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Paso Por Aqui

Mabel Dodge Luhan

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LIKE TO LIKE, the magnetic ones flew to the magnet. Impelled by a mysterious gravitation, the glowing spirits arrived every month every week, and added their lustre to the lustrous Valley.

“This is one of the magnetic centres of the earth,” Lawrence said. “Such places are invisibly afire for a while and then the spirit that informs them may withdraw to another neighborhood,” he added maliciously. Was he speaking unwittingly of himself?

Those were the days!

Then the great and the semi-great and the lovers of the great appeared in the plaza. They looked like other people but they were a little different from the horde. They had a deeper awareness, more capacity, a larger dimension. Potentia|ility. They were greater. Because of their own inner life they were able to breathe upon the latent life in the Valley so that it brimmed and gave them what they had come here for, an enhancement of power and beauty, delicate and pristine. So there was an exchange between people and environment, each contributed to the other.

When they descended to the world they gave a shape and an expression to what had impressed them in the high place. Sometimes the Valley reappeared, in New York, Washington, or San Francisco; it was exhibited in outline and color, or in music, poetry and prose. Sometimes it showed itself in faces and behavior and in being. The great visitors and the magical earth had created together an influence, and the impact of one upon the other set up a chain reaction that still continues when the original combination has been altered and replaced by other values. Such as commerce and competition.
Who were they, these bright birds of passage, and where are they now?

Some forgot, like Stokowski. Yet Stokie should have remembered, for he truly experienced the beauty and the strangeness ("'tis the beauty not the strangeness turns the traveller's heart to stone!"). With unwearying patience he spent night-long hours listening to the Indian songs and tried in vain to write down phrases, failing for lack of a scale! "They are singing in thirty-seconds!" he whispered despairingly.

He returned the following year with a specially built recording machine, but it was not perfected like the ones of today and after the first tryout he shoved it under the table where it remained until his departure. But what of it? What do we get now from perfect recordings with their full volume and accurate tones? Do we get more than the bare, dead facts? Do we get the life waves, the imponderable life vibrations that, heart to heart, enable us to know the singers and the players? Do we get the life of them? Not, I think, from any canned music. The germ has been destroyed.

So maybe Stokie did not forget. Maybe he remembered and gave up.

And of the others, some died, like D. H. Lawrence, Willa Cather and Dr. A. A. Brill.

We know what Lawrence did when he went away. He began to die quite soon and maybe he should have stayed, but then we should not have *Lady Chatterley's Lover* with its prophetic foresight of broken class distinctions and its revaluation of real life. Something he got in Taos enabled him to write this, but only outside and away he learned that.

He had a fine time putting a period to the importance of economic situations and in reinstating the flesh, giving it first place before money and what money could buy; demonstrating the extravagant finality of Victoria's materialism. What would she do for love?

One remembers her fantastic gesture towards her lover upon
his birthday, setting him definitely far down on the list of her importances, empire and the like!

"To John Brown, a pair of silver-plated cuff links—not too much, God knows, for such a faithful friend!"

The book that came out of Willa when she left Taos was better loved than all her other books. Perhaps there is more love in it.

In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* it seems we find the verities she soaked up in Taos and Santa Fe, the little tales Tony told on the long, slow, drives around the Valley in the summer afternoons, and the simple immediacy of the Roman Catholic Church as it is known here where its realities seem stronger than all its grand organization. The realities stayed with her, for upon her return to the frantic world she drew upon them to the end, as we see in *The Shadow and the Rock*, maybe having found here security and certainty in the midst of chaos.

Taos was simply and deeply imbued with the Roman faith in those days, for both the Spanish people and the Indians dwelt in an intimate proximity to God.

For the Indians it was a more recent experience than for the Spaniards (or Mexicans as they were called then before the public schools decided this nomenclature was an insult!).

The Spaniards had espoused Jesus Christ since the early Roman days of crucifixion, but to the Indians He and His Mother were guests of a mere three hundred years, having been introduced by the Catholic priests when they arrived with the King's soldiers.

The Indians always have loved women and children and they readily offered hospitality and a guest house, called the *Iglesia*, to the newcomers in the Pueblo. They treated them with tenderness and admiration, taking them out for an airing occasionally, taking them to bless the fields, treating them with intimacy and honor.

Possibly because the Pueblo was matriarchal in habit they seemed to revere the Lady Mother more than Her young Son;
and there is a story in another Pueblo that hints at this when, during a drought, they carried the image of the little Jesus out to the newly-sown fields and besought Him to bring down the rain. It is told that that night there was a cloudburst over the land and it washed out all the seed. The following day the people carried the Virgin Queen through the mud-soaked terrain and, showing it to her, they said:

"Now look at the mess your Son has made!"

In Taos and Santa Fe it was possible to become immersed in this intimate and familiar Catholicism, and in Willa's beautiful book we recognize it.

People used to come to Taos almost as though they had to. Impelled. Like Thornton Wilder, whom I had never met, but who telephoned me from Santa Fe, stammering a little: "I w-w-would like to c-c-come up and see you if I may," then arriving with two heavy bags. (Was it in Taos he learned that all people are just people and so wrote of Caesar and his wife as of the people next door?)

Taos brings out the particularity in people. It is the most individuating place in the world, I think. As Frank Waters says, it is the last outpost of individualism left!

There is no standardization here, no social structure. People do not live according to a single pattern. Every house one enters is different in character from every other, and the occupants resemble no one else.

Side by side, people live their own lives and not the community's life. They do as they please, they say what they think, and nobody cares, for everyone is busy doing likewise. There is only one vague imperative seeming to guide them all. If they come and do not fit into the good spirit of Taos, they do not stay. They cannot. Nobody tells them to go away, they just disappear. The "genius loci" of the Valley is benign and tolerant and it maintains a creative direction. Anyone who, in his essential nature, opposes this spirit of the place is forced out by it, for it is very powerful.
This spirit does not draw the line at civil crime, it does not object to "moral turpitude," gambling, or even passionate murder. But the mean, the petty, the destructive elements cannot exist here for long. They cannot continue to live and breathe and have their negative being in this place. They go in order to survive in their miserable fashion. The alternative left to them is to change, to overcome their evil star, to be a part of the Taos order and not in opposition to it.

I do not think I am imagining this. Taos does things to people. So many people came! Sometimes they stayed, others went away but came back; some like Georgia O'Keefe never altogether went away; others finally stayed away but now are starkly stripped of half-and-half realities down to bedrock like Jeffers was, as one finds in his play Medea. Oh, yes! Taos does things to people.

Some got it through the eye, some through the ear, and others through the pores of the skin.

Robert Edmond Jones was a seer. He saw the life in the old handicrafts and in the ancient hand-built houses, where no spirit level was used, and no plumb line made straight mechanical forms one like another as off an assembly line. He saw the sensitive, refreshing shapes of which the eye would never tire. When he went back to New York he designed the settings for Til Eulenspiegel, performed at the Metropolitan Opera House, and they could have come out of Taos handmade.

Nowadays in Taos people try to build crooked so their houses will look like the old ones. But they do not succeed with them. It is not done like that. In the past there was feeling put into the uneven outlines, for the men were happy building their homes. They were not trying to be artists. Art is a by-product of living; it is not living, in itself.

In bygone days the settlers in Taos Valley had a true sense of proportion, unconscious and valid, springing from the heart. Their building was functional—wooden pillars of right dimension supported portales that were of the proper height and depth.
for their uses. They were not added for decoration or "interesting shadows."

What there is left of these old places still retains the gemütlich, the charming, the real look of natural beauty, inimitable, and not to be repeated in our mechanized age.

John Marin was another seer. He saw so essentially that he delivered the landscape in a few bare strokes of his brush, the color and form with all the freshness of high altitude intensity, massive and clean in the morning of the world. Other Taos painters here before he came wondered why they had not seen it like that and straightway adopted his vision, turning it into a formula. But they lacked something he had. What was it?

One night I had the Indian boys come down to dance for Dr. Brill at a little party we gave him. He watched them with his glowing red face, so full of good will, all lighted up.

The boys flashed by him, their golden brown bodies gleaming, the bells ringing on their ankles. How happy! How happy! The big drum and the singers supported them and never let them sag. The longer they danced, the more dance they had in them, so after a while we had to withdraw to the living room and let them go on in their accelerating ecstasy; for since we were not participating we could not endure, without fatigue overlong, just watching! When we closed the door upon them, they afforded a faint
delirious background of delight to the little speech Dr. Brill was making to the guests:

"... Descartes said: 'Je pense donc je suis,' but I prefer to say: 'J'agis donc je suis.' I move, therefore I am! This dancing embodies my feeling perfectly. True and complete being is in the movement of the whole body and not only in the movement of the mind. In New York there is an old gentleman who is a patient of mine. In his eighties now, he is vigorous and indomitable. But one day his son and his daughter-in-law came to see me and they were very worried about him.

"'What should we do, doctor? Father keeps on going! He goes out at night dancing with his little sweetheart! Imagine! Dancing for hours at his age! He will not listen to us! What if he should have a heart attack and die?'

"'Well, now, wouldn't that be wonderful?' I asked them. 'Wouldn't it be fine for him to die dancing instead of immobilized in his bed? I think so,'" and he grinned around at the faces turned up to him.

Everyone clapped at his words except one or two who pulled down their lips and glanced at each other, while the dim pounding of feet and drum in the distance emphasized the wonder of motion.

We persuaded John Collier to come to Taos for his vacation, and he came bringing Lucy and his three little boys.

The world had been too much with him and he had a quick conversion to the mysterious enlightenment of our Taos ambiente.

After the months passed, he left to take up his work in San Francisco again but soon he wrote that he could not stay away. Taos had done something to him!

What followed has been a long story, too long to tell here in detail, besides being already known.

Briefly he organized the American Indian Defense Association; he successfully fought the Government in its Bureau of Indian
Affairs; and, superseding the antique routine that dated back to the Civil War, he became himself Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

In that role he placed the emphasis upon Indians instead of upon the Indian Bureau employees. Under Roosevelt he established a New Deal for the Indians, who, paying a visit to the President, asked for it themselves and obtained it when Mr. Roosevelt sent them over to see Mr. Ickes who was then Secretary of the Interior.

Those were the days! When they came to an end, under the change of administration Democracy has to endure, Collier organized the Institute of Ethnic Affairs, enlarging his field to include all minority and some majority groups existing in Mexico, and the countries south and east and all islands flying our flag. He has unified these in a measure of solidarity so they have become a "factor." It is still too early to know what this means. Probably more than anthropological and ethnological knowledge, probably political values. Or perhaps cosmic progress of some kind? Probably.

As far as the artists are concerned, something started here long ago, as you will see in the following pages by other writers.

I can touch here very briefly only upon a few other personalities who came to Taos in earlier years.

Mr. and Mrs. Bert Harwood, fresh from Paris during the first World War, recognized its wonder and responded to it with generosity and creativeness. But it was harder then than now to get the inhabitants to cooperate. Bert was grieved because he could not organize a branch of the Red Cross association. There was not enough interest among the people of the community. But now, with Time's unfailing justice, the Red Cross conducts its meetings and business in Bert Harwood's house.

When Mrs. Harwood died, she bequeathed her beautiful place and everything in it to the University of New Mexico for a social center, where it now provides art classes, conducts a lending li-
brary that includes a bookmobile supplying reading to all the Taos County people, and where all kinds of meetings are held and exhibitions of all types are shown. She has contributed enormously to the socialization of the whole community.

Another fabulous contributor to Taos, Dr. Victor Thorne, became an active influence of the same kind. Inheriting Mr. Manby’s large property, he reconstructed the house and provided maintenance for the beautiful garden surrounded by its fertile fields. More than this, he contributed freely to many community efforts by doubling the earnings of many bazaars, money-making community sales, and hospital group efforts, although he was unable himself to be in Taos.

He delegated our socially conscious Helen Williams to manage his property in a helpful and benevolent spirit, so that numberless people have been aided by her administration of it. "Thorne House" is another active and positive influence in Taos Valley.

One of the results of Dr. Thorne’s contribution will presently result in the Kit Carson Memorial Park, which will include the old cemetery where the latter is buried; and the former Manby land will provide a beautiful park for the townspeople.

When one looks back one finds in retrospect how many people have enlarged the Taos spirit! Dasburg, one of the foremost painters of the century, came and has stayed for decades. His stimulating, penetrating instruction has inoculated countless students who have carried it to the outer world.

Emil Bisttram built up his large art school in Taos, and now overflows with it during the winter season into the larger environment of Los Angeles, where he indubitably permeates his groups with the mysterious Taos influence.

What happened to Marsden Hartley in our town? He wrote me years later that after his months here in the Valley his painting seemed to have gained a larger dimension that appeared in it involuntarily, unbidden but welcome!

And Brett! Coming to Taos she developed her unique talent
in a touching appreciation of the simple beauty and truth of In­
dian life that the English Slade School certainly did not arouse!
... “and knowing this is truth and truth is beauty ... what fur­
ther shall be sought for or declared?” Browning said.

What I have set down here are but a few hints about the ex­
change of influence between Taos and those who passed through,
and but a few names of the great number of those, for a list with­
out the stories attached is only sterile and tiresome, and I have
not the space for more. But as I tell even this little, I discover for
myself that the balance between these two, the environment and
the people, is not even.

Environment is the stronger for as long as it does something
more for the people than the people do for it, and that is still true
today. Taos continues to do something to people. But we do not
know how long this will last, for there are new and powerful ele­
ments at work all over the world and not only in this little Valley.

Some call it Progress and some call it Commerce and some call
it merely Change.

"'Tis a heartbreak to the wise that things are in the same
place; for a short time only!"

The irrational and irresponsible universe, we think some­
times, we all unknowing . . . and without faith.

**LOS OCHO PINTORES**

*Kenneth M. Adams*

**The historic** significance of the Taos Society of Art­
ists in the development of the Southwest stems primarily
from its activities when the membership comprised eight
painters: Bert G. Phillips, E. L. Blumenschein, Joseph H. Sharp,
O. E. Berninghaus, E. Irving Couse, W. Herbert Dunton, Walter
Ufer, and Victor Higgins. Although the Society was created by