

WHITE INDIANS OF NEW MEXICO WHO FREELY GIVE AWAY GOLD.

PECULIARITIES OF THE QUINCAS, A TRIBE WHOSE ORIGIN IS UNKNOWN.

Always Friendly, Peaceable and Hospitable—Sun Worshipers Who Dwell in a Beautiful Valley of the Sierra Madres—Lovers of Birds and Flowers.

IN a beautiful valley of the great Sierra Madre mountains, in old Mexico, lives one of the strangest tribes of the entire continent—the Quincas. These people are neither Aztecs, Mexicans nor Indians, though their neighbors call them "White Indians." They speak of themselves as Quincas, and their only village is called Quincas Ma. It is said that there are not more than a thousand of them, and they assert that they have occupied the same locality for many centuries, though they have a tradition that their ancestors at some remote period dwelt near a great salt sea, and in proof of this fact they show visitors a small collection of shells carefully preserved in their only temple.



Whenever a Quinca is bitten by a reptile, he runs immediately to this pole and prostrates himself on the ground at the base.

out of a pair of pleasing blue eyes. By many persons who have made only a superficial acquaintance with the racial characteristics and customs of this tribe they have been regarded as Albino Zunis. A little investigation soon convinces one that they have no relationship whatever with these peculiar people. Their eyes are not pinkish or weak, like the Albinos, nor is their hair of the same color or texture. They are sun worshipers, but they do not practice any of the hideous and repulsive rites requiring the use of reptiles peculiar to the Zunis of New Mexico. They are distinguished for their hospitality to strangers and for their love of peace and good morals. Crimes that are so common among people of a higher civilization are entirely unknown to them, and it is said that their simple laws rarely are violated.

They are the pets of the Mexican government from the fact that they are very ready to pay any tax imposed upon them without the least protest. When an assessment is made the chief simply asks how much his people have to pay, and when the amount is stated he pays it. "On the third day my young men will bring you the money in the yellow dust, if it is the will of our God and our Father who shines above us."

Every important matter always is deferred for three days, to give to their priests time to consult with their God, as they say, but the Mexicans say that the delay is to give to the chief men of the tribe an opportunity to go to the sacred gold mine and get the necessary dust. At any time they can get any amount of gold dust, but no man outside of the tribe has ever been able to discover the locality. Many efforts have been made by government officials, private individuals and robbers to induce these people to reveal the source from which they so easily obtain such large sums of gold dust, but they can neither be moved by the hope of the greatest rewards nor the fear of the most horrible tortures.

In one instance a cruel Spanish general had a Quinca chief bound upon a wooden back, and then he ordered a surgeon to pull the man's teeth and toenails slowly from their sockets. Two whole days were occupied in torturing this heroic chief, but he died with the secret of his tribe locked in his bosom. Bands of bandits have burned the temple of the Quincas and inflicted revolting cruelties on the unresisting inhabitants in their efforts to induce some member of the tribe to tell the location of the famous gold mine, but never did a man or woman show the least sign of yielding.

It is hardly probable that all of the people are familiar with the important secret. Those who are best acquainted with the manners and customs of the Quincas think that only the priests and perhaps the head chief of the tribe know where the gold comes from. Experienced prospectors who have explored carefully the Sierra Madres in the vicinity of Quincas Ma say that it is one of the greatest mineral regions on the continent, but they never are able to find any paying placer deposits, though rich gold quartz is abundant and more or less gold dust can be panned out almost every little gulch in the mountains.

the tribe, visits the stranger and he is informed that the great God of the Quincas desires that he should pursue his journey in peace. If the traveler should complain of being sick or footsore he is invited to remain three days longer, and an old woman of the tribe whom they believe to be skilled in the art of healing, the sick is sent to offer to him her services. When the traveler is ready to depart two young men are appointed to accompany him a short distance as a courtesy. Before he starts a young girl whose entire costume is made of the plumage of birds, approaches, bearing a small dish, upon which there are a few Mexican coins, and the chief asks the astounded traveler to take some or all of the money, saying: "You may need it to buy food or drink to sustain you on your journey among strangers, and our God desires that you shall ever carry in

your heart a good image of the Quincas." With such an irrevocable custom of hospitality it is fortunate for these peculiar people that they dwell far away from civilized communities and in a land where a wheeled vehicle never has been seen. The narrow trail which crosses the cloudcapped, snow-covered Sierra Madres at this point is practicable only for mountaineers and sure-footed horses, and, consequently, it is seldom that a traveler takes this route. Quincas would have to change their customs or the whole population would have to devote every hour of their time to mining gold.

When Charles Nordhoff first wrote that this same custom of offering a dish of gold to travelers was practiced by the early Spanish settlers of California his readers did not believe it. It, nevertheless, was true, and there are many old people yet living in Los Angeles who can bear witness to the fact.

The strangest of all their possessions, and the one that distinguishes them as a peculiar people, are countless flocks of tame birds and aquatic fowls. In the evening, when their swarms of pigeons begin to sing, the village is roared, by a noise reminds one of stories that the old pioneers used to tell about the clouds of wild pigeons that frequently passed over the Western states in the early years of the century. The fondness of this tribe for birds is not limited to pigeons, for the town is simply one vast open-air aviary. Every house is full of birds of every color, while the trees in the streets and the plaza fairly shimmer with plumage of variegated hues, and the air is laden with the melody of song. It is a serious offense in Quincas Ma to kill or maim a bird of any kind except for food, and even then the priest has to be consulted. The birds—or, at least, certain species of them—are regarded as sacred messengers. They have some idea of the old theory of transmigration of souls, and they either believe that the spirits of the departed assume the forms of birds, or they regard them as water carriers inspired by angels. The beautiful quetzal, of royal plumage, regarded by the Aztecs as sacred, makes its home under the porches of the Temple of the Sun. An ornithologist could find no better place on earth to gain information than the plaza and streets of Quincas Ma.

The people are as fond of flowers as they are of birds, and every little yard and garden seems to be a crowded flower bed. No woman ever appears in the public street without her head-dress of flowers, while the young girls and children always wear great garlands of roses about their necks. Every unmarried girl's whole costume is made up of the plumage of birds.

The Quincas are a puzzle to all ethnologists. They are of no kinship to their neighbors, and their skin is too white for them to claim descent from the old Mayas of Central America. One of their strange customs has led some investigators to think that they are of Semitic origin. In front of their temple stands a pole about twenty feet high, about which is wound a great serpent carved in wood. Whenever a Quinca is bitten by a reptile, he runs immediately to this pole and prostrates himself on the ground at its base. While the priests are offering sacrifices inside of the temple the people gather about the stricken person, chanting a mournful appeal to the gods for his recovery, and the medicine woman administers to him a liquid which is possibly an effective remedy, for the victim frequently recovers. The old missionary priests saw something in this ceremony which reminded them of Moses raising up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, and they at once jumped to the conclusion that the Quincas were the descendants of the shipwrecked crew of one of Solomon's vessels, either outward or homeward bound from the land of Ophir. If an acute observer should spend a few months with these people, he might learn something that would throw a little light upon the early history of the native races of Mexico and raise a corner of the cloud of gloomy mystery that overhangs so much that is interesting.

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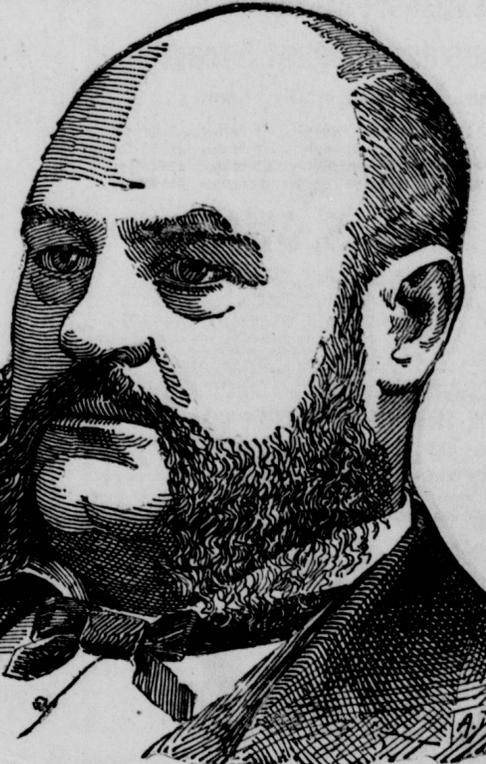
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