

THEIR DOWNFALL

--From notes by H. C. Bailey.

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When I try to recall at this time the Indians of the Sacramento Valley as I first saw them nearly fifty years ago and as I last saw them fourteen years later, the wreck and ruin of so short a time, is far from pleasant to recall.

Though unpleasant and almost repulsive to look at, a closer acquaintance and observation showed there was more good in them than outward appearances indicated. As they discarded their aboriginal habits and ways of living and assumed those of the white man, they were doomed to early extinction.

As soon as white women began to come and the squaws saw their way of dressing, they, with the exception of a few very old ones, discarded the primitive hemp skirt and adopted the others which were made of most any kind of material that came to hand. They also adopted the shirt waist. If not exactly after the present pattern, it was the best known at that date and all things improve with age and familiarity, except possibly a bad temper.

With the ability to supply their wants from the stores, they soon ceased to produce many things deemed indispensable in their wild state. By the use of money easily obtained they were able for a small sum to procure what would require much labor and time to produce. They also became more and more negligent in gathering their wild food supplies. As wheat and barley fields extended, they depended more and more on gleaning the fields and threshing floors.

The men followed along the same lines. In a very few years most all had shirts and an Indian without some kind of pants was rare.

Clothing was easily obtained from town, and from the ranchers they received cast off garments that the owners were glad to get rid of, if no better motive moved them to help clothe the Indian families.

It was often amusing and entertaining to see some of the Indians after an excursion to some of the towns. A buck would be dressed in all the shirts he could get; one on top the other so long as he could get them on, Regardless of cloth or color. Some of cotton, some wool and a few biled shirts for variety and pants worn after the same plan, and possibly a plug hat to top out with. So togged out, the average buck was ready in his heart to repeat:

"Some may be blest, but I am glorious

O'er the ills of life victorious."

Heap big Injun; and so he was in ~~balk~~ and his own estimation.

After women got fairly plentiful the squaws often made a more ludicrous appearance than the bucks, by putting on a number of dresses intermixed with shawls and any other cast off female apparel. They preferred carrying them on their backs rather than in a bundle.

This silly and often ludicrous and apparently harmless practice, was to the simple Indian as destructive as opium to John Chinaman.

It was destructive along several lines. First, they had no idea of regulating their dress to climatic conditions. A hot day would find them dressed three or four layers deep and a colder one in nature's uniform.

Were it possible an Indian would gamble his soul away. They were inveterate gamblers during all their idle time. When two bucks sat down to gamble they may have been both clothed four layers depp, but when they quit one had an all the duds. Such practices soon began to tell on their health.

The squaws suffered less along this line than the bucks, but met more dire and sure destruction along worse and more certain lines.

Loathsome and to them incurable diseases in a short space of time swept from existence the whole band at Colusa, except a few that had been incorporated into the white homes. In a short time they had so nearly gone that their homes were burnt by the whites, and no attempt ever made to rebuild them. The few left joined the other two rancherias.

Colusa was the head of navigation on the river and was filled with teamsters, Mexican packers, and the usual floating frontier population. The two Rancherias lower down the river suffered little if any from the same cause as the others, but more from whisky.

It was the same old story of all our Indian care and protection. It is a sad, pathetic story--the decline and almost entire extinction of the American Indians. But such seems to be the order of the universe; "Take the one pound from he who has none and give it to he who has ten." The world needed their lands for a civilization beyond their ken or ability to adopt.

There were only two ways to solve the problem--intermix or destroy. The Anglo-Saxon chose the later and the Latin, the former. In existing conditions in North American and South America is the answer as to which was the better policy.

I think more than 60 per cent of the deaths were from lung troubles. A band would come to the house and sit around, according to their way of visiting, and talk, while several would be coughing a little and looking drowsy. In a few months they would cease to come. Inquire for them--gone, was the answer, with a mournful cadence and a look pathetic to see.

They seemed to realize they were doomed and each and all only waiting for the call. The interruption and abandonment of their aboriginal habits, and the attempts to adopt the white man's methods proved their ruin.

By some pervers law of nature the wild tribes always adopt the worst feature of a civilization to the exclusion of the better. With one exception, all the Indians I ever came in contact with were lovers of whisky and tobacco. They will go to any extreme for whisky when once they get a taste. The large profit on the whisky trade by bad men has been a large factor in the Indian's destination regardless of law or right.

In the great flood of '62-3 the smallpox entered among the remnant left and killed more than half. Their suffering was terrible. My boy, Lopez, told us the whole story.

Eighty or ninety per cent of the valley race died in attempting to escape disease. Many left their huts and camp as best they could where a high piece of land could be found. Of course, the disease soon revealed itself. So the poor wretches shifted around from place to place, the number diminishing all the time, until by April, when bad weather and smallpox was gone, less than 200 Indians were left.

When I went onto my ranch it had skulls and other human bones scattered over a good part of it with a tradition of a great battle. I don't doubt the truth of the fight--only the participants. Instead of Indian against Indian, it had been Indian against smallpox.

The Sacramento Indians were as harmless, contented, happy a set of people as ever lived. They were as peaceful as sheep and never even fought among themselves.