THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA INDIANS*

No. I. [The Cahroc]

In a conversation, wherein participated a distinguished scientist, the remark was made that the character of the California Indians seemed to contain no romantic element. To this a gentleman who had once periled his life in defending a handful of the despised race from the frenzied atrocity of a mob, made reply, that, if there was no romance in their life, at least there was in their death.

It has been the melancholy fate of the California Indians to be at once most foully vilified and least understood. "Men damn what they do not understand." To have been once the possessors of the most fair and sunny empire ever conquered by the Anglo-Saxon, and to have had it wrenched out of their gripe with the most shameless violence; to have been once probably the happiest, and afterward reduced to the most miserable and piteous ruin, of all our American aborigines! Pity for the California Indian that his purple-tinted mountains were filled with dust of gold, and that his green and shining valleys, lying rich and mellow to the sun, were pregnant with so large possibilities of wheat! Pity for the blotched and sweaty toad, "ugly and venomous," that he "wears yet a precious jewel in his head!" Fatal for him was the unconscious guardianship of these apples of Hesperides; and in what proportion the gold of his placers was beautiful in the eyes of the White Man, in that proportion was he the dragon, odious to look upon, and worthy of death. It is small concern of pioneer miners to know aught of the life-story, customs, and ideas of a poor beggar, who is so fatuously unwise as to complain that they darken the water so he can no longer see to pierce the red-fleshed salmon, and his women and pappooses are crying for meat; and when he lies stiff and stark in the arid gully, where the white, pitiless sun of California shakes above him the only winding-sheet that covers his swart body, he is not prolific in narration of his people's legends and traditions. Dead men tell no tales.

And what have we done to compensate the Indian for this gigantic robbery? You will mention to me the Reservations. Good! I have seen them--and they are so raw, so bald, so primitive in their uses, and so crude in their outcome, that they were scarce worth (1) the visiting, except for the opportunity they afforded of noting the workings of the natural and unregenerate Indian mind. As for giving any glimpse of the benefits bestowed by the White Man upon the savage, why, bless you, the scope and significance of those benefits are pretty much measured by bushels of wheat and gallipots of mollifying ointment. Not but that the agents are sincere and earnest Christian men, and the majority of their subalterns likewise, in seeming; but the chasm between them and the wretched, unhappy Indians is world-wide; and into that chasm little is hurled to bridge it over, save bright bayonets, granaries of wheat and corn, and utterly maladroit Christian endeavor, quite useless because quite too spiritual-minded to compel the Indian, by the whole military

---

* Overland Monthly, Vol. 8, pp. 325-333, 1872.

power of the United States Government, if necessary, to construct for himself a chimney, and change his linen. Instead of building the Indian-house from the bottom upward, they lay the corner-stone among the stars; and, meantime, the untutored savage is weeping his eyes out in the accursed, bitter, eternal smudge of his cabin.

Above all others, the California Indians are a shy, foxy, secretive, close-mouthed race, and will not impart whatever information they may possess until confidence has been grounded on a long intimacy, and then not completely unless one does them the flattery to learn their language. This singular secretiveness has kept the great body of the Whites in profound ignorance of their ideas, whatever they may have observed of their customs. It has brought upon their heads more charges of cloddishness, and more calumniations, than have been heaped upon any other Indians.

(2) athirst; wading over the execrable mining streams, and floundering among the slimy stones, Wandering over the sweltering and arid plains of the interior, dust-choked and or slumping into the foul porridge; losing the trail an average of a dozen times a day among the mountains, and falling headlong down through the chaparral; bewildered in the maze of cattle-trails out of all whooping, and losing even my familiar and helpful Number Nip, "the shod-horse tracks," to which the trail-hunter clings as to life; clambering with Indian guides around coast headlands, with fingers and toes rigidly hooked into niches of the rocks, and wetted to the skin by the prodigious splashing of the surf, or resting in a sea-girt cave, where they might have done the business for me with a sharp stone, and no soul in all the world been the wiser; bowling lively down the rough-ridging rapids of the swamp-stained Klamath, so swiftly that our hair flutters behind our hats--three of us in a little, bobbing cockle-shell of a canoe, and liable to be capsized out of the same in a twinkling; confronting a huge black bear on a lonely mountain, with no useful tree in reach: I remember all these things with exceeding pleasure, but they are of no consequence in themselves, except as showing that some pains was taken to get correct information.

Sometimes, when wandering on the great, ferny, wind-swept hills of the upper coast, keeping a sharp weather-eye out for the trail, I have seen a half-dozen tatterdemalion Eurocs, with their stiff hair bristling in the wind, their two short club-queues bouncing on their shoulders, and their lips and hands stained gory-red with the juice of salal-berries, spying me, quit their picking, and come rushing down through the chaparral, with a wild, lunatic laugh that made my hair stand on end. But they were never bent on "butcher deeds," and never gave any war-whoop more fiendish than the insinuating question, "Got any tobac?"

One who travels afoot among the Indians, habited in the plain garb necessary amid the scraggy thickets of California, will find them making themselves very familiar with him, sometimes to his amusement, often to his great disgust. The lively Klamaths, especially, conceived the greatest curiosity respecting myself and my business. They carefully scrutinized every article of my apparel in turn, and men who understood them said they always discussed in detail, and with the greatest minuteness, every stranger's hat, coat, boots--every thing--and tried thus to conjecture his occupation. They wanted

to purchase my clothes; they wanted to swap handkerchiefs; they wanted to peep into my traveling-bag. Waxing presently more familiar, they felt the quality of my cloth, stroked it down, rubbed it between their thumbs and fingers, asked what it cost, clasped my arm with their hands to measure my muscle, and then encouraged me with the brief, judicious remark, "Bully for you!" They turned up my boots to inspect the nails and soles of the same; they wanted to try on my coat; and, last and worst of all, the rascals wanted to try on my trousers!

Like ill-mannered White people--to use the mildest phrasing--they were very fond of borrowing my knife, pencil, drinking-cup--any thing-- which they would presently insert into their pockets, hoping I might forget to ask for it again.

One means of protection which old pioneers advised me to take, was, in journeying anywhither, always to keep at my tongue's end the names of several prominent citizens of the vicinity, to impress the savages with the belief that I was thoroughly acquainted in those parts, had plenty of friends, and ample means of redress if they did me any mischief. The Indians are strongly attached to their homes, on which they have fudged so long in the building; and they have learned, by tough experience, that, if they do any thieving, it will be the worse for them, and that it will go hard by the Whites will burn their rancherias, and requite the stealing double. They desire to live in quiet where they were born, and they understand that they must keep the vicinal peace; but with a stranger in the gates, it is quite a different matter. Men keeping trading-posts, or having bands of them to fetch and carry on their ranches, almost without exception, say they are the most honest Indians they ever knew. But from a stranger, who they think is without means of swift and certain requital, they will prig every thing he has in the world.

In this, as in a hundred other things, the California Indians display their notable cunning. As the Italian proverb says, they have the open countenance, but their thoughts are exceedingly tight and crafty.

I am much indebted to them for guidance through labyrinths of trails; but unlike Cuffee, they never rendered any service, however minute, without expecting payment. For every substantial benefit I paid them, but I speedily discovered, that, if a present were to be made every time it was expected, it would require a sumpter-mule to carry my substance about. For instance, Tacho-Colly, Chief of the Ta-ah-tens, refused to count ten in his language unless I paid him, and only consented, at last, when he saw me entering into negotiations with one of his subjects, by presenting him a handful of sweet crackers. Once I was sitting with three stalwart and sinister-looking Eurocs on a rugged promontory, waiting for the tide to ebb; and when lunch-time arrived, we fell to--they, on their dried smelt; I, on some sandwiches. They had no claim on my luncheon, therefore asked for nothing; but presently I commenced talking with one about Indian concerns, and, in an instant, the crafty savage espied the drift, saw he had established a claim, and remarked, "Me talk you Injun-talk, you give me piece of bread and meat."

The difficulties of the undertaking are sometimes almost disheartening. It is very rare to find an Indian who can give any connected account of himself; so one must possess already a considerable stock of facts, or a vivid imagination, and ask a thousand questions in such manner that the Indian can answer "Yes" or "No." Then, too, they have a terror of a Reservation Agent, which is significant and piteous to behold; and, if one asks a number of questions, or produces a note-book, without making an elaborate explanation, the poor beggar gets scared, and will answer to never a word more. Many an Indian would perish in his tracks rather than go the the Reservation, which he remembers only as an infamous pest-house. Many a wretched, trembling squaw has fled for life to some pioneer, and gladly slaved for him all her life long, without reward or recognition, for the sake of his protection against the Agent.

One must depend mostly on men who have dwelt a good part of their lives among them; and, for this reason, many a "squaw-man," whose contribution to the large uses of civiliation was not otherwise conspicuously apparent, was, to me, a mine of treasure. One might spend years with diligence in acquiring an Indian tongue, then journey a three-hours' space, and find himself adrift again, so multitudinous are the languages and dialects of California. Carefully recorded conversations with five hundred men, therefore,would be more profitable than five years spent by one man, to say nothing of the value of time.

The custom in respect of names is various. Sometimes there is a tribal name for all who speak the same language; sometimes none, and only names for separate villages; sometimes a name for a whole tribe or family, to which is prefixed a separate word for each dialect, which is generally co-extensive with some valley. Of the first, an instance is found in the Cahrocs, on the Klamath, who are a compact tribe, with no dialects; of the second, in the large tribe, on the lower Klamath, who also have no dialects, and yet have no name, except for each village; of the third, in the great family of the Pomos on Russian River, who have many dialects, and a name for each--as Ballo Ki Pomos, Cahto Pomos, etc.

To increase the confusion, the Indians seldom call their neighbors by the same tribal names as the latter themselves adopt.

(3) As a simple basis of classification, I used the ten numerals. These will always detect a new language, but not always a new dialect; for a tongue may have many dialects, with wide departures, yet the numerals will remain about the same throughout.

It is frequently a hard work to scrape away the debris created by the White Man during twenty years, and get down to the bed-rock of the old tribal organizations. The California tribes crumbled under the touch of the Pale-face, and their members were proud to group themselves about some strong man in the land, and call themselves by his name. They thought it greater honor to be called Bidwell's Indians, Hubbard's Indians, Redding's Indians, or so, than Wintoons, or whatever might chance to be their native title. Some remnants of tribes have three or four names, all in use

within a radius of that number of miles; some, again, are merged, or dovetailed, into others; and some never had a name taken from their own language, but have adopted that given them by a neighbor-tribe, altogether different in speech. All these things are exceedingly perplexing and vexatious. For this reason, I have studiously ignored all (4) the names given to tribes by Americans, else the whole matter would have been involved in an inextricable confusion.

On the Klamath River there live three distinct tribes--called the Eurocs, Cahrocs, and Modocs; which names mean, respectively, "down the river," "up the river," and "head of the river." The habitat of the Cahrocs extends from a certain canon, a few miles above Weitspeck, along the Klamath to the foot of the Klamath Mountains, and a few miles up Salmon River. They have no recollection of any ancient migration to this region; on the contrary, they have traditions of creation, the flood, etc., which are fabled to have occurred on the Klamath.

The Cahrocs are probably the finest tribe of Indians in California. Their stature is a trifle under the America; they have well-sized bodies, erect and strong-knit; and when a Cahroc has the weapon to which he is accustomed--a sharp stone gripped in the hand--he will face a White Man, and give him a square, handsome fight, though he flees before him when armed with a snickersnee, or pistol, in the use of which he does not feel confidence. The Klamath face is less broad than the face in the Sacramento Valley, but, in early manhood, nearly as oval as the Caucasian; cheek-bones not over-prominent; eyes bright, moderately well-sized, and freely opened straight across the face; nose broad at the base, straight and strong, with ovoid nares; forehead rather low, but without that disfiguring point of hair growing down the middle, such as one sees in the Sacramento Valley; chin and forehead nearly on a perpendicular line; color ranging from buff-hazel, or old-bronze, almost to black. Many of them--especially the young squaws--are notable for the fullness of the eyes, and the breadth of sclerotic exposed. The squaws age early, but even at forty or fifty their faces are furrowed with comparatively fine lines, and they seldom display those odious hanging wrinkles and that simian aspect seen in the Sacramento Valley.

With their smooth, hazel skins, oval faces, plump and brilliant eyes, some of the young maidens--barring the tattooed chins--have a piquant and splendid beauty. In those full, voluptuous eyes, so broadly rimmed with white, there is something dangerous, a very unmistakable suggestion of possible diablerie. When we consider, in addition, the paucity of White Women, it is small wonder that so many pioneers-including nearly all the county officers--have taken them for wives. The young people of both sexes dress in the American fashion; and I have seen plenty of them appareled with quite correct elegance--the young Indians in tolerable broadcloth, spotless shirt-fronts, and neat black cravats; the girls in chaste, pretty, small-figured stuffs, with sacques, collars, ribboned hats, etc.

The Cahroc is taciturn and indifferent toward his squaw and parents, but seldom wantonly cruel; easy-going with his children; talkative with his peers; generous to the division of the last crumb; mercenary and smiling to the White Man; brave when

(5) need is, but cunning always; fond of dancing; quick to imitate; very amorous; revengeful, but avaricious, being always pacable with money.

The primitive dress of the men is simply a buckskin girdle about the loins; of the women, a chemise of the same material, or of braided grass, reaching from the breast to the knees. The hair is worn in two club-queues, which are drawn forward over the shoulders. The squaws tattoo-in blue--three narrow fern-leaves perpendicularly on the chin--one falling from each corner of the mouth, and one in the middle. For this purpose they are said to employ soot--gathered from a stove--mingled with the juice of a certain plant. In their native state, both sexes bathe the entire person every morning in cold water; but in the care of their cabins and the immediate vicinity, they are execrably filthy.

For money, the Cahrocs make use of the red scalps of woodpeckers, which are valued at $5 apiece; and of a curious kind of shells, resembling a cock's spurs in size and shape, white and hollow, which they polish and arrange on strings, the shortest being worth 25 cents, the longest about $2--the value increasing in a geometrical ratio with the length. The unit of currency is a string of the length of a man's arm, with a certain number of the longer shells below the elbow, and a certain number of the
(6) longer shells below the elbow, and a certain number of the shorter ones above. This shell-money is called allicochick, not only on the Klamath, but from Crescent City to Eel River, though the tribes using it speak several different languages. When the Americans first arrived in the country, an Indian would give from $40 to $50 in gold for a string of it; but now, it is principally the old Indians who value it at all.

The Cahrocs are very democratic. They have a head-man, or captain, in each rancheria; but, when out on the war-path, they are somewhat more united, being under the command of one chieftain. But the authority of all these officers is very slender. The murder of a man's dearest relative may be compounded for by the payment of money, the price of an average Indian's life being esa pasora--one string.
(7) If the money is paid without higgling, the slayer and the avenger become boon companions for evermore. If not, then the avenger must have the murderer's blood; and a system of retaliation is initiated, which would be eternal, were it not that it may be checked any moment by the payment of money.

In war they take no scalps, but decapitate the slain, and bring in the heads as trophies. They do battle with bows and arrows; and, in a hand-to-hand encounter--which often occurs--they clutch ragged stones in their hands, and maul each other with terrible and deadly effect. They sometimes fight duels, with stones, in this manner. Though arranged without much formality, they are conducted with a considerable degree of fairness--the friends of the respective combatants standing around them, and setting them on their pins agains when they fall.

There is no process of courtship, but the whole affair of love-making is conducted by the father of the bride and the bridegroom expectant. When a young Philander becomes enamored of some dusky Clorinda, he goes straight to the father,

and, without any beating of the bush, makes him a plump offer of so or so many strings for her. They chaffer, and higgle, and drive bargains without any reference to her wishes. "My ducats and my daughter," says the avaricious old Cahroc. A wife is seldom purchased for less than half a string; and, when she is especially skillful in making acornbread, and weaving baskets, or belongs to an aristocratic family, she sometimes costs as high as two strings--say $80 or $100. There is no wedding-ceremony whatever, but the bride follows the bridegroom to his cabin, and they at once set up their savage Lares and Penates.

No marriage is legal or binding unless preceded by the payment of money; and that family is most aristocratic in which the highest price was paid for the wife. For this reason, it stands a young man in hand to be diligent in accumulating shells, and not to be niggard in haggling with his prospective father-in-law. So far is this (8) shell-aristocracy carried, that the children of a woman for whom no money was paid are accounted no better than bastards, and the whole family are spit upon. Bigamy is not tolerated, even in the chief. A man may own as many women for slaves as he is able to support, or, rather, to purchase; but, if he cohabits with more than one, he beings upon himself obloquy and contempt. He is beneath the notice of honest Indians.

Before marriage, virtue is an attribute which can hardly be said to exist in either sex, all the young women being a common possession; but after marriage, when the dishonor of the woman would involve also that of the husband, they live with tolerable chastity, for savages. Still, no adultery is so flagrant but the husband can be placated with money; and it seldom requires more than one string. Virtue, therefore, is exceedingly rare, as an innate quality, but is simply an enforced condition; and, indeed, the Cahroc language, though rich in its vocabulary, is said to contain no expression for "virtue," though possessing an equivalent for "prostitute," corresponding to the fact. And yet, with all their immorality, inconsistently enough , bastards are universally shunned and despised. They, and the children for whose mother no shell-money was paid--who are illegitimate, in fact, according to Cahroc ideas--constitute a class of social outcasts, Indian Pariahs, who can intermarry only among themselves.

There prevails in this tribe a juster division of labor than among the Eastern Indians. The men build the wigwams; kill the game, and generally bring it in; construct the fishing-boats, weirs, and nets, and catch the salmon; cut and bring in all the fuel for the sweat-houses; help to gather acorns and berries; make the fish- (9) gigs, bows, and arrows. The women gather and bring in the firewood used for secular purposes; carry in all the acorns and roots; weave the baskets; generally bring in and dry the salmon; perform all the work of the scullery; make the clothes. Squaws also constitute more than half of the "medicines," and officiate as midwives. Yet they are regarded as drudges, and the Cahroc word for "woman" is asisicitatvan, which signifies "water-carrier," from the two words, asisick and tatvan.

The Cahrocs have a conception of a Supreme Being, whom they call Chareya.

The root of this word is the same as the first syllable of "Cahroc," and also calleh, or callay, in the Russian River dialects, signifying "above;" but, with the curious accretive capacity of Indian languages, it is expanded into the complicated idea of "The Old Man Above." Chareya sometimes descends to earth, to instruct the prophets (or medicines), when he appears as a venerable man, clad in a close-fitting tunic, with long, white hair flowing down his shoulders, and bearing a medicine-bag. When creating the world, he sat upon the Sacred Stool, which is still preserved by the Chareya-Indian, and on which he sits, on the occasion of the great annual Dance of Propitiation. But, as among all the tribes of northern California, the coyote is the real and practical object of veneration. They also believe in spooks, or demons, called apparoan, who run after people at night in the forest, and leave tracks, which, when seen in the morning, bear a very suspicious resemblance to horse-tracks.

The sweat-house is constructed entirely underground, smallish and oblong, puncheoned up inside, covered with a flat roof level with the earth, and airtight, except for the little hatchway at one side. It is church, theatre, cafe chantant, dormitory, sweat-bath, and medical examination-room in one; and it is consecrated exclusively (10) to masculine occupation. Lapitean says, among the Eastern Indians the men never enter the private wigwams of their wives, except under cover of darkness; but here, the case is reversed, for it is the men's apartments that are sacred. No squaw may enter the sweat-house, on penalty of death, except only when passing her examination for the degree of M. D. During the rainy season, when fires are comfortable, they are kept burning in the sweat-houses day and night; and there are always enough of them in each village to furnish sleeping accommodations for all the adult men thereof.

In summer, the Indians occupy the common cabins, or brush-wood booths, (11) with their wives; but in winter, they sleep by themselves in the sweat-houses; and I suspect they use the terrors of religious taboo to banish the squaws from them, in order to enjoy the warm and cozy snuggery themselves. But, airtight as they are, and heated perpetually (for, once kindled, the fire must never be suffered to go out until spring), the atmosphere in them is villainous beyond description.

Of numerous fables and coyote stories in vogue among the Cahrocs, related by gifted squaws to their children, I will give here one specimen, which is not entirely unworthy a place in that renowned old book written by one AEsop:

FABLE OF THE ANIMALS.

In the old days, a great many hundred snows ago, Chareya, sitting on the Sacred Stool, created the world. First, he made the fishes in the big water, then the animals on the green land, and, last of all, The Man. But the animals were all alike yet in power, and it was not yet ordained which should be for meat to others, and which should be meat for The Man. Then the great Chareya bade them all assemble together in one place, that The Man might give each his power and his rank. So the animals all met together, a great many hundred snows ago, on an evening, when the sun was set, that they might wait overnight for the coming of The Man on the morrow.

Now, Chareya commanded The Man to make a great many bows and arrows, as many as there were animals, and to give the longest to the one that should have the most power, and the shortest to the one that should have the least, etc. So he did, and after nine sleeps his work was ended; and the bows and arrows which he had made were very many.

Now, the animals, being gathered together in one place, went to sleep, that they might rise on the morrow, and go forth to meet The Man. But the coyote was exceedingly cunning--above all the beasts that were, he was so cunning. So he considered within himself how he might get the longest bow, and so have the greatest power, and have all animals for his meat. He determined to stay awake all night, while the others slept, and so go forth the first in the morning, and get the longest bow. This he devised within his cunning; then he laughed to himself, and stretched out his snout on his fore-paws, and pretended to sleep like the others. But about midnight he began to get sleepy, and he had to walk around camp and scratch his eyes a considerable to keep them open. But he still got more sleepy, and he had to skip and jump about like a good one, to keep awake. He made so much noise this way, that he woke up some of the other animals; so he had to think of another plan. About the time the morning-star came up, he was so sleepy that he couldn't keep his eyes open any longer. Then he took two little sticks, and sharpened them at the ends, and propped open his eyelids, whereupon he thought he was safe, and he concluded he would take just a little nap with his eyes open, watching the morning-star. But in a few minutes he was minutes he was fast asleep; and the sharp sticks pierced through his eyelids, and pinned them fast together.

So the morning-star mounted up very swiftly, and then there came a little peep of daybreak, and the birds began to sing, and the animals began to rise and stretch themselves; but still the coyote lay fast asleep. At last, it was broad daylight; and then the sun rose, and all the animals went forth to meet The Man. He gave the longest bow to the cougar, so he had the greatest power of all; and the second longest to the bear; and so on, giving the next to the last to the frog. But he still had the shortest one left, and he cried out, "What animal have I missed?" Then the animals began to look about, and they soon spied the coyote lying fast asleep, with the sharp sticks pinning his eyelids together. Upon that, all the animals set up a great laugh, and they jumped on the coyote, and danced upon him. Then they led him to The Man--for he could see nothing for the sticks--and The Man pulled out the sticks, and gave him the shortest bow of all, which would shoot an arrow hardly more than a foot. And all the animals laughed very much.

But The Man took pity on the coyote, because he was now the weakest of all the animals--weaker even than the frog--and he prayed to Chareya for him; and Chareya gave him cunning, ten times more than before, so that he was cunning above all the beasts of the wood. So the coyote was a friend to The Man and his children, and helped them, and did many things for them, as we shall see hereafter.

In the Cahroc legends, the coyote is as important as Reynard in ours. When one Cahroc has killed another, he often barks like a coyote, believeing he will thereby be endued with so much of that animal's cunning as to be able to elude the punishment due to his crime.