

# A FEMININE UTOPIA

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Illustrated with Photographs by the Author

**I**N connection with the agitation for still higher political standing and more industrial and social freedom for women that is now going on in nearly every country of the civilized world, frequent references are made to the customs and primitive beliefs in bygone ages, when the position of woman in tribal life was, if anything, more important than that of man; for the reason that, while he was the fighter and defender of the home, she was unquestionably the head of the house, the owner of property, the preserver of the line of descent and the purity of the race, and the unquestioned arbiter of the destinies of her children.

Yet, even in this country, I suppose there are few people who know that there is existing among us here and now a small free community that preserves intact the conditions and customs that their forefathers have handed down from immemorial ages, and that one of the most important and most faithfully observed of these ancient traditions is the respect paid to woman and the position of dignity and authority she occupies, in relation both to her own home life and to the broader life of the community.

## Descendants of the Cliff Dwellers

**I**REFER to the Hopi or Hopitu tribe, the People of Peace, who live their own Old World life in the heart of the Painted Desert of Arizona. This tribe numbers not more than two thousand people; but, owing to the fact that they have preserved so carefully their ancient faith and their time honored customs, there is probably no people in the world of greater significance to the ethnologist. During the last few years much has been written about the Hopi; yet I doubt if anyone can really understand the life of these descendants of the ancient Cliff Dwellers, unless he has lived in their villages on the mesas and shared in their daily life sufficiently to have gained some understanding of their point of view. To the missionary who attempts to convert them from the benighted faith of their fathers, or to the Government official who undertakes to instruct them in the ways of civilization, their life is as a sealed book; but the white man who approaches them as a friend and wins their trust, reaps a rich reward in the broadening of his own mental horizon that comes from intimate



Hopi Woman Drawing a Design on Pottery.



Hopi Preparing Food in a Ground Oven.

contact with these people who are prehistoric and yet of the present day.

For example, most people know that the Hopi have many and elaborate religious ceremonials; but the symbolism of these ceremonies and the beautiful and poetic faith that lies behind them is known only by a few. Many tribes of our Indians preserve the form of a number of their ancient religious observances even when the meaning of them has long been forgotten. But among the Hopitu nothing is forgotten, and their traditions and folklore bring to the open mind the echoes of old wisdom which it is not well even for civilized man to lose sight of entirely. Their gods are deified Nature powers, as the Mother Earth, and the Sky or Sun God,—the Father and Mother of all living things. To these are added the gods of Fire and Lightning, and this closeness to the forces of Nature is the keynote to their whole manner of life and thought as well as to their religion.

This latter is largely a product of their environment; for Nature does not deal kindly with man on the desert. Look where you will over the waste of sand he calls home, and you will find that the cry of man and beast is, "Water! Water!" And so they pray to their kindly Nature gods to give them of this precious fluid, that their crops may not wither and they may not perish from thirst and starvation.

Standing at the top of the cliffs where the Hopi live, and looking out over the desolation of the surrounding desert, one wonders what could have induced these people to build their homes in such inaccessible places, so far from the fields where they raise their scanty crops of corn and where not a drop of water can be found. But they will tell you themselves that they did not always live on the cliffs; that there was a time when their lines were cast in more pleasant places. Hundreds of years ago they lived far to the south in forest clad mountains where there were game and water in plenty; but their enemies, the Apache, Navajo, and Ute, harassed them constantly and compelled them to move from place to place, until at last they found comparative peace on the summits of the impregnable cliffs where they now dwell. There they have established their little Republic, and are so absolutely self maintaining that they are wholly independent of the white man and his civilization, and could go on with their quiet life even if all the rest of America was laid waste and the pale faces banished across the sea to the lands whence they came.

## Think Civilization Destructive

**O**WING to this isolation and inaccessibility, it is probable that in no community in all the world could be found a greater number of patient, sober, and industrious workers than the men and women who inhabit the strange villages borne high upon the cliffs. There are no jails, asylums, poorhouses, or saloons among them. They are the only aboriginal people known to history that has never invented an intoxicating drink, and the only one that has absolutely refused the white man's whisky. They are a pure-blooded race, and have as little to do with outsiders as possible; for they believe that unless they preserve their racial integrity, civilization will ultimately corrupt and destroy them. But in the meantime the Hopi present an example of as perfect communal life as can be found. Widows and orphans belong to the clan and are well cared for. If one suffers, all

suffer, and any measure of prosperity benefits all alike.

Therefore, it is not surprising that among the Hopitu womanhood is revered, and that the position of woman is one of freedom and dignity. As in the case of the ancient tribes, the home and everything in it belongs to the mother, who is literally the Queen of the Household, and the line of descent is on the female side. Though the men are by no means effeminate and are indefatigable workers in outdoor pursuits, the occupations of the two sexes are often reversed, the man undertaking many womanly tasks, while the women consider it their privilege to perform such work as among the white race would always be done by men. For instance, the women build the houses, which is heavy work, while the men weave, do the dressmaking, and knit the stockings.

There are six Hopi villages, or pueblos, as the Spaniards call them, and a seventh, the Pueblo of Tewa or Hano, that was settled by Indians from the Rio Grande in New Mexico. This group of seven pueblos makes up the little Republic of the Hopitu, which occupies what was the old Spanish Province of Tusayan. Oraibi, the largest of these settlements, is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the two Americas, and was probably a flourishing town more than a thousand years ago.

All the houses in these pueblos are built of stone and piled on one another to the height sometimes of five stories, each story receding a little from the one below; so that the whole village forms a sort of irregular pyramid, the upper stories of which are reached by ladders or by steps placed in the partition walls. The dwellings are in the form of flats, each family occupying several rooms. In fact, the original American flat dwellers are the Hopi, and their pleasant communal mode of life makes this form of building the most desirable.

## Women as House Builders

**B**UT it will easily be seen that the construction of this form of dwelling is fairly heavy work for a woman, and one of the most interesting sights to the visitor admitted into their community is the building of a Hopi house. The woman whose home it is to be calls all her female friends to help her, and when a dozen or more of these strong, active women



A Hopi Maiden.