned by the deserted wife, laid for him. The white man was buried the next day and the Indian was taken to G Gallup to be buried. Blood poisoning set in and the arm was amputated. There were no witnesses to the midnight duel. The Indian said it was self defense, and his arm, shattered with a .44 bullet, was pretty good evidence. And this was the story of the only one-armed Indian I ever saw.

Here are a few of the strange customs and characteristics of the Pueblo Indians along the Rio Grand that perhaps you do not know:

The child belongs to the mother; the father cannot own a house. The pueblos (villages) are divided into many clans, all named, like Green Corn People, Wolf People, River People, etc.; and people who belong to a clan cannot marry into the clan. They must marry from another clan. With all Indian tribes of the southwest, I am told descent is from the mother, not the father.

Some of the southwest Indians put their dead in the tops of trees to mummify; others burn the bodies and all belongings with them, but the Rio Grande tribes bury them, and with them many a string of beads, turquoise, silver ornaments, etc., that a relic hunter would take a long chance to get, as some of them are of great relic value. But nearly all burials are near, and often in the center of the village and if a white man attempted to disturb them he would be killed like a coyote. I have seen Indian burial grounds, where the dead had been buried for so many hundreds of years one upon another, that there was almost more bones than dirt, and arm, leg, rib and skull bones were sticking out of the ground all over the burial yard.

The Navajos have some peculiar habits and characteristics. Altho their reservation adjoins the snake-tending Moquis, yet they shun a rattlesnake as much as a white man.

The Navajos are great meat eaters and will live entirely on game if they can get it, yet they will not touch rabbit meat if starving. They will lie down by a prairie dog hole and wait all day to catch him, and his meat is in great demand, but no rabbit stews for a Navajo.

The Navajos are, I believe, the only Indian tribe of the southwest that does not live in villages and the only tribe that lives almost entirely on meat. They do not even live near neighbors and their hogans (houses) are built back from the roads and trails, hidden from view by a pile of rocks or a hill.

With a gun one day I went out after the noon lunch to get a rabbit and climbing over a lava hill I ran onto an Indian home, half built and half dug into a hill. Behind the house was a squaw on her knees before a loom weaving a Navajo blanket. The dogs rushed out at me as I started down the hill and I halted. They held me at bay. So long as I kept that distance they laid down and watched, but the first step forward they growled in an ugly way. I wanted very much to see the squaw work, but the dogs said no. She paid absolutely no attention to me. The man I was with said if the Indian had been at home he would have welcomed me, in the hope of selling a blanket, but the dogs were trained to guard the squaw.

The Navajos are wonderful silversmiths, and considering that their tools are little more than a hammer and a piece of iron to pound on, they turn out some beautiful rings, bracelets, and other articles, and they can be bought a little above the cost of the silver in them.

Silver is the metal and turquoise the gem of all Indians. I never saw a gold ornament on an Indian, and they told me if I would offer a Indian a gold finger ring he wouldn't accept it.

But they will trade anything they have, their horses and saddles for the coveted turquoise. It is said there is but one turquoise mine in all New Mexico, northwest of Santa Fe, owned by the Tiffany jewelers of New York, yet the Indians go far back in the mountains and find it, and lots of it. But no inducements are potent to make them reveal the source.

On all their jewelry is the blue stone, some polished, some in the raw quartz. It is to them what the diamond is to us. They set them into handsomely carved bracelets, ear rings, and many other articles. I have seen Indians with strings of turquoise beads twelve or fifteen feet long, looped around their necks several times. It is difficult to get these, for the reason the Indians would rather have them than the white man's money. Some of their bridles are wonderful works of Indian art, almost covered with silver mountings and turquoise settings.

And their water jars. I was offered one that would hold about ten quarts for a dollar, but I had no way to carry it, as I was going in instead of out. The squaws make this work, and some of the designs are really artistic.

They are a great people, these Indians. Going from one tribe to another you will find such pronounced differences in customs and ways of living, yet mix two tribes and you could not distinguish them.

They are all more or less sun worshippers, but they do not take to religion to any extent. The Catholics work hard among them, but have little success.

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