

INDIAN SLAVES

--From notes by H. C. Bailey.

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Not many of the present generation of California know that in the early '50s a regular slave trade was carried on in the mountains bordering the upper Sacramento Valley from Clear Lake to Strong Creek. Although on a small scale, it was in all respects similar to that practiced by the Arabs of the present day.

Vicious and desperate characters, for the ready gain to be obtained by the trade, would locate a small band of Indians, make a sudden dash upon the camp, revolver in hand, shoot as many of the men as possible, and sometimes the women, too, and scatter the rest of the band.

The raiders would then catch all the boys and girls between eight and 14 years of age who had remained near the camp. Then they would start out for the market, perhaps to fill orders they had already obtained. These men would stop at nothing in their greed for gain, and in their eyes their captives were legitimate merchandise.

During the years in which this traffic in human chattels flourished there was an almost unlimited demand for them. They were sold all over Sacramento county, and in some instances were taken as far as San Francisco. From 1854 to 1858 the trade was quite active, and this especially during 1855 and 1856.

Up to the latter date the authorities had taken no cognizance of what was going on, but about that time the newspapers directed public attention to the traffic, and as the anti-slavery sentiment was then gaining rapidly in strength, the more zealous advocates of the doctrine started an agitation

against the California slave trade. They were assisted by the best men of all parties.

In 1857 a general crusade was under way. Few if any arrests were made, but many captive Indians were restored to liberty. Whenever it was possible the rescued Indian children were returned to the camps from which they had been stolen, but where this could not be done they were turned over by the county supervisors to citizens who could give bonds for their proper treatment, the boys being bound over until they were twentyone and the girls until they were eighteen.

The decline of the traffic in Colusa County dates from 1856. In that year the last lot of captives was publicly offered for sale in the northern part of Sacramento Valley.

One farmer who was particularly outspoken against negro slavery bought a one hundred and twenty pound boy at the sale and saw nothing wrong in it. In justification of his act he said he feared the boy would fall into worse hands, as someone was sure to buy him.

The last raid on the Indian camps in Colusa County, and, I think, in the State, was made in 1856 or 1857. The sheriff received word that a band of slave traders were camped in Cartenas valley, near the line between Colusa and Yolo Counties with a gang of captive Indians.

A neighbor of mine who saw this band of helpless prisoners described their condition as most pitiable. There were more than a dozen of them all tied together by a long rope and forced to walk in single file.

One of the raiders rode ahead on a horse with the end of the rope attached to his saddle. Some of the captives were in a miserable condition, being footsore and barely able to walk, but still their relentless captors

forced them to continue their march into bondage.

As soon as the sheriff could gather a posse he started for the place where the slave traders were reported to be in camp with their captives, but the men had received warning of the coming of the officers and had decamped with most of the Indians.

The sheriff found at the place where the camp had been six Indians ranging in age from 10 to 12 years, who had been left behind.

The young redskins were taken in charge by the officers, and later all bound out to citizens of the county. There was never any difficulty in finding homes for these wards of the county. On the contrary, they were always in great demand, for the very conditions that made the slave trade profitable served to open the homes of the farmers to the Indian children.

At that time the conditions of California ranch life were peculiar, to say the least. Then, as now, the women on the ranches were confronted with about twice as much work as they could do, and to get hired help, even Chinese, in that part of the state was well nigh impossible.

John Chinaman had not at that time invaded the servant girl's domain as he did a few years later. The result was over worked wives and unamiable husbands, for it did not improve the temper of the men to be half rancher and half domestic.

Under these circumstances it was not unnatural that longing eyes should be turned to the idle, half starved Indians, who were always, except during the goose and acorn seasons, on short rations. How much better it would be for the young redskins if they had someone to feed and clothe them,

Thus the white men and women argued. But no kind of reasoning could

convince the Indian of the benefits to him to be gained by the deal. He was an Indian, and proposed to remain one despite all argument and reasoning to the contrary.

Californians at that time were rich in resourcefulness when money was to be made, and the more easily the better it suited a certain class with elastic consciences, or none at all. The outcome of the situation was the slave trader.

The Indian hunters carried their captives as far as possible from their homes, and, not infrequently, having killed the parents of the children, they retained the slaves with little trouble. Warm clothing, a bed and plenty of food with usually good treatment were strong factors in weaning the young savages from their old lives.

So far as my observation extended, contentment and apparently perfect resignation was the result until manhood or womanhood was reached, when all the Indian instincts seemed to return and no influence, moral, mental or physical, could induce them to remain in the positions they had in many instances esteemed highly during their childhood. It is only just to say that the kind treatment accorded the Indians was almost universal.

It is hardly possible for Californians of the present generation to comprehend fully the trials and tribulations of the wives and mothers of pioneer days. When from five to ten or twenty miles intervened between neighbors, with all clothes to be made by hand, water to be carried, and a hundred and one things pertaining to the household to be done in the most laborious way and under the most unfavorable conditions, is it any wonder that prosperous farmers were ready to invest \$50 in at least a hope of future help?

This was the standard price for the young redskin, a small sum at that time, when compared with the relief expected and farmers gladly paid it. As a rule fair success attended the experiment.

The young Indians were adepts in caring for and amusing children; they were clever in inventing amusements and enjoyed the sport almost as much as their young charges.

But when it came to washing dishes or clothes or doing other household drudgery, there were usually protests, particularly from the boys. On the whole, however, the young servants materially lightened the burdens of the women of the house, besides giving assistance to the man in the fields.