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On Indian Trails

The thirteenth of a series of articles specially written for The Guardian
By Lucy Gertrude Clarkin

Preparations For Ceremony

"On the day of the dance the captain of the Snake men places all the snakes in a large buckskin bag and deposits them in the booth. All the other active participants are still in their Kiva, going through their mysterious preparations. Just before sunset is the invariable time for the dance. Long before the hour, the house-tops and the edge of the court are lined with spectators; the earnest Moquis, a goodly representation of the Navajos, whose reservation lies just east, and of late years many whites.

"At about half-past five in the afternoon the twenty men of the Antelope order emerge from their own special room in single file, march three around the court, and go through certain sacred ceremonies in front of the booth. Here their captain sprinkles them with a consecrated fluid from the tip of an eagle's feather. For a few minutes they dance and shake their gauds (ceremonial rattles made of gourds) in front of the booth; and then they are ranged beside it, with their backs against the wall of the houses. Among them are the youngsters that day admitted to the order in which they will thenceforward receive life-long training—dimpled tots of from four to seven years old, who look extremely "cunning" in their picturesque regimentals.

"Now all is ready and in a moment a buzz in the crowd announces the coming of the seventeen priests of the Snake order through the roofed alley just south of the dance-rock. These seventeen enter the court in single file at a rapid gait, and make the circuit of the court four times stamping hard with the right foot upon the sacred plank that covers Shi-pa-pu as they pass in front of the booth. This is to let the Cochinas (spirits or divinities) know that the dancers are now presenting their prayers.

"When the captain of the Snake order reaches the booth, on the fourth circuit, the procession halts. The captain kneels in front of the booth, thrusts his arm behind the curtain, unties the sack, and in a minute draws out a big squirming rattlesnake. This he holds with his teeth about six inches back of the ugly triangular head, and then he rises erect. The captain of the Antelope order steps forward and puts his left arm around the Snake captain's neck, while with the snake-whip in his right hand he "smooths" the writhing reptile. The two start forward in the peculiar hippety-hop, hop, hippety-hop, of all the Pueblo games: the next Snake priest draws forth a snake from the booth, and is joined by the next Antelope man as a partner; and so on, until each of the Snake men is dancing with a deadly snake in his mouth and an Antelope man accompanying him.

Dancers in Pairs

"The dancers hop in pairs thus from the booth to the dance-rock, thence north, and circle toward the booth again. When they reach a certain point, which completes about three quarters of the circle each Snake man gives his head a sharp snap to the left, and thereby throws his snake to the rocky floor of the court inside the ring of dancers, and dances on to the booth again, to extract a fresh snake and make another round.

There are three more Antelope men than Snake men and these three have no partners in the dance, but are intrusted with the duty of gathering up the snakes thus set free and putting them back in the booth. The snakes sometimes run to the crowd—a ticklish affair for those jammed upon the brink of the precipice. In case the snakes run, the three official gatherers snatch them up without ado; but if they coil and show fight, these Antelope men tinkle them with the snake-whips until they uncoil and try to glide away, and this is seized them with the rapidity of lightning. Frequently these gatherers have five or

six snakes in their hands at once, the reptiles are as deadly as ever; not one has had its fangs extracted. (A snake cannot strike without a leverage; the coil gives him this base—or if you step on him, it amounts to the same thing.)

"I never knew one of them to be seriously effected by a rattlesnake's bite. They pay no attention to the (to other people) deadly stroke of that hideous mouth, which opens flat as a palm and emits exactly like one, but dances and sing in earnest unconcern."

The author explains here how difficult it is to get a good photograph of this dance, starting as it does in the late afternoon, and performed in the shadow of the tall houses; even the make-up of the dancers makes photography difficult. "Their faces are painted black to the mouth, and white from there to the neck. Their bodies, naked to the waist, are painted a dark lake red. They wear curious dancing skirts to the knees, with beautiful fox skins dangling behind, but nothing on their legs except rattles and sacred twigs at the ankles.

"At last all rush together at the foot of the dance-rock and throw all their snakes into a horrible heap of threatening heads and buzzing tails. I have seen that hillock of rattlesnakes a foot high and four feet across. For a moment the dancers leap about that writhing pile, while the sacred corn meal is sprinkled; then they thrust each an arm into that squirming mass, grasp a number of snakes and go running at top speed to the four points of the compass. Reaching the bottom of the great mesa (Walpi, where the chief Snake Dance is held, is 600 feet above the plain) they release the unharmed serpents.

"These astounding rites last for half an hour to an hour ending when the hot sun has fallen behind the western desert. Then the dancers go to receive their sacred purification with the secret herb, and the onlookers scatter to their quaint homes."

London Letter

By Glenville Carew
(British United Press)

LONDON, February, 26.—There assembled the other day at the top of Whitehall in London a group of members of one of those fanatic societies of which the general public know little or nothing. They were representatives of the Order of the White Rose, or some such name, and they met to pay homage to the memory of Charles Stuart, King of England who, in the year 1649, met his death on the scaffold in that same street of Whitehall.

These people hold that the Stuarts are still the rightful kings of England and Scotland, and every year on the anniversary of the King's death—or his murder as they would say—they place wreaths around his statue and pray for the day when a Stuart shall again ascend the Throne.

The ceremony over, the members melt away, claiming, a little inconsistently, the assistance for pilotage through the traffic of the police of a Government under a King whom they regard as a usurper.

That statue around the base of which they gather has a history. It was cast in bronze in 1633. Before it was erected the Civil War—the war between the Cavaliers and the Roundheads—the King and the Parliament—broke out, and the victorious Parliament handed it to a Roundhead brazier with orders to destroy the noxious symbol of the Monarchy. Secretly that brazier sold innumerable bits of the metal to royalists who cherished them until the happy day when the King came into his own again and all the bells of the land rang for Charles the Second.

And then that brazier, who was a sort of Vicar of Bray before his time, disintegrated that statue from the spot where he had buried it. Yet even now one is occasionally invited by proud owners to inspect the reverent one of those bits of metal sold by that astute and brazen brazier.

Dietators seem to do pretty well in some continental countries, for a time at any rate, but in these isles the gentlemen who have essayed the role have, with one or two notable exceptions, come to an unpleasantly sticky end. It is true that they have played the part in times long past and that we have changed in manners since then, but still

The point is that an increasing number of politicians—statesmen if you like—are becoming more and more convinced, even against their will, that in the economic crisis which seems inevitable neither party government nor Parliamentary control will be able effectively to direct affairs. The only alternative would therefore seem to be a temporary dictatorship and there is common belief gaining ground that should

the country come to that point Mr. Lloyd George is hoping that he will be asked and able to fill the bill.

Probably this is not an instance of personal ambition. Beneath all the opportunism which undoubtedly characterises Mr. Lloyd George and a certain amount of instability which is probably more apparent than real there is a veritable volcano of the Celtic fire which urges men of his type to do great things for quite selfless motives.

This country made Mr. Lloyd George nothing short of a Dictator in War for our salvation. It will be strange if we make him one day a Dictator in Peace. There seems no other Richmond in the field.

Talking of Dictators, it is clear that whether or not Mr. Lloyd George becomes a sort of Shah of Shahs in the case of the great affairs of the State at large, he is undoubtedly at the present time a sort of pulse king in matters of politics in the House of Commons.

In spite of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's vain glorious words about the stability of the Socialist Government in office, no one takes his remarks on that point as anything more than bluff, and almost certainly the Prime Minister—whoever else he may be "kidding"—is not deceiving himself.

There is all sorts of talk about "facts" between the Socialist and the Liberals whereby, says the Man in the Street, the Lloyd-Georgians in return for quids pro quo will support the Government in emergency, but to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear it is clear as noon-day that L. G. keeps Whitehall continually guessing and that he is far too old a parliamentary hand to put all his tactical cards on the table for other parties to look at.

For men of words to men of action.

For weeks past most Londoners have been interested in the attempt to break the land speed motor car record which Captain Malcolm is to make—and indeed at this moment of writing may have already made—on Daytona Beach. But most people seem to know quite a lot about the car he will use and very little about the man who will use the car. So to mention a few facts about him for those not already informed, on the authority of one who knows: "Captain Campbell is the oldest racing motorist still driving. He is 47 years of age. He is the holder of more records than any man alive

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