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## Po-Sé

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## PO-SÉ

By the late Adolph F. Bandelier.<sup>1</sup>

Looking eastward from the railroad which follows along the western bank of the Rio Grande del Norte, near the southern ending of the valley of La Joya, and half between the Tegua Indian village of Santa Clara and that of San Ildefonso, may be seen the round-topped, mesa-like mountain which the Teguas call Tun-go Ping (The Basket Mountain). The native Mexican people have named this mountain, La Mesilla (The Little Mesa); while the Americans - always practical - call it merely The Round Mountain. Its barren top, conspicuous in its isolation and in its somewhat more symmetrical proportions, rises considerably above the eastern sand hills. The river, winding about its western base, flows almost beneath its overhanging hills, and one must be a hardy climber indeed who would attempt to scale them from the river side. Only from the southeastern corner may one ascend with safety.

Once up, the top shows a flat, ashy surface containing some fifteen or twenty acres, strewn here and there with stones, some of which, from their regular shapes, appear to have been used in the erection of house walls; scattered about are many broken pieces of pottery, some yet showing the broken lines of the old decorations, some of them glazed, and some of the class of vessels that were used for cooking; and a keen-eyed searcher may find as a reward for his patience, or as a memento of his visit, still a few arrow heads which have been washed up by an occasional rain. Along the edge of the top, flush with the sides, rude walls, parts of them still intact, may be observed, built up, as some

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1. A tale of San Ildefonso pueblo, forty odd years ago, left by Bandelier in manuscript and presented to the Historical Society by Mrs. Samuel Eldodt, Chamita, New Mexico.

suppose, to make more difficult the ascent of the hostiles, or to prevent, may be, the falling over its precipitous sides of some careless dweller above. All these evidences of domestic life, of defensive and offensive warfare, lead the fanciful to conclude that a permanent inhabitancy existed long since, or, at least, its dry and deserted top may have been used as a place of retreat from stronger forces than the ancient dwellers in the valley below were able to muster. But there is yet another theory which may account for the fallen ruins on the top, the broken pottery, the arrow heads and the wall remnants. The following account not only seems to give color to the theory, but rather seems to confirm the argument made that the mountain was one of the numerous Indian shrines with which the country abounds.

-I-

It was the middle of February in one of the years of the earlier 80's that Dr. Rand and myself set up our camp in San Ildefonso. The gentle winds falling into the valley from the snowy tops of the Santa Fe and the Jemez ranges were warmed by the increasing rays of the sun rapidly returning northward, making, the doctor observed in his wise and positive way, "Just the proper mixture in the air to counteract disease germs".

I was convalescing from a long sickness, and, in truth, from the very first day I began to grow strong and take a deep interest in the doctor's investigations. His energy and zeal, always bubbling and stewing with enthusiasm, infected me and I became a willing assistant in many of his projects. We had ransacked the dimly written record books of the old church and made some copies of what the doctor declared to be valuable matter; we had quizzed the Indian villagers, buying our way when persuasion was ineffective; our incursions among the cliff and mesa ruins with pick and spade had added many a curious relic of the dead past to our impedimenta; while our daily associations and nightly juntas had made of us tolerable experts in the peculiar

inflections of the Tegua language. So occupied were we that April had passed before we thought of moving.

"The middle of May is an ideal time for Rocky Mountain travel for one hundred and one reason", the doctor replied pompously and finally, when I had suggested a transfer and a change of activities.

And I, not ill pleased at his dictum, continued to amuse myself with old Po-se, taking care to show no greater proficiency in Indian lore than the doctor was able to acquire. Now, Dr. Rand was a very capable physician, my elder by some fifteen years, and the best-natured and most open-hearted man alive, and, notwithstanding his disposition to exercise a sort of paternalism and show his superiority I nearly always gave in to his theories and rarely criticised his conclusions. Because he had traveled much and had spent a short time once before in the valley, I easily looked over his pride - almost vanity - in his accomplishments and in his ability to learn new things. If his peculiarities became tiresome I made excuse, without offense, to make excursions on my own account. At night we would meet again, the best of friends, to compare the labors and pastimes of the day.

But not a drop of rain had fallen since early in March; towards the latter end of that month the winds seemed to gather force, and in April the days were mere repetitions of unchanging wind storms with every particle of moisture squeezed out; then, because of the almost vertical rays of the sun the winds, blowing from the southwest, became hot blasts through the lengthening days; they hardly ceased at night; they parched the whole valley's expanse, and, rushing along the mountain sides and up the short cañons, browned the vegetation and dried up the little cañon streams almost to their very sources; the Rio Grande itself had become a mere brook as its scant and shallow flow found way through the burning wastes of sand. At length, about the middle of May, the forests on the lower mesas and along the sides of the mountains caught fire, and this

disaster fast dried up the little remaining water and pasturage; by day those fires appeared in the distance literally a "Pillar of Cloud" from the smoke; by night, a "Pillar of Light" from the flames; yet there was no promise of good because of them; rather, did the people stand aghast as they gazed upon the far off conflagrations, knowing that the fires promised present as well as future evil. Thus did the last days of May pass, and the first of June - a Sunday - was ushered in by the same irritating, nerves-racking wind, dry and parching heat.

The wind on that Sunday, as it had for a day or two before, came not in gusts as usual, but the blow was straight, steady and hard. Towards evening, disgusted and nervous with the never-ceasing sounds and the flying dust and sand, I fell asleep. Sometime afterwards I awoke, disturbed by the positive voice of the doctor outside. As I lay listening, I saw and wondered at a curious curtain of smoke which hung in the tent doorway. I realized that it came from the doctor's cigar, but why it should fill the doorway and become a screen, upon which fell the prismatic rays of the setting sun as they filtered through some torn holes in the tent walls, seemed more like some fantastic dream. Musing upon the strange spectacle of the smoke curtain, I listened for the wind sounds. They had ceased. I bounded up and rushed outside to enjoy once more mountain air unstirred and unmixed with flying dust and sand.

The doctor's companion was old Po-se and they were good naturedly disputing over the signs of the probable weather. Their language was singularly different. In the main - each understanding the other - it was the language of the old Conquistadores. The pronunciation, as well as the grammatical construction of the white man's speech, was wretched and interspersed now and then with an English word, more for the purpose of advising that English was his native tongue, and, with the occasional use of a Tegua word, to show that he was acquainted in some measure with the Indian's own tongue; still, curious and faulty

as was his use of the language, he spoke without any hesitation. The Indian's use of the Spanish, while much more grammatical, was quite as peculiar; although he made no use of his natural tongue, as if it were a sacrilege, a native Mexican would have said, "It is the accent of a Tegua". I shall translate, since their words may not be intelligibly written.

The Doctor, dogmatically, "No, Juan" — Juan was the Indian's baptismal, or Spanish name — "No rain yet. Tomorrow, more wind. When it is full moon, then, may be, yes". And the Indian quite as wise in his own conceits: "The moon has now but five days. It is the growing (crescente - first) quarter; when she has six, may be seven, then will come the rain".

He stepped to the corner of the tent and made use of that peculiar gesture with the mouth by putting out his lips and indicated where the crescent hung over the western mountains growing brighter with the fast fading light of the sun.

"The moon", he calmly went on, "you see is red, like the fire, the other moon was white all the time —"

"It is the smoke," broke in the doctor, "from the burning forests through—"

The Indian paid no attention to the interruption but doggedly continued: "—but that moon sometimes is going to make a big lie. It is not the moon, no — no, sir! It is that wind. The wind tells no lie."

Just then we heard the slow beat of an Indian drum and the low, even chant of two or three male voices in unison, the sounds coming from the Estufa (council chamber). I thought I detected in the imperfect light a contemptuous smile on the Indian's face as he turned towards the sounds and uttered with something of bitterness in his tones:

"Even the people know when to deceive. Now they make the big dance and then it will rain". He laughed a low, bitter laugh and added, as he turned toward us, "But some day that rain will come too fast and too much".

His last words contained a real prophecy which I recalled afterwards. At the time, I thought of them only as the mutterings of a disappointed man.

The doctor had gone within and impatiently asked about supper.

“Going to spend the night at the Estufa?” I asked.

“Yes, I am going to see the whole works this time. Tomorrow takes place the Rain Dance and tonight is the last of the preparation.”

The Indian still stood, gazing into the west. I asked him if he would come over and talk after the doctor had gone.

In his own tongue he answered me: “Behind Ku-si ping” (the highest of the western range) “the moon will fall there, then shall I arrive.”

Thus did he often dignify me when he dropped his Spanish and used the Tegua dialect. Speaking with the doctor he always used the white man’s language; but I was his younger brother (ti-u); therefore would he use the words that an older brother (pa-di) Might speak to his younger brother. Without turning, nor saying more, he brushed aside the low bushes growing near and went away, silently, with no more noise than a cat might have made.

The doctor came outside and looked around. Not seeing the Indian, he exclaimed: “What in the world have you done with Juan? It looks as though he might have been swallowed up by that moon of his.”

“Po-se is a pretty good type; he comes and goes silently”, I replied. “What a pity, doctor, that he does not get along better with his fellows!”

In his usual, over-wise manner, the doctor answered: “So always with tyrants — and men. He belongs to the minority; those who are best equipped for counselors are not always in the council chamber. He is too wise to rule. His character, also, accounts for the name he has among his people”.

"I have never heard that".

"The Indians are too polite to insult *your* friend in *your* presence; but to me they often call him Chu-ge. The word is a little stronger than the Spanish, brujo; a little worse than our English, wizard."

After supper the doctor bade me good night and went towards the Estufa leaving me to think over the strange character of my Indian friend. Many a tramp had we taken together, many a story had he told me of the old days, much of the old customs and much of his peculiar tongue. A diplomat in his way, he professed to believe in the changes that were advocated by the new teachers, yet he still held tenaciously to much that was old, and I concluded that even his weak advocacy of the white man's improvements would change if only his faction could count a working majority, for no race is a greater stickler for a majority rule than that of the Indian; yet he had a profound suspicion, in his crude way, of the "Square Deal" so long as the pack remained in the hands of his enemies. So he preferred secession to submission.

In other ways Po-se fully satisfied my earlier formed ideals of an Indian hero. He was large for an Indian, but a giant among the Pueblos; his massive shoulders, his large hands and feet, his straight, wiry form, his bold, aquiline face, made a figure to be picked out and set apart from a race that is fast deteriorating.

## -II-

As I sat waiting outside in the unaccustomed stillness of the night air, the monotonous beat of the drum, the weird chant of the singers, the regular stamping of the dancers' feet upon the resonant floor of the estufa — the sounds muffled by the thick walls of the building — produced a drowsiness and I was wishing that I had not asked my Indian friend's company. I began to frame, half un-

consciously, some kind of an excuse to get rid of him upon his arrival, when, of a sudden, I was startled by a dark shadow, lengthened to uncommon and apparitious proportions, just in front of where I sat. Looking up I saw Po-se approaching and several feet away, but in the opposite direction from which I expected him. He was in a direct line with the almost disappearing rays of the moon and I wondered if he might not have stood guard at some safe distance to be sure of nature's time piece.

Advancing, he entered the light space thrown out by the tent lamp beyond the darker shade wherein I sat. I could not but admire the graceful, blanketed figure, erect and moving in a direct line with a quick but noiseless tread as of some animal of prey.

Fully satisfied that Po-se had waited beyond the tent for the appointed hour, as soon as he had seated himself upon the ground I went into the cook's tent and brought him out a heaping plate of food. My surmise had either been correct, or he had met with scant cheer at home, for he ate ravenously.

The meal seemed an effective lubricant to his tongue, for, as he slowly rolled his cigarette, he cautiously asked, "Ke-ma (friend), is the *médico* (physician) still gone?"

Now the head gate leading to an Indian's information need not be opened too wide at the beginning. I answered carelessly, "Yes, nearly an hour."

"He will arrive when?"

"In the morning when the day breaks, he told me."

He was silent for several minutes while the smoke curled above his head and floated off into the darkness. Then, like one feeling his way over an unfamiliar trail, he asked, "He has not talked to you about the trouble between me and the people?"

"Yes, but he has heard only the other side; maybe he knows not all the truth. Tell me your side and I will listen. Then I shall know the truth."

"I will. But first I will tell you of the dance which

we make when it is very dry and then you will understand."

He began in that strange monotone, peculiar to relations and orators of his race. He used the Spanish which I best understood, yet now and then, as if he found the foreign tongue unworthy, he spoke a word or a phrase in the Tegua.

"Years ago, just after the planting, when the Rain Priest (Po-a-tun-go), and those with him, had prayed long for the rain and had done all else to bring down the water from the clouds that blew quickly away, and when the Rain Priest saw that it was very dry and more yet of sadness would come unless the good rain should fall; because the Guan-sa-be (The Navajo)<sup>2</sup> had set fire to the mountain sides so that the deer (Pa-i) and the elk ( )<sup>3</sup> and the little rabbit (Pu) and the big rabbit (Quong) had run away and the rattle snakes ( )<sup>4</sup> had gone far down into the earth — for all these the people knew it could not rain. Then they heard that their friends who dwelt beyond the eastern mountains had gone far away to the great river and all the buffalo (Ko) had gone with them. That made the people very sad because their friends would not come in the time of the ripe corn; they would not bring the good meat nor the skins that were warm because of the long wool, since there would be no meal nor corn to pay for them.

"Then the Po-a-tun-go went away for three days and when he came again he called the people and said what must be done for he had found out the way. So he chose all the young men that were of him, who had no women, and taught them a new dance. On the first day they must eat no food at all and for six days more they might eat only the food which the Po-a-tun-go brought down from the top of the Estufa which the women placed there; for none of the dancers might see a woman nor come close to one. On

2. Harrington, *Ethnogeography of the Tewa Indians*, 107, gives the spelling, "Wan-sa-ve."

3. Bandelier left blank. The Tewa term "Tá" is given by Junius Henderson, *Ethnozoology of the Tewa Indians*, p. 15 — editor.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 51 "Qw'ae' npu."

the eighth day they must go to the flat rock which is on the south side of Tun-go Ping, and there they must dance all the day long, or until it might rain; first they would sing the song and beat the drum slowly and not too loud; afterwards, louder would they beat the drum and faster would they sing the song and the dancers would go very fast. Towards the evening the snakes would come out from beneath the mountain and because it had been very dry these had gone very far down.

"Thus they did according to the way the Po-a-tun-go had been told. And the young men who danced saw not the face of any woman during all of the eight days, they made not one mistake and obeyed all that their father, the Po-a-tun-go, had told them to do, for they looked into all of the six ways and threw meal Up (Ma-ka-no,) Down (Non-so-oíno-ge), East (Tom-pe), West (Tsom-pe), South A-kom-pe), North (Pim-pe).

"From the top of Tun-go Ping the women and the men who did not dance nor sing, looked down and saw that the dance was good and they were very glad; but the women covered the face that none who danced might see; when these brought up water the men would let it down over the side that the young men might drink and not fail. Then came the rain and it was good for all the people, and the snakes, because they came out and brought the rain, they took care of and made for them the little room by the flat rock. So always when it is dry for a long time the people make the Great Dance, that the snakes may not go away.

"Yet now the Po-a-tun-go is a bad man and does what the O-ge-ke (Winter Cacique) tells him, and when the people dance they make many mistakes; they do not sing the song in the old way nor dance as they should and soon they will have no more the dance because they are very bad."

The old man paused and I asked so as not to offend, "Will it not be better when all the people have forgotten the dance?"

But he replied, using that peculiar Tegua word expressing strong doubt, holding up both hands and shrugging up his shoulders, "Ga-ha!"

Then I, thinking to make an impression, argued, "O, my friend, when your people think less of the dance, they will have more time to think of work and all things else which help you to live better and have more! For will not the rain come, or not come? Is not that God's business anyhow?"

-III-

Po-se gave no heed to my little sermon and I thought at the time that I had only wasted words; but afterwards I found that the meaning had found lodgement in his crude mind.

He went on:

"Now I will tell of the trouble and I will tell you the truth. The time of the year was the same as now, and, as the mountain fires burn now, in the same way they burned then.

"The governor then was my father who asked the Po-a-tun-go what he was doing. That one said he had done everything else, but only the Great Dance on the flat rock must be done.

"Then my father cried from the top of the Estufa and told the people to wait and be good, for the Po-a-tun-go was going to make the dance and then it would surely rain.

"I was very glad when I heard the words because I am of the Kai-dge (one of the two divisions of the Teguas)<sup>5</sup> and at that time I was very swift and strong. No other knew the song nor the dance as well as I, and the Po-a-tun-go liked me better than all the others because I obeyed all his words. He was very good to me and taught me more than all the others. Qua-sang-wi was his wife and a bad woman. She always helped Kai-e, her son, who was as bad

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5. The "summer people." Harrington (*Ethnogeography*, p. 78) gives a different phonetic spelling — editor.

as his mother. The Po-a-tun-go was always afraid of them, and he was almost as strong and swift as I, but not quite, but because he was the Rain Priest he could not quarrel with them and make them obey; for that is the way with the Po-a-tun-go; he must not quarrel but must always do his duty and be good to all the people. Kai-e was of the Qua-di (the other division of the Teguas)<sup>6</sup> like his mother and he was almost as strong and swift as I, but not quite, for I beat him always and that made him feel sad and his mother hated me.

“When the time came to make ready for the dance I went to Tset-ha, — she was the one that all the people had agreed should be my wife — and I told her not to carry any water only in the early morning, for in the evening I would have to watch from the top of the Estufa. Then I could make no mistake and forget and look upon her face. Tset-ha was always good and obeyed me in every thing: so she said she would do as I said, but because it was very dry and hot they would need water the day before the dance, and only on that day in the evening she would bring water. And I said it was good and surely I would not look on the last day. Then when I had obeyed all the days and stood the last day and looked long upon the place of the flat rock, I felt glad because we could make the good dance the next day.

“While I stood and thought no evil, I heard Tset-ha go along the pathway and she said ‘Na-di’ (I am here to those who stood near and I knew her voice and step. But Kai-e saw it all, for his mother had told him how to do. There he stood in the way and when he saw my own pass he caught her sabina (the head cloth); she cried out and took hold of the jar that it might not fall and then the cloth fell from her face. When I heard her voice I forgot and looked; and because her sabina had fallen away I saw her face.

“When the people saw how I had been fooled they laughed but Tset-ha ran to her house because she was

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6. The “winter people.” For variant spelling, see *ibid.* p. 76.

afraid. I saw how it was and I said to Kai-e, 'Some day shall I pay you; the longer you wait, the more shall I owe.'

"Then because I had made a mistake I could not dance; only could I help in the place of the snakes and sing. And when the day of the dance came and the others had danced all the day long and had done everything else, it did not rain for a long time and the people met and said I was to blame. They said I could not have Tset-ha, but that Kai-e should have her. They shut me up in the Estufa for a long time and not even my father would see me.

"Tset-ha then said she did not like me but that she liked Kai-e better, and in that way she fooled them and they let me out. When they let me out the rains had come and the people said they would have a big feast and then they would give my own to Kai-e. But before they could do that I met Tset-ha in the willows by the river, and then we laughed a long time because we were going to fool all the people.

"She said, 'Let us run away to Te-ma-ge (Cochiti) and they will not know; there is where lives my two cousins who are very strong and swift.'

"And I said, 'It is a good way. Run back now to your house and I will wait; when the moon is behind Ku-si-ping we will go. All this night we will run and tomorrow we will be with your cousins.'

"So she ran back, but in the way she met Kai-e who caught her by the arm. All the time he was saying, 'Na-vi-e! Na-vi-e!' (my own! my own!) while she was calling to me and fighting to keep him away. I heard them and ran swiftly from behind and with a big stone I struck him so that he fell down like one dead. When the people came to take him, he opened his eyes and laughed and kept on saying 'Na-vi-e! Na-vi-e!' So the people met and because they saw that Kai-e was Ping-e-he (crazy), they said that Tset-ha was to blame. They shut her up in the Estufa, but one night her two cousins came from Te-ma-ge, because I ran there and told them, and we stole her away.

We went to the priest and I told him the truth. Then he married us. So then the people could say no more about us and they could do nothing at all. Now you know the truth."

"But what became of the old Po-a-tun-go?" I asked. "Your present one is about your own age."

He hesitated before making his reply; then, as if weighing his words: "He died, yet he was not sick."

"And Qua-sang-wi?"

"The people all met and said she was chu-ge (witch) because she made her husband die when he was not sick. All the people were very angry, so they burned her till she died."

"What of Kai-e?"

The old man laughed at the question — a hard, cruel, remorseless laugh. As he straightened up to his full height and stood in the shadow I thought I could detect that peculiar expression of an unfeeling victor flash from his eyes while he pointed over the flat roofs to the opposite edge of the village; his words were distinct and bitter, the memories of the past and deep hate preventing a connected utterance: "He lives yonder — the fool - with his real father, the governor for this year — laughing always — he says to everyone — to a man, to a woman, to a little boy, to a little girl, to a burro, to a dog — the same words, 'Na-vi-e! Na-vi-e!'"

I thought it best not to pursue the subject further, for the old man seemed deeply wrought up over the remembrances of the past. Without thinking of the effect of my words, I said quietly,

"Po-se, my friend, come and go with me to the dance tomorrow; I have the governor's permission; only must we go by the trail up the southeast corner."

The old man wheeled 'round, drawing his blanket closer about his shoulder; I saw I had made a mistake in mentioning the governor but I awaited his words as I sat, fascinated by the glitter in his eyes. His compressed lips

trembled as he paused for a full minute before replying. Then his speech came and his words fell hissing from between his slightly parted lips like escaping steam:

“Licencia del gobernador!; (the governor’s permission!) I need it not. I have my rights. Who will prevent me? I shall not go by the trail, but by the Shay-i (ladders). Go with me, na vi ke-ma, (my own friend) and I will show you the way up the Tun-go Ping Shay-i (the ladders of Tun-go Ping). Only the medico (physician) may not go with us.”

“I will go as you say, my friend.”

“It is a good way. Be ready early,” he said. Again he parted the bushes and was gone.