

Daily Mercury

4-29-1885

R. M. Green of the Oro Drug Store, has stuffed the hide of the large California lion, brought to town Saturday, placed large glaring eyes in its head, and stood it in front of his store with a bottle of his famous Santa Abbie in the ferocious looking beast's mouth.

Tom Lockerman of Pentz, has some bucks that average ten pounds of wool at a clipping, one yielding fourteen and a quarter pounds the other day. His flock will average five pounds. His sheep have been graded up, until they have become extra fine. This kind of sheep raising pays.

Abner Randall, the Indian who died in the Hospital a few days ago, was supposed to have been at least a hundred years old, if not more. He was raised in the Northwestern States, and when N. D. Plum was a boy, Randall was an old man. Mr. Plum knew him, away back in the forties, when they both lived in Wisconsin. Randall was a citizen of the United States, his tribe having been admitted to citizenship years ago. He was an intelligent man and a good citizen. He lived for years in the vicinity of Bidwell Bar, and was well known in that community.

Some Curious Customs Still in
Vogue Among the Concows.

HEL-LO-KI, THE FEARFUL DEMON.

Poisoning Enemies by Aid of Evil Spirits.
Abandonment to Grief in Mourning.
Grass Gambling.

ROUND VALLEY RESERVATION, August 15, 1888.—About two hundred miles north of that great center of civilization, San Francisco, there is a people, of whose origin even they themselves are ignorant, and who live in a condition bordering on the barbarous. I refer to the Indians of Northern California, a few of whom have gathered together on the Round Valley Reservation in Mendocino county. Here reside the remnants of six once powerful tribes, the Ukies, Concows, Little Lakes, Redwoods, Pitt Rivers and Potter Valleys. Of the last two named there are very few, the greater portion of the tribes being settled on their own land in another part of the State. There is much of interest yet attached to these "noble red men," though much of their nobility has become a thing of the past, they say, in consequence of their contact with their pale-faced brother. However, be that as it may, they still retain a few of their old-time customs and all of their superstitions. They are, as some one has aptly put it, "very spiritual," in fact their religion is merely a species of spiritualism. Their God, "Supreme Ruler," "Creator" or "First Power," is called the Great Spirit or Good Spirit. To all other spirits they give the universal name of "devil" in translating it into English. Anything strange that is seen or heard is immediately dubbed "devil," and they have the grace to be greatly alarmed by any reference to his Satanic Majesty, designated in the Concow language as "Hel-lo-ki."

On the reservation, which lies partly in Round Valley, there is quite a large hill standing out distinct and separate from the foothills of the mountains by which the valley is surrounded. This immense mound is supposed to be inhabited by "Hel-lo-ki," and an Indian of the ancient regime is never seen near it after the sun goes down. The younger ones and the half-breeds are supposed to have very little respect for these superstitions, and, in company with one of them, I once ascended the almost perpendicular sides of this hill to get a good view of the valley. On the topmost twig of the topmost bush were strings of beads and several feathers floating in the evening wind. I thought I would like one of the feathers as a relic, but the boy seized my outstretched hand, exclaiming:

"Don't touch that!"

"Why?"

"It's poisoned!"

SF Daily Alta 8-18-1888
page 1 of 2

"How do you know?" I inquired, and after a number of questions found that when a member of the Concow tribe wants to cause the death of another of the tribe, because of some fancied insult, or perhaps because some of his relatives have in some past unlucky hour had something to do with the death of some of his relatives, he gets rattlesnake poison and rattles and a poisonous decoction of some herb and has the "medicine man" repeat his words of incantation over the mixture. He then gets something that the intended victim has worn about his person, a scrap of his clothing or a lock of his hair, or even a portion of something he has been eating, and putting the poisoned mass on or with the possession, buries it under a stone or deep in the earth where it will not be found or disturbed. This "medicine hill" is a favorite place for such interment, hence the dread of it, for "Hel-lo-ki" must haunt such a spot so cursed.

It sometimes happens that they make an offering to this evil spirit or devil in the shape of the beads or feathers hanging on the bush. Of course after this, and in deference to the feelings of my guide, I no longer desired to possess what had been consecrated to this deity. When the wind blows very strong and the windows and doors of their rude huts rattle, the Indians shiver and huddle close together, whispering "Hel-lo-ki!"

While an Indian cannot swear in his own language, though he has attained quite a reputation when it comes to a question of white man's profanity, yet he can pronounce a curse on one of his own race, and thus make his life a burden, because even an evil wish is supposed to carry weight with it. It is no uncommon thing to hear a squaw say, "Ah! No good woman! I not like that woman. She 'cuss' me." When asked what she said, no answer save that can be elicited—"She 'cuss' me!" As near as I can ascertain one will say to another when angry: "I wish you die in a year," and, "You no good! You a lazy woman—never tend to your house," or some such expression; and it is never forgotten, and when the woman dies, no matter how long afterwards, her death is supposed to be partly caused by this curse, unless some one has poisoned her in the way already described.

Their unwritten law is like that of the ancient Jews—"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life." Within the past two years every death that has occurred has been attributed to poisoning or a curse. They live in constant dread of one another. When a person is very sick, and the skill of the medicine man has availed nothing, a series of dances lasting two or three weeks or more, is offered to "Hel-lo-ki," ending with a "big dinner" or general feast. When the patient is rich in beads and can afford it, a dinner is given every Saturday or Sunday, sometimes both. The eatables are dedicated to the angry god, who has sent evil spirits to the sick person to torment him, thus making him ill, but are eaten by all the members of the tribe, young or old, who can attend the feast, the old women packing off in their handkerchiefs or shawls what is left. The dance, too, is a propitiatory offering to the same wrathful deity. The Indians tell him they will dance till they are exhausted if he will let the afflicted one live. One of their wise men will pray quite as earnestly as Christians do, pleading, with tears in his eyes, for the life of a relative. But this is only done when all other means have been tried and failed. Then the dancers begin their maneuvers, and keep up the nightly orgie till all are utterly weary and unable to stand the fatigue any longer.

An Indian submits very gracefully to the inevitable, and when fully convinced that there is no hope for a patient for whom everything has been done in the way of such ceremonies and sacrifices, the medicine men often aid him to end his miserable existence, sometimes by trying to drive out the evil spirit by beating and stamping on him, and sometimes by slow starvation and studied neglect, even refusing a drink of water under some circumstances.

At the funeral all their feelings of affection are called in play again. The younger members of the family furnish the money for the coffin, which is always a rough pine box, sometimes painted, but oftener covered with black cloth or velvet and trimmed with cheap black lace. The old women of the tribe all assemble in the house of mourning and lend their voice to increase the sound of the crying of the mother or grandmothers, of which there are usually three or four, any aged relative on the father's or mother's side being thus named. This crying for their dead is strictly like unto the Jewish custom. I have seen the women sit on the edge of the graves, even jump in and abandon themselves to the wildest grief, throwing handfuls of dirt all over themselves, rubbing it on their faces and in their hair, putting it in their bosoms and on their mouths. One mother, I remember, clawed her cheeks with her finger-nails till they were raw and bleeding. All at the same time wail at the top of her voices and call for the dead to come back. Their cry is like this: "Ah-wi! Ah-wi! wee-now-ah (friend), wee-now-ah! Ah-wi! Ah-wi! Ah-gi! Ah-gi!" repeated again and again, and, though weeks have passed since I have heard it, it is ringing in my ears yet. They sometimes throw themselves on the ground with such force as to burst a blood vessel, and I have seen several women carried from the graves insensible, exhausted by the violence of their emotions.

In the grave, and oftentimes in the coffin, if

there is room, is put all the clothing of the deceased. All that has been used by him during his sickness, even the bedstead on which he has lain and all the bedding, is burned. When brush houses and wigwams were used exclusively, they were also burned to the ground and the bereaved family sought another camping ground, but in these days of white man's houses, and very few of them, this kind of a funeral pile is not popular, and they must be content to merely leave the house for a while, or perhaps move it to a new location. The reason they give for this custom of destroying everything belonging to a dead friend (or relative, synonymous terms) is that they don't want to think about them. "It make me feel bad," as an old woman told me once. And the sequel to this "feeling bad" is a season of mourning requiring considerable time. I have known the old women of a family to cry every night and morn for over a year for a child's death. They take a great deal of comfort in their weeping—a real luxury of grief it seems to them. Sometimes they become so hoarse they lose their voices, and are thus compelled to silence. Once in a while, when one of them dies, all the animals that belonged to him are shot, but they have acquired too much of "white man's" greed to thus lose a valuable horse now, so this custom is gradually dying out.

Every Autumn, if they are allowed to do so, the Concows have a "burning" or burnt offering to their dead. They erect a brush-house in the graveyard, and upon a night selected by the "medicine" men, all repair thither laden with baskets, beads, pi-no-la and acorn soup. The baskets and beads are hung on poles, the pinola and acorn soup being set at the bottom in the big baskets, that are fashioned so closely as to hold water. Again we see what they have gained from the white man. After the white people, who come to see the "burning," have bought the finest and best of the baskets, the rest are thrown into the large fire in front of the brush-house and each one seeks the graves of his dead relations and there they sit and cry till morning. The noise can be heard for miles distant. The half-breeds or younger ones generally spend their time in gambling. This is carried on either with cards or by means of the grass game, which is thus played: Two or four men selected by some one, seat themselves on the ground where the grass is long, or, if the game is carried on in the sweat-house, they pull a quantity of the grass and lay it in piles in front of them. Then one side, having decided by lot which, begins. Taking four small sticks in his hands, two in each, he sings a monotonous chant, the words of which have little or no meaning, in the meantime rapidly changing the sticks from one hand to the other, rubbing his hands together, snatching up handfuls of grass, sometimes burying his hands in the grass, then tossing a small bundle of it over his head, and going through all sorts of maneuvers to conceal the change of the sticks, or deer bones. One of them is peculiarly marked, and the game is to guess in which hand it is held. At a given signal from the opposing side, the motions are stopped and the guess is made, and the player loses or wins the pile of beads or money in the center, as the case may be. To an Indian there is nothing more exciting than a good "grass game," and they will play for days at a time, hardly stopping to eat or drink, and their legend of the game tells that in olden time men played for men, a chief betting his men and finally himself, till all were lost or became captive to the enemy, till Un Koi-to (the Saviour) came and won all men back and gave them to themselves again to be free, and then left with them a message to "love one another" and look for his coming again.

JEAN CLAUDE CARLYLE.