

THE DIGGER INDIAN, HIS RELIGION, SUPERSTITIONS
AND BURIAL RIGHTS

--from notes by H. C. Bailey.

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The American Indian remains a problem almost as much today as when he was first discovered. The archaeologists are far from a unit in their conclusions and can only give individual theories regarding his origin, distribution and different degrees of savagery or civilization.

None of his traditions reach to a beginning. The best of them only reach an undefined pass where all is lost. He has left many relics of his past history by which we may formulate a fairly probable theory, but his hieroglyphics where found remain unsolved.

There is a marked unanimity in many of the characteristics of all the tribes. And none more marked than his religion. And their religion approaches nearer the theology of our bible than any other heathen people when found in their wild state.

The Indian theology had the same two elements of rewards and punishments as ours. But as is common to all heathens their ideas were crude and poorly defined, yet in substance were identical with ours, and their simple faith in some instances is pathetic.

A well authenticated incident which is the prototype of many others of a like character, occurred when the great north west was an unknown country. A white man and Indian were together in unknown regions and for three days and had had nothing to eat. Though they were in a game country, no game had been seen. At last the Indian said he was going to make a sacrifice and invoke the Great Spirit.

After the ways of his people, he prepared a sweat house, an altar and his offering. When all was prepared he entered and commenced his devotions and at the proper time offered the following prayer.

"Oh, Great Spirit, hear us, thy children, we have gone long without food. The deer and the turkeys are thine. Oh, let us not die. Thou knowest how I love tobacco and how hard for me to get it yet here I offer to thee all I have. Oh, hear us and give us food."

The idea of sacrifice attaches to all Indian theology in some sense. The Sacramento Indian had no religious rites unless their fiestas were in some way a religious affair.

Their creed was plain and simple. If an Indian was good at death he entered a place with all the good things of the Indians ideal of good. If bad according to their code of good and bad and their code differed from ours in many particulars, he was banished to a place where he suffered all the ills and hardships of Indian life without respite.

At

The death of an Indian all his belongings were buried with him and a season of mourning was kept up for a stated time. As to noise, it was sure enough mourning and was kept up by relays. Five or six in number would sit on top of a log and at intervals send forth the most lonesome and dismal prolonged howls.

A round hole was dug and the body was doubled as near into a ball as possible by bending the back and drawing up the knees and wrapping rope around so as to confine the body in the least space possible.

All of their belongings were buried with them. Every bead was believed to give protection one day on the way to the happy land. While the

beads held out the spirit was safe from evil. It was a kind of abbreviated purgatory minus the third party. Until corrupted by contamination with the whites they were a harmless, happy people.

They were simple in their habits, and, so far as I ever saw, kind and affectionate and free from the cruelty generally supposed to be attached to the race.

In many things they were far different from the tribes along the state line and in Mexico. The countries are so different that a forced difference was a necessity. In the one it was a hard fight to live, while in the other food had only to be gathered, and all parts of the year had its abundance of special supplies.