

THANKSGIVING— An Old Indian Custom



Indian Dance at Taps during a Thanksgiving festival



The Governor of Shungopovi Pueblo



Inside the Pueblo



A Group of Santa Clara Pueblo Indians

By EDITHA L. WATSON

TANDING on the edge of his little cornfield, the Hopi farmer looks at his crop and smiles. His lips move, and gentle words come from them—words which carry so much of heartfeltness that we might guess their meaning from the warmth with which they are uttered, and know, because they are spoken softly as well as earnestly, that they were addressed to Those Above, whom we call The Almighty.

"Kwa kwi, kwa kwi," is what the Hopi says: "thanks, thanks!" And in these words he expresses one of the most characteristic of Indian customs, that of giving thanks on every occasion and no matter how slight the pretext.

We may smile at the thought of uttering thanks for the presence of a visitor; that his health is good; if a child who has fallen and hurt itself slightly, begin to smile again; if rain comes—for any or all of the small matters which fill every day. Yet we, who pride ourselves on our manners, and who are prompt to acknowledge the slightest favor from a fellow-human, cannot help but admire the etiquette which calls for acknowledgment to God also; and when we realize that all these seemingly slight events are beyond the unaided power of man to bring about, we feel that we have been ungrateful to take so much for granted without bothering to acknowledge the source.

Not content with unending thankfulness, the Indians also said grace, sometimes both before and after meals. To the words of the little prayer were added an offering of food, which was cast into the fire as the grace was spoken. "Receive, oh source of my ancestry, and eat!" said the Zuni as he performed the rite. "Spirit, partake!" murmured the Dakota woman, and her husband echoed the whispered prayer and offering of gratitude.

In the Pueblo land, no cooking was undertaken without an offering. A pinch of meal preceded the bread into the oven; a bit of each sort of food was placed in the fire, with a thought of thanksgiving for past and future, before meals. The smallest children had their hands guided in this little ceremony, for the spirit of gratitude to Those Above for everything, and for food above all, was strong in every Indian heart. Clothing they could skip, if necessary; shelter they could do without, but life itself depended on food, and they were grateful for it.

It is strange how nearly the grace before meals of white men and red coincide. Both express thanks, the white man by words, the Indian by his offering of food as well, and both ask blessings to come. A Zuni grace runs as follows:

"Makers of the trails of our lives and ye spirits of our ancestors, of this add ye unto your hearts after the manner of your own knowledge, and bless us with fruitful seasons, needed water, and age of life."

It must have been a very lovely world in which the ancient red men lived. There were all the beauties of untouched nature to behold; there were tasks to keep the hands busy, and prayers to occupy the heart and mind. The Navaho prayer:

"Make beautiful all that is before me.
Make beautiful all that is behind me.
It is done in beauty."

was answered daily to all the tribes, and out of this serene beauty of their Earth Mother, there grew a very strong religion, the essence of which was thanksgiving.

There is a beautiful Tewa ceremony which occurs about harvest-time—that of giving the perfect seeds in charge and allowing the Earth Mother to rest for a while. The finest seeds of all sorts are searched out by the Kossa, a summer priesthood, and a few of each kind are sanctified, guarded, and planted about ten days before the rest of the crop is put in. In the fall, the perfect seeds of these selected plants are gathered, and at the conclusion of a feast of thanksgiving, the Kossa give them to the Quarrano, a winter priesthood, to guard until the next planting-time.

At this time, out of gratitude to the Earth Mother, strong medicine is made that she may sleep after all her toil. All spring and summer she has given of her flesh in all forms of nature to her children. Surely she is tired and needs to rest. The feasting is done, the next year's seeds laid by, and now comes a period in which the grateful Indian people keep quiet, making no noise that that beloved Mother may sleep. No loud talking is allowed in Tewa towns, and every noise is hushed, until she has had her rest. Here is true thanksgiving—primitive, naturally, but sincere, and expressed in terms of human-kind.

The dances and ceremonies which preceded various feasts were something like an enlargement of the grace before meals. Harvest-time meant happiness, and it also brought with it the obligation of giving thanks, so by combining the celebrations with rites, the Indian enjoyed both

and did not neglect either. There is a little Cherokee tale which illustrates the custom of celebrating before feasting:

Seven wolves went out hunting and caught a fat groundhog. Their prey, considering that with presence of mind there might be a chance for absence of body, reminded them that people always danced for gratitude when they had something good to eat, giving the Green Corn dance as an example. He urged the wolves to do likewise, and offered to teach them steps and to sing for them. The wolves, although they were very hungry, eagerly agreed to hold this dance of thanksgiving, and during their celebration the groundhog escaped.

The Green Corn dance, to which the animal alluded, is one of the favorites among Indian ceremonies of thanksgiving, although it is held at the time of green corn—late summer. Among the Creeks this festival was the occasion of forgiveness, when injury and hatred were forgotten. The ceremonies lasted from four to eight days and were marked by rejoicing over the first fruits of the year.

The Pueblos also hold a green corn festival, beautiful and symbolical, a sort of grace before the harvest. Then later in the year, about the time of our own Thanksgiving day, there are harvest festivals, when the prayers of gratitude rise endlessly to Those Above, as the happy people celebrate with ceremony and feasting the gifts which the Earth Mother has bestowed. In one ancient Pueblo dance, great trays full of the finest vegetables, bread, and meats, were thrown about and trampled into the earth, forming a great offering to express the thanks of the people.

Although shelter and clothing are as important to us as food, we have not left off the age-old association of food with celebration. Indeed, Thanksgiving day centers around the dinner table. At first a fast-day, the early American colonists gradually assimilated the old Indian customs, and today the annual feast of gratitude is a real American institution. Hence it seems all the more fitting that most of the dishes which are traditional to the day should be those which the Indians themselves enjoyed and celebrated in the eating.

First of all, there is that grand American bird, the turkey. Nothing like him was ever seen before, and the newcomers thought that he must be some relation to the peacock, as he strutted in his iridescent finery. Perhaps there is nothing more delicious than young wild turkey fed on pinon-nuts, which the Indians of the Southwest knew. With this noble bird always go potatoes, an American product which the natives enjoyed long before the coming of Columbus. In fact, in those pre-discovery days, America furnished some of the choicest and most palatable foods which we know of. Some of them grew, also, in the eastern hemisphere, but many were distinctly and distinctively American.

The Indians had real cause for thanksgiving in the variety and tastiness of the food. True, there was no beef, but buffalo humps were a delicacy which has been celebrated in practically every history of early Americans, and ribs, juicy and tender, roasted over coals, would rival the famous cookery of the Old world, yet requiring no other sauce than hunger.

But do not think that hunger was the necessary ingredient of an Indian meal. Cooking was not the haphazard operation we might believe it to have been. There were fifty-three ways of preparing corn, and we should offer thanks on our own accounts for this Indian food, as we eat succotash, hominy, and other corn dishes prepared, long before our time, by the "savages" of America.

There were deer and mountain sheep for a change from buffalo, and fish from the many streams, and ducks and other birds were numerous and varied, so that no one need live on turkey. The great "kitchen middens" found along the coast prove that oysters were a greatly enjoyed Indian food, and turtles also helped in the menu.

While we are hunting for Indian dishes to place on the Thanksgiving dinner table, we may give thought to the appropriate beverage for this truly American meal. Of course, the average man will demand coffee, which is not a native drink, but mate, which has a high caffeine content, would be the nearest drink of the sort. Teas made from dried flowers or flavoured twigs and roots would be truly Indian decoctions, but scarcely enjoyable to our trained palates. Tiswin, the Apache beer made of sprouted corn, would be appropriate, but it is alcoholic to a considerable degree. The only real Indian beverage which appeals to modern tastes is chocolate, favorite drink of the Aztec kings.

After dinner, in that hour when it is too early for the football game and every one is too contentedly filled to care about exertion anyway, the air begins to grow hazy with tobacco smoke. Here, too, is an old Indian custom closely associated with the giving of thanks. Few tribes used tobacco to smoke as we do; rather it carried messages to the gods in its clouds of smoke. The pipe was presented, or the smoke blown, to the four world-quarters, above and below, to symbolize the offering of prayer in all directions. It was puffed during ceremonies, and at councils.

The Chippewa and many other tribes use tobacco as a thank offering. When they cut a Birch tree for its bark, they bury a little tobacco at the roots, giving thanks as they do so. The Pueblos tie small parcels of tobacco to their prayer-sticks, and the tribes which have dog-killing ceremonies fasten bundles of tobacco to the legs and neck of the sacrificed animals, bidding them to carry these to the spirit land with them, there to present them with prayers for health and plenty for the tribe.

Little of that ancient gratitude is left; and we, in our hard modern shells, celebrate the day of thanksgiving by feasting without ceremony. Yet in our hearts we have studied the question, "what are we thankful for?" and find many things which made us glad to be alive—among them, perhaps, the fact that we are not Indians!

We owe acknowledgment to Providence, that much is certain. And because we, after all, are a thoughtful and a courteous people, some time during Thanksgiving day we will echo in our hearts the words said by our predecessors, centuries ago:

"Thanks, that it is so!"
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Ostrich Bulldogged by Bedouin Riding in Auto

It is possible to "bulldog" ostriches from the running board of an automobile. Prof. A. Aharoni, of the Hebrew university at Jerusalem, led a zoological expedition into the Syrian desert to collect specimens of its rare birds and animals. The expedition wanted to capture alive two ostriches. One of the tribesmen stood on the running board of the car and bending over, grasped an almost black ostrich by one of its useless wings as they rode past at terrific speed. The big bird was so powerful that he would have dragged the unfortunate Bedouin off his slight hold on the running board had not one of his brother Arabs held him from the inside of the car in a vise-like hold. They tied the bird and took it into the already overcrowded machine and continued the chase. Another ostrich was already so fatigued that it could scarcely stand a half hour's pursuit. This one was easily captured.

This Little Girl Got Well Quick

"Just after her third birthday, my little daughter, Connie, had a serious attack of intestinal flu," says Mrs. H. W. Turnage, 217 Cadwalder St., San Antonio, Texas. "It left her very weak and pale. Her bowels wouldn't act right, she had no appetite and nothing agreed with her. Our physician told us to give her some California Fig Syrup. It made her pick up right away, and now she is as robust and happy as any child in our neighborhood. I give California Fig Syrup full credit for her wonderful condition. It is a great thing for children."

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