THE LIFE AND CULTURE OF THE WASHO AND PAIUTES*

The Wash-o

(66)

Geographically the Wash-o belong in Nevada but their language seems rather to connect them with the California Indians, although the resemblances are few and unsatisfactory. From the vocabularies at my command I have collated the following words:

English	Washo	Miwok
Dog	shu-ku	chu-ku
Hair	tai-yus	yu-seh
Face	mass	ma-Ka-suh
Earth	it-teh	to-tet
		Pit River
Tooth	tsa-tsa	it-sah
Body	shu	chush-tih
Chest	tsi-ko-gus	ku-kus
		Win-tun
Leg	mai-up	mai (foot)

The Washo pronoun of the second person is mi, and this form prevails throughout nearly all the California languages. While it is necessary to admit that these resemblances form a slender basis of comparison; on the other hand, they have no linguistic affinities with the Pai-u-te at all.

Physically, their leanings are decidedly toward California. Though a race of mountaineers, they are dark in complexion, nose depressed at the root, stature short and stout; the Paiute are taller, lighter-colored, and their nose prominent, though straight. They are also inferior in prowess to the Paiute, who have always been a terror to them; and their habits and customs resemble the Californian much more than the Paiute. If there were no other way of distinguishing them, the Washo men wore their hair in one queue, the Paiute in two.

I am inclined to believe that the Washo colonized Western Nevada from California, migrating eastward over the summit of the Sierra; and that at a period subsequent to this the Paiute arrived on the ground, expelled them from the lowlands above the sinks of the Truckee and the Carson, and drove them into the mountains on the upper reaches of the rivers above named. There seems to be evidence of this in the fact that they allow the Washo, during the fishing season, to descend the Truckee

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to a point much below their recognized boundary line.

When the Americans arrived in the country the habitat of the Washo was as follows: the Truckee River down to the Truckee Meadows (Reno). These large and rich meadows, so valuable in this desert country as a resort for game, were always in dispute between them and the Paiute. In the fishing season, as above remarked, they were allowed by the Paiute to descend the Truckee to Clark's Station, eighteen miles below the Meadows. They occupied Carson River down to the first large canyon below Carson City. Besides this, they held Lake Tahoe, Sierra Valley, and certain other summit valleys up to the first range south of Honey Lake, though they resorted to these elevated valleys only in the summer, or on hunting excursions in the winter. Within the American period it is said they have never visited Lake Tahoe; they have a superstitious terror of that lake on account of the lightness of its waters and the fact that a man drowning in it never rises to the surface.

Their own name for themselves is that given above. They call the Paiute Bal-loh; the California Indians Do-bi-muss; California itself, Tang-li; Washoe Valley, Tsa-tau; Truckee River Valley, at Reno, Ta-pe-u-meh; Sierra Valley, Moh-tsin. To denote the tribes living in these valleys respectively they add to each word tang-an (house). These were the designations given to me on Carson River; this stream is called Wat-tah, which is also the general name for "river." "Down the river" is tau-al-loh; "up the river" hang-al-loh.

They are not only a lower race than the Paiute in prowess and in physique, but also in virtue; their women are less chaste than their eastern neighbors, and in this respect they resemble the California women.

There is very little ingenuity or invention or enterprise among them. Their basket work is less diversified, abundant and ornate than the Paiute. Along the streams where they can get a supple of willows they construct huts of slender poles planted in the ground and bent over, forming a dome-shaped frame which is thatched. But they frequently had, even in winter, nothing that could properly be called a house. On the open desert they pulled and stacked together a quantity of sagebrush, making a circular, hollow heap, which was defended on the windward side with skins and hare-skin blankets. In this wretched enclosure, with a fire in the center, they passed the days and nights, lying around close to the wall to escape the snow which blew over or sifted through. Fortunately, however, the fall of snow is light in most of their territory. They have often been decried and derided for their miserable dwellings, when as a matter of fact, in the almost rainless climate of Nevada they need no other for eight or nine months of the year, and on the deserts they had no better material of which to build if they had needed them. For summer use a slight circle of sagebrush, with shades of cloth or skins hoisted overhead, suffices.

I was much interested in their fire-making apparatus. It consists simply of

a joint of cane (Andropogon), filled with charcoal dust, which is turned rapidly between the hands in a stick of pine furnished with shallow holes to receive the end of the cane. The charcoal dust serves a very good purpose as tinder, in catching the first spark that is elicited. On the end of the firestick is a lump of pitch and red earth mixed together which answers instead of beeswax about the household.

Another implement which I procured is also of some interest, and that is the punch for making arrow-heads. They take a piece of buck-thorn about six inches long, and as large as one's little finger, make it of a uniform thickness throughout, and lash it firmly to a wooden handle about eighteen inches in length. Holding this in the right hand, with the handle between the right arm and the body, the operator brings it to bear upon the flake of flint, which is held in the left hand between the thumb and fingers. The motion is simply one of punching; a minute particle of flint is spalled off with each thrust, and the flake is frequently reversed, so that it is reduced symmetrically. The tool here described comes into play only after the flint has been roughly blocked out by blows with a hammer or with another cobble-stone.

There are no weapons used for warlike weapons but the bow and arrow. A warrior going to battle decorates his person with white and red paint, and provides himself with about three hundred arrows. This number being considered one day's supply of ammunition. They fight mostly in the open plains; the battle is joined at daylight, and last until one or the other side have expended all their arrows or lost so many men that they become panic-stricken. They very seldom come to close quarters (an Indian readily shoots 500 yards and hits his man), and the battle is fought through without any strategy or tactics. One day generally ends it, if they even hold out so long, but sometimes the combatants rest on their arms, sentinels are stationed, and during the night if an Indian is seen passing before the camp-fire, instantly he becomes a target for half a dozen arrows; and at daybreak they are up and at it again. Captives are never taken, if men; if women and children, they are sometimes.

The average price of a Washo wife is twenty-five dollars in American gold; this is equivalent to five hare-skin blankets, or one large grizzly-bear skin or two small ones. She cannot properly be said to be purchased, but the happy Benedick is expected to make his father-in-law presents to the above amounts. Adultry is not uncommon, and produces fighting; divorces are easy and informal. Polygamy is allowed. Infanticide is never perpetuated on any pretext. Murder is never compounded by the payment of money, as among the avaricious tribes of Northern California; there must be blood for blood.

Amusements among them were very few and primitive. The principal festival of the year was the Pine-nut Dance, celebrated at the ripening of that highly esteemed edible. It was a simple dance in a circle, hand joined in hand, a man and a woman alternately.

Vague accounts have reached me of weird nocturnal dances held by the Washo in celebration of certain mystic rites in propitiation and honor of the spirits; but I had not sufficient acquaintance with this tribe to be able to penetrate their mysteries. Captain Joe denied that they have any belief in spirits whatever, but this must be attributed to their unwillingness to converse with strangers on certain topics.

A bad Indian sometimes returns to earth in the form of a Kingfisher (?), a large bird with white head and tail.

They believe that all creatures and things were brought from the western country by the Old Coyote.

In their medical practice the principal remedial agent resorted to is suction with the mouth. They do not use the sweat-house. Their medicines are few in number and of uncertain application. When an Indian dies, they forthwith abandon the house wherein the death occurred. Their practice in disposing of the dead has been much mooted, some holding that they observed burial; others incremation; still others that they carried them into the forest (where one was accessible) and lifted them aloft in the trees. Captian Joe made this distinction: bury good Indians, but burn the wicked, together with all their worldly effects. This is probably the correct statement. Near the town of Truckee they have been observed to have figures of human beings drawn in relief in the sand, above the graves; and they go once a year and freshen up the images, pluck up the weeds, restore the outlines, etc. This same custom has been observed among the Paiutes.

In the chapter on the Paiute will be found a number of statements as to articles of food and medicine which will apply equally to the Washo.

The Southern Paiute

The Paiute of Inyo County, California and Southwestern Nevada are so different from those above described that I shall here write down separately all the authentic facts I obtained concerning them. They are darker and shorter in stature than the Northern Paiute, being apparently a little mixed in blood with the California Indians. Still, they are unmistakably to be classed as Paiute because of their language. There is one branch of them who are commonly called Monos (or, by the California Indians, originally, Mo-na-chi), who invaded the domain of the Californians, crossing the summit onto the headwaters of King's River and the San Joaquin, and following down those streams to points about fifteen miles from the plains. At an early day they were taken by Government Agents and placed on Reservations in the Tulare and Kern Valleys, but in 1868 they suffered heavy losses from the measles, and, becoming frightened, they returned to Owen's River. After a time they gradually

returned and now they occupy substantially their old habitat.

I did not go east to Death Valley and the Panamint Mountains, but I learned from a vocabulary taken by Dr. O. Lowe, of Lieutenant Wheeler's party, that the Panamint Indians are Paiute. Following down the eastern slope of the Sierra, I discovered linguistic traces of the Paiutes as far south as Tehatchaypah (Tehatchapi) Pass, and found that a branch of them had once occupied the large and beautiful plateau in this pass; but that they are now extinct. Thus it was that the aggressive and mountain-toughened race of the Paiute, bordering on the Californians all along the eastern slope of the Sierra, (except where the Washo are interposed) wherever there was an inviting pass poured through from their deserts to the rich forests of plains fo California.

Lieutenant W. W. Witherspoon of Camp Independence, who has paid considerable attention to the habits of the Paiute, and to whom I am under obligation for facts, entertains the opinion mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that the name of this people signifies "Water Utes." Certainly the name is more applicable to this branch of them than to the northern, for the former generally have their camps or villages near the few springs which are found in their arid country.

The inferior animals find these springs as grateful and as indispensable as do the human inhabitants, and birds especially resort to them in large numbers to slake their thirst. The savages have only to utilize this circumstance to secure a valuable food supply. They construct very small booths of brushwood, tight and dark, large enough only for one man, near these springs, wherein the fowler crouches with bow and arrows or with a long pole having on the end of it a string furnished with a loop. The birds alighting on the margin of the pool or on perches placed for them, are easily shot or snared one by one and drawn in (the arrows being provided with strings) without frightening away the others. A skillful fowler will often secure scores of them from a single flock. I have seen this kind of contrivance also on Tule River, where the Monachi had doubtless introduced it, as I never saw it eslewhere in California.

The extremely low state of the industrial arts among the Paiute of Inyo County may be judged by a couple of illustrations. For needles or awls they employ the thorns of the "niggerhead cactus;" and for pipes they use sections of cane (Andropogon). These last they have about six inches long, and fill them with fire and tobacco within an inch or two of the end which is inserted in the mouth. They might perhaps more properly be called cigarettes; they last only for two or three smokes.

A first born child is almost always named for its father or mother or some near relative; afterward it acquires a sobriquet from some event in the individual history. Children are betrothed by their parents when very young, sometimes when unborn, this contract being subordinated, of course, to the contingencies of sex. Lieutenant Witherspoon mentions an instance of betrothal where the boy was only four or five and the girl only one or two. On arriving at maturity the young man has to

purchase his wife from her father, according to the regulations for such cases made and provided. A Paiute Chief who had been doing service as a United States scout, when pay-day came around and he was put in possession of a snug little roll of greenbacks, instead of throwing it away on bad tobacco and worse whiskey, like his white comrades prudently invested $50 of it in a new wife.

It was mentioned above that the Pyramid Lake Paiute have no sweat-house; I could not discover any, nor did they know of the existence of any. But here the influence of the Californians seems to have been felt somewhat; there is a large and fine sweat-house in Wheeler's Canyon, at the east of Owen's River, though it is not used for an assembly hall or a dance house, as in northern California.

They have a curious way of treating their doctors. When one of them has been so unfortunate as to lose three patients in succession, he is put to death by stoning or clubbing. Yo-wo-wik-kuh was the name of an old doctor in Mason Valley who was killed in 1872 for this offense. He had lost two patients and was attending a third who lay at the point of death. The relatives were closely and sternly watching him, but the veteran Hippocrates, fortifying himself in his professional pride and hoping against hope, continued to wage the unequal warfare against double Death.

With all his aged and waning strength he plied his eldritch arts, dancing and shouting, sucking the insensible body of the moribund Indian, puking and retching and foaming at the mouth, wailing through his savage chants, now shaking his rattle and howling, and now bowing down again to suck the filthy patient, until he perceived that the death-rattle was already in his throat. Then, too late, he abandoned the desperate case and his professional pride together and fled for his life. But the avengers of blood were already mounting their horses. They followed swiftly in pursuit, they hunted him down, with stones and clubs they struck him to the earth, and cut off his head then.

A doctor at Camp Independence familiarly known as Joe Bowers explained this custom in this way: a Paiute medicine man receives his fee in advance, and in case he either can not or will not refund it, he is to be killed if this happens three times.

Lieutenant Witherspoon thinks they are moon-worshippers. He mentions an instance where, on a march, he entered an Indian village in Saline Valley just as the moon was rising, and saw a large number of them standing on their houses or the hillocks in the vicinity, all facing the moon. They stood in perfect silence, but were executing certain genuflexions and gestures of address. He describes the scene as quite impressive -- the moon rising in solemn splendor, such as only this climate can display, and shimmering with a mellow half-light over the sagebrush-spotted desert, while the dusky savages on sandhills are performing their mystic pantomime.

Great annual open-air dances are held in celebration of a good pine-nut harvest, or on similar occasions, and offerings are burned to the spirits. They are held in various places in turn; for instance, this year on Owen's River, the next in Salinas Valley, then the White Mountains, then at Denton, etc.

The influence and example of the California Indians seem to be shown in the custom of incremation, which has a certain prevalence. It is explained by their sages and medicines that only those who are good and die a natural death are to be honored with a burial, but the bad, and those who die of an unknown disease or are bewitched are to be burned. The same usage obtains on Carson River: an instance is mentioned where three Indians who died of an obscure disease were abandoned to the beasts of prey.

There are numerous places in Owen's Valley and in the vicinity where the rocks have markings or paintings and hieroglyphics scratched or cut, some of which are explicable and others are not. For instance, on the eastern slope of the Inyo Range, a few miles above the town of Independence, there are, in two caves, some red cross-marks enclosed in circles which were made by Paiute hunters to indicate the spot where they performed certain exploits, as the killing of a mountain sheep, etc. On the western slope of the same range, at a point about opposite the mouth of George's Creek, there are some white marks which the Indians say were made to show the elevation of a great flood which once occurred there.

I will make brief mention of a number of others, on the authority of Dr. S. C. George, an early pioneer of the valley, who named the Inyo Mountains and some other localities, and J. J. More, Esq., sheriff of Inyo County. On the west side of the Inyo Range, above Independence and about opposite Hot Springs, there are paintings on the slate rocks representing animals, etc. On Bishop Creek, about twenty miles south of Benton, close beside the stage road, there are hieroglyphics cut in the rocks, in imitation of animals. In Fourteenmile Canyon, near Death Valley, about sixty miles a little north of east from the lower end of Owen's Lake, there are hieroglyphics cut high up on the limestone and sandstone walls, representing geography, lakes, rivers, etc., also animals. They are said to extend along the canyon walls for several miles. Near Little Owen's Lake there are others like those last described. I am also informed by Dr. Loew that about five miles southeast of Benton, in the valley of Black Lake, there is still another inscription, which he has himself seen, and in which he recognized five Chinese characters.

Opposite the town of Independence, on the summit of the Inyo Mountains, is a natural pillar of stone, fifty or sixty feet high, which is known as the "Paiute Monument." It is called by the Indians "Win-ni-du-mah," which they interpret "big rock." There is a tradition (related to the American pioneers, though the Indians of to-day do not seem to know of it) that a great chief was once buried under this rock, or at the foot of it, and that he left the Indians a dying legacy of good advice and an illustrious example which he charged them to follow for all time.