



How to Make Indian and Other Baskets: Indian Basketry, the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River in Arizona, the Indians of the Painted Desert Region, ... California, Etc;, Etc (Classic Reprint)

George Wharton James

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Excerpt from *How to Make Indian and Other Baskets: Indian Basketry, the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River in Arizona, the Indians of the Painted Desert Region, Travelers' Handbook to Southern California, Etc;, Etc*

Just now the making of Indian and other baskets is a fad. Like all other fads it will have its day and then die. But unlike many fads there is something in the making of baskets that will keep the art alive, when those who practised it merely as a fad have forgotten that they ever were interested in it.

It is singularly appropriate that I, the son of my father, should write a treatise on basket making. The earliest remembrances of my life are connected with that art, as my father was a basket maker, not simply a trader in baskets, but personally a skilled workman himself. My oldest brother, too, learned the art and was a good workman.

Well do I remember, as a child, a season when coal was dear and scarce, as during the recent Eastern coal strike. My father, always a man of originality, rose at once to meet the occasion, and made a mixture of coal dust and the thick ends or nubbins cut from the ends of new splints or weavers introduced into the coarse kinds of baskets.

We used the old-fashioned English grates, and after a fire of coals was well alight my father would take a coal scuttle full of this mixture which he called backing, and throw it up on the top of the fire and well back into the throat of the chimney. In half an hour or less it would be a bed of fire, throwing its grateful heat into the cold room and cheering all who came within its influence.

Two of his workmen were father and son, named Fields. The young man was "Lige," and into my youthful ears he used to pour his tales of woe at the hardships of a basket-makers life. In the making of some of the larger and coarser baskets the bottoms, after being started, were pinned through the center with a large steel bodkin to a heavy flat board, and, treading on the work itself the weavers were woven in, the worker bending down almost double over the work. When I bent over for a few minutes my childish back seemed to be broken, and when I asked Lige how he could endure it for hours at a time his solemn asseveration was that he'd had his backbone taken out, or he never could do it.

After I came to the United States the work of the Paiuti Indians soon arrested my attention, and I began the studies which culminated two years ago in the publication of my "Indian Basketry."

Now that the work of Basket Making is being taken up in earnest, I wish to do my share in helping it along by making a book of helpful instructions and hints that will be worthy the dignity of the subject.

It has been my purpose in arranging the following pages to introduce all the stitches, practically usable, from the simplest to the most complex.

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