



Indian basketry, and How to make Indian and other baskets with nearly 600 illustrations

George Wharton James

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PREFACE.

What would be the civilized man of to-day without the art of weaving — the soft art that surrounds his home with comforts and his life with luxuries? Nay he deems them necessities. Could he do without his woven woollen or cotton underwear, his woven socks, his woven clothing? Where would be his bed linen and blankets, his carpets, his curtains, his portieres? His every day life is so intimately associated with weaving that he has ceased to think about it, and yet it is all owing to the work of primitive, aboriginal woman that he is thus favored. For there is not a weave of any kind, no matter how intricate or involved, that the finest looms of England or America produce to-day under the direction of the highest mechanical genius, that was not handed down to us, not in crude form, but as perfect as we now find it, by our savage ancestry in their basketry and kindred work.

Interest in the arts and industries of our aboriginal tribes has grown so rapidly in recent years, that whereas, twenty years ago, illustrative collections of the products of these arts and industries were confined to the museums of scientific societies, to-day they are to be found in scores of private homes. This popular interest has created a demand for knowledge as to the peoples whose arts these collections illustrate, and of the customs, — social, tribal, medicinal, religious, — in which the products of their arts are used.

One of the most common and useful of the domestic arts of the Amerind* is that of basketry. It is primitive in the extreme, is universal. both as to time and location, and as far as we know has changed comparatively little since the days of its introduction. It touches the Amerind at all points of his life from the cradle to the grave, and its products are used in every function, domestic, social and religious, of his simple civilization.

To give a little of such knowledge as the intelligent collector of Indian baskets desires to possess is the purpose of this unpretentious book.

Its field is limited to the Indians of the South-west, the Pacific States and Alaska. It is an incomplete pioneer in an unoccupied field of popular literature, and later writers will doubtless be able to add much, and correct more. It is the result of twenty years personal observation and study among the Indians of our South-west, much correspondence and questioning of authorities, and the reading and culling from every known source of information. Everything that I could find that seemed reliable has been taxed. Necessarily, no one individual could possibly describe, with accuracy, the basketry of

*This is a new coinage by Major J. W. Powell, of the U. S. Bureau of Ethnology, to designate the North American aborigine.

this extensive territory unless he were prepared to travel over the vast regions of the North-west and South-west, and personally visit each tribe of basket-makers, watch them gather the grasses, collect the dyes,

prepare both for use, dye the materials, and go through all the labor of weaving, then study the symbolism of the designs, learn all about the ancient methods of manufacture, and, finally, visit all family, social and ceremonial functions where baskets are used.

Hence, it is evident that such a work must be, as this confessedly is, largely a compilation.

If collectors find it at all helpful or suggestive; if it aids in popularizing knowledge on these interesting products of our aboriginal peoples, and leads to a study of the peoples themselves I shall be more than repaid for the time and labor expended in its production.

For material aid, I wish most cordially to thank Major J. W. Powell, Dr. J. Walter Fewkes and Professor F. W. Hodge, of the U. S. Bureau of Ethnology, and the Hon. S. P. Langley, Professors Otis T. Mason, W. H. Holmes and Dr. Walter Hough, of the Smithsonian Institution, together with Dr. J. W. Hudson, of Ukiah, Cal., and Rev. W. C. Curtis, of Norwalk, Conn.

The engravings of the Government have

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Henry Robinson:

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Christopher Parker:

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Jesse Ward:

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