

## BARE FEET

### Preface

One day there may be no more "Bare Feet" on this earth --- They may be as mythical as the Cave-men are today. The thought fills one with indescribable sadness, for much will go with them that may never come again. Man will always long for a world that rests in what we like to call "The arms of the Eternal".

In the world of today one feels infinitesimal and, speaking for myself, not a little afraid; as though we were no longer human beings with something of the Divine, but only so many dry leaves blown before a storm. Deep inside me a voice reminds me that life is a solitary sojourn. We are born, we suffer, and we die, alone. Man has not changed that nor can he escape that --- least of all in a storm.

This fact itself is not new - but we have nothing to comfort or to guide us in a world where intellect has been made into God ... where light no longer illuminates the way - but only dazzles men's eyes. The human spirit must watch, helpless, while the blinded lead the blind into the conflagration.

All of which could be the reason for the making of this book - undoubtedly it was a factor, just to escape from the sound of their cries.

But it is deeper-rooted even than this. As far back as I can remember my inner compulsion has led me to people who live close to the earth. They had some secret I must find: an inner strength and patience and quiet. They knew how to be reverent toward today, solitary in themselves - and how to ripen on one's own vine.

There are still places in the world where this whirlpool has not reached - where the waters are calm and the people are well. The ones I found are in the remote, native villages in the mountains of Mexico and some few years ago, in our own Indian Country of New Mexico.

It gives me now an extension of joy to be working over these pictures in the quiet of my dark-room... breathing again the delicious elixir and trying to make it come across to you.



I try to think back how it was. Because of the language differences we might not have understood each other, but we did.

We had the joy of reaching across the barriers of language, background and culture and speaking directly, heart to heart. This must be how language was born in the beginning, out of the vast silence which surrounded it.

Often we were only women, sitting together on the hard earth floor of their small enclosure. Their houses have no windows and there is no place to sit except on the floor. There is not a single piece of furniture as we know it -- no table, or chairs or bed. Only a small family altar. This may be nothing more than an old box but there are always fresh flowers before the Virgin and a candle burning -- even in the poorest house.

The men are busy at their looms outside which leaves us happily alone. We are frankly curious about each other but there is nothing strained between us. On the contrary there is everything to put us at our ease. There are the endless tasks: the corn to grind, the tortillas to bake, the fire to tend, the baby to nurse -- I understand all of these things and never tire of them.

In a dark corner of the room sits an old woman -- probably the great grandmother of them all -- carding her wool as patiently as though time did not exist. A small boy sits spinning in the open doorway, as though it were only his top. But from this spinning comes a thread of finest wool and with this thread the young daughter of the house weaves her marriage rebosa.

One sees how beautifully each life fits itself into the pattern of the whole, as parts of an ordered world. There is nothing to remind them of any other... the work of their hands springs from the ancient and universal roots. Truth, whatever that may be, is present with them. Whether it is the cloth they weave or the clay they mould with their hands... all they do bears its signature, clear and unmistakable.



"This is my loom" I say, pointing to the camera on my lap. (We laugh, for we are no longer shy) They understand what I mean and are waiting for me to show them... We have all the time in the world.

"I weave pictures" I tell them, while I am making a picture of the mother with my Polaroid. This coin is good in all countries and I have only to give them a picture of themselves, and of each other, and they are as excited as children on Christmas morning. There is no stopping until I run out of film.

The pictures are then solemnly placed on the family altar, beside those of the Virgin and the Saints. I must say that the flicker of candlelight in the half-darkness of the room gives the pictures a kind of significance that they would not otherwise have. These will be their keepsakes now -- their most holy possessions -- they have but a few. The humorous touch is that they often insist on making one of me -- so that my face may be there beside them. I never know whether to laugh or to cry -- but I am deeply touched.

I explain to them that I too have an altar in my house and that with my other camera I would like to make pictures of them for my altar, which is true. This is my altar and these are the ones that I made for it. One day I shall send this book for their altar. The pictures came to me as easily as the rain falls -- and caused no more disturbance. I did not need to seek them -- they were everywhere. I gathered as many as there was time.

In these moments it seemed to me that I understood what existence can mean -- human beings behaving simply as human beings -- solitary in ourselves, yet united into a new unison.

Together we moved into an infinity of Time and Space and were as quiet, and as ready for each other as the earth is ready for the April rain or the young leaves to bud in their time.

We touched the intangible in Life and were probably very near to God. This was a new thought to me but I had the feeling that it was nothing new, or strange, to them. They feed from His table daily.