
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA,
September 16, 1850.

STR: I have the honor to transmit herewith so much of the language of the Indians of California as I have been able to procure. My greatest difficulty has been in obtaining proficient interpreters. None of the many who profess to know the language of the Indians, understand more of it than enough to trade with them or to transact the most ordinary business. Even those who have spent years among them are greatly at fault when they attempt to interpret the language beyond common business transactions.

Since the third day of June last, I have traversed more than eight hundred miles through the great valley of the Sacramento, and along the tributaries of that river which take their rise in the mountains of the Sierra Nevada. In my route I visited ten distinct tribes of Indians, besides meeting many wandering families or communities gathering acorns, pine-seeds, &c., for subsistence.

The men and children are, in general, naked. Some of them have obtained a few articles of clothing from the whites, such as shirts, handkerchiefs, &c., of which they seem quite proud. The females are also without any covering, except what they call the "*Du-ch*," or breech-clout. This is nothing more than a bunch of grass or rushes, about one foot in length, suspended from a belt or girdle around the waist, in front and in rear.

I could discover no distinction in their customs, habits of life, or their general language, which could induce me to think they were not originally the same people. Indeed, their customs and manner of living are in many respects almost identical. Their huts or lodges are constructed in the same manner. They do not *scalp* those whom they kill, but universally throw the dead body into water. They all burn the dead of their own people, and their manner of mourning for lost friends is the same; that is, the nearest of kin cover themselves—hair, head, face, arms, and body, down to the waist—with black tar or pitch, which is permitted to remain upon them until worn off by time.

They all subsist on roots and grass-seeds from the earth, acorns and

pine-seeds from the trees, and fish from the streams. Acorns, nuts, and small fish are gathered in great quantities and stored in magazines, prepared for the purpose. They universally lay up enough of these things for two years' subsistence, and thereby guard against a failure in the future crop of the coming season.

The acorns and nuts are ground into a kind of flour, which is done by means of mortars or deep basins drilled into rocks. Into these the acorns and nuts are placed and pounded as fine as flour. Before baking, the Indians not unfrequently mix with the flour berries of various kinds. All this is the work of the squaws, or, as they call them, "*mo-hales*." Indeed, the same characteristics mark the whole of the tribes in the great valley of the Sacramento and its adjacent territory. They have an indefinite idea of their right to the soil, and they complain that the *pale-faces* are overrunning their country and destroying their means of subsistence. The emigration are trampling down and feeding their grass, and the miners are destroying their fish dams. For this they claim some remuneration, not in money—for they know nothing of its value—but in the shape of clothing and food.

In my last communication I recommended the establishment of about three depots in the great valley of the Sacramento, for the purpose of furnishing the various tribes in that region with subsistence and clothing. Their wants are few, and little of clothing and something to sustain life upon will readily satisfy them. This policy, I believe, would not only be the most economical for the government, and vastly more beneficial to the Indians, than annuity in money, but must be by far the best means of reaching the wild mountain Indians and bringing them into a state of civilization. I have been informed by Americans who have lived for years on the borders of the mountains, that where the mountain Indians have been well treated by the whites, they return to their tribes with sentiments of the highest regard for the Americans. There is, however, a class of men here, who, as I have been informed, shoot down Indians wherever they meet them. This is not only cruel to the Indians, but works great injury to the whites. The known custom of the Indians is revenge, and their vengeance frequently falls upon the innocent. They must be avenged, and their best friends often pay the penalty of the rash or reckless acts of others. It seems to be a kind of religious sentiment with them to have "blood for blood."

The Indians of the valley of the Sacramento are not a warlike people. They possess no *war-clubs*, scalping-knife, or tomahawks, so universally used by the Indians east of the Sierra Nevada. They are mostly indolent, docile, and tractable, but many of them are thievish. They are fond of dress of almost any kind, and readily learn the more simple arts of agriculture.

The construction of their huts and villages is much the same. They are constructed by excavating the earth the size of the room or lodge they desire, some five feet deep. This is covered over with a dome-like top, several feet above the surface of the earth; in the centre of the roof or dome there is generally an aperture or opening, which serves the double purpose of admitting light and letting the smoke escape. This is the only opening in the lodge except the entrance, which is in the side, and barely large enough to admit a human body. Through

this they enter, feet foremost, on their hands and knees; when once inside, these lodges are not uncomfortable. The thickness of the earth over them prevents the sun from penetrating them in the hot season, while in the colder seasons they protect them from the winds, &c.

The names of the tribes which I have visited in the great valley of the Sacramento and adjacent mountains are as follows:

The "Hocks." This tribe reside upon the celebrated Hock farm, and near the residence of Captain Sutter. They number from 80 to 100.

The "Yubas," located at the mouth, or rather junction, of the Yuba with the Feather river, and number about 180.

The "O-lip-pas," located on Feather river, about 32 miles above its mouth. This tribe numbers about 90 or 100.

The "Bogas," located a short distance above the O-lip-pas, on the opposite side of the river, and number about 70.

The "Ho-lil-le-pas" reside at the base of the mountains near the Feather river, and number about 150.

The "Erskins," on Butte creek, near to Neal's rancho, and number about 80.

The "Ma-chuck-nas" reside in the valley near to Potter's rancho. Number about 90.

The "Cush-nas." This tribe is located in the mountains, on the waters of the south Yuba. They number about 600.

The "Tagus" are also in the mountains, above the headwaters of Butte creek. Number unknown.

The "Nim-sirs," also in the mountains, not far distant from the Tagus tribe. The number of this tribe I could not obtain.

Within the short period since the occupancy of this country by the whites, the red man has been fast fading away. Many have died with disease, and others have fled to the mountains to enjoy, for a brief period, their primeval sports of hunting and fishing. Almost the entire tribes of *Costanoes*, or coast Indians, have passed away. Of the numerous tribes which but a few years ago inhabited the country bordering on the bay of San Francisco, scarcely an individual is left. The pale-faces have taken possession of their country and trample upon the graves of their forefathers. In an interview with a very aged Indian near the mission of Dolores, he said, "I am very old; my people were once around me like the sands of the shore—many, many. They have all passed away—they have died like the grass. They have gone to the mountains—I do not complain; the antelope falls with the arrow. I had a son—I loved him. When the pale-faces came, he went away; I know not where he is. I am a Christian Indian; I am all that is left of my people—I am alone." His age, his earnestness, and decrepit condition, gave full force to his language, and I left him under the deepest sense of sympathy.

I am, sir, your most obedient servant,

ADAM JOHNSTON.

HON. ORLANDO BROWN,
Washington City, D. C.