

Foreword to "Runner in the Sun."*

"Most of us grow up believing that the history of America begins with the men who came across from Europe and settled in New World wilderness. The real story of our country is much older, much richer, than this usual history book account.

"Thousands of years before Europeans, by accident, stumbled upon the American continents, men were living here, scattered between the two polar oceans. They lived under a variety of conditions, and they developed tools, clothing, shelter, food habits, customs, and beliefs to fit their conditions. In some areas, they felled trees in the forest and built houses out of planks split from the trees. Elsewhere, they erected great mounds of earth and stone and placed their houses and temples on the summits. In still other places, they quarried rock and built houses of stone.

"They were skilled craftsmen and artists: weaving baskets; fashioning fine pottery; carving in wood, stone, and ivory; molding copper, silver, and gold ornaments; and rearing monumental public buildings. Some were fishermen and sea-mammal hunters, following their game in wooden boats far out in the open ocean. Others were renowned hunters of land animals. But by far the greater part of this population depended upon agriculture, and some groups even constructed irrigation works to reclaim otherwise worthless desert lands.

"Salt's people lived without written records, but the shape and content of their lives have been pieced together by scientists examining the houses, tools, weapons, clothing, ceremonial objects, and other evidences of their existence. We know approximately when they lived, and what happened to them.

"They were real people, as were all the people Salt encountered on his journey south into the country we call Mexico. They lived, looking into the very skies we look into, hundreds of years before Columbus and his three little ships set sail from Isabella's Spain.

"They and their racial kinsmen, scattered over the two continents, domesticated many of the food, fiber, and medicinal plants we use today; not alone the corn which plays a part in our story, but tobacco, white and sweet potatoes, long staple cotton, beans, pumpkins, squash, cocoa, quinine, tomatoes, maguey fiber (henequen), and cassava (tapioca), to mention the best known. The tribes inhabiting the highlands of Peru used no fewer than seventy different plants for food and other purposes.

"The world was enriched by such a material contribution as maize, or Indian corn, which quickly spread to all continents after New World discovery. THE WORLD MIGHT HAVE BEEN EVEN RICHER TODAY IF THE FIRST EUROPEANS HAD ADOPTED AND CARRIED AWAY WITH THEM THE RESPECT FOR PEACEFUL LIVING WHICH CHARACTERIZED THE FIRST AMERICANS.

*This is the "foreword" to D'Arcy McNickle's new book entitled "Runner in the Sun" published by John C. Winston Company, Philadelphia, in November, 1954.

"Columbus remarked their gentle quality: 'No request of anything from them is ever refused, but they rather invite acceptance of what they possess, and manifest such a generosity that they would give away their own hearts.'

"Later Europeans, coming as permanent settlers, would learn to dread the war cry of the wilderness, and they would depict the Indian as a dull, revengeful savage. Unfortunately for the Indian people, this latter judgment has prevailed.

"The gentle, friendly people Columbus encountered did not physically disappear, but something happened to that openhanded generosity with which they met him. Tribes dislodged from their homes along the Atlantic coast had either to fight or perish. They turned upon other tribes, seeking territory, and soon Indian fought against Indian throughout the land. With mounting ferocity, they attacked white settlements as well, and border warfare did not finally subside until an awful morning in December 1890, when a camp of Sioux Indians was slaughtered in the snow on Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota, by United States soldiers.

"SCIENTISTS DIGGING INTO OLD VILLAGE SITES TELL US OF TRIBES LIVING SIDE BY SIDE FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS WITHOUT WARFARE. THE MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF THE MANY TRIBES ARE NOT BATTLE STORIES, BUT CONVEY INSTEAD A FEELING FOR THE DIGNITY OF MAN AND REVERENCE FOR ALL OF NATURE. BEST OF ALL EVIDENCE OF THE INNATE PEACE-SEEKING HABITS OF THE FIRST AMERICANS ARE THE LIVING INDIAN SOCIETIES OF TODAY. HERE ONE FINDS TRUE CONCERN FOR THE WELL-BEING OF EACH LEAST MEMBER, RESPECT FOR THE ELDERS, AND DEVOTION TO THE NEEDS OF THE SPIRIT.

"CORN WAS, INDEED, A GREAT GIFT TO THE WORLD; BUT A GREATER GIFT WAS ONE THAT THE WORLD LET LIE AND NEVER GATHERED UP FOR ITS OWN. THAT WAS THE GIFT OF PEACE ON EARTH.

Yes, these were real people. They broke the trails which our railways and highways follow today. Their names are upon our land, upon the rivers, lakes, and mountains we love.

"They belong in the great tradition we call American."