

## SCRAPS OF MODOC HISTORY.

LYING between the 121st and 122d degrees of west longitude, and crossed by the boundary-line between the States of California and Oregon, is the water-shed that supplies the sources of the Sacramento and Klamath rivers. Traversed by irregular and broken ridges of basalt, evidently torn asunder by violent natural convulsions, and abounding in volcanic scoria, this region is, generally, inhospitable and sterile. Between the broken mountain ranges are extensive plateaus covered with wild sage and *chemisal*, a little bunch and rye grass, and having all the characteristics of the sage-plains of western Nevada. Throughout this region are numerous lakes; among which, and lying east and west along the forty-second parallel, are Little Klamath, Rhett, and Clear lakes. This is the home of the Modoc Indians, whose bold deeds and defiant attitude to the military forces of the Government have attracted so much attention.

Physically, and in point of intelligence, this tribe are superior to the average American Indian. Subsisting almost entirely by the chase, the men are lithe and enduring, courageous and independent—some of them really handsome types of humanity; and their recent decided repulse of a force of regulars and volunteers, five times their number, shows that they must not be confounded with the Diggers of the Pacific slope. Once a numerous, powerful, and warlike people, like the tribe of Ishmael, their hands were ever raised against all others, and their aggressive spirit kept them in continual warfare. Their country was rich in everything necessary to sustain aboriginal life. The little val-

leys and plateaus were dotted with antelope; the timbered ridges sheltered large herds of deer; the Klamath River—theirs to where it breaks through the Siskiyou range to the westward—and Lost River, connecting Clear and Rhett lakes, were teeming with fish. The *kamas*-root, an exceedingly nutritious article of food, was found everywhere. The marshes around the lakes produced tons of *wocas*, the seed of the water-lily; and their waters were alive with wild-fowl of every description. Like the nomads of the East, the habitations of this people were anywhere in the vicinity of water; for the raids of their equally warlike neighbors had taught them the folly of wasting labor on permanent abiding-places. They are usually made by the erection of willow-poles, gathered together at the top, like the skeleton frame of an inverted basket, and covered with matting woven with the tule of the marshes. The earth in the centre scooped out, and thrown up in a low, circular embankment, protects the family from the winds; and, while readily built and easily taken down, these frail dwellings are comparatively comfortable.

It is difficult even to approximate the probable number of this people, when in their undisturbed aboriginal glory, and before their contact with the superior civilization, whose vices, only, seem to be attractive to the savage nature. Indians have no Census Bureau; and, indeed, nearly all tribes have a superstitious aversion to answering any questions as to their numbers. The Modocs are like all others, and, when questioned on the subject, only point to their country, and say, that "once it was full of

people." The remains of their ancient villages, found along the shores of the lakes, on the streams, and in the vicinity of springs, seem to corroborate this statement; and one ranch alone, the remains of which are found on the western shore of Little Klamath Lake, must have contained more souls than are now numbered in the whole Modoc nation. Only 400, by official count, left of a tribe that must have numbered thousands! Some of the causes of the immense decrease of this people can be traced to their deadly conflicts with the early settlers of northern California and southern Oregon. They were in open and uncompromising hostility to the Whites, stubbornly resisting the passage of emigrant trains through their country; and the bloody atrocities of these Arabs of the West are still too well remembered. As early as 1847, following the route taken by Fremont the previous year, a large portion of the Oregon immigration passed through the heart of the Modoc country. From the moment they left the Pit River Mountains, their travel was one of watchful fear and difficulty, the road winding through dangerous cañons, and passing under precipitous cliffs that afforded secure and impenetrable ambush. Bands of mounted warriors hovered near them by day, watching favorable opportunities to stampede their cattle, or pick off any stray or unwary traveler. Nor were the emigrants safe by night. The camping-places were anticipated by the enemy—dark shadows crept among the sage and tall rye-grass, and, when least expecting it, every bush would seem to harbor a dusky foe, and the air be full of flying arrows. If the train were small, or weak in numbers, the Indians would be bolder, and not satisfied with shooting or stampeding cattle, but would waylay and attack it in open daylight.

In 1852, a small train, comprising only eighteen souls—men, women, and chil-

dren—attempted to reach Oregon by the Rhett Lake route. For several days, after leaving the valley of Pit River, they had traveled without molestation, not having seen a single Indian; when, about midday, they struck the eastern shore of Rhett Lake, and imprudently camped under a bluff, now known as "Bloody Point," for dinner. These poor people felt rejoiced to think that they had so nearly reached their destination in safety; nor dreamed that they had reached their final resting-place, and that soon the gray old rocks above them were to receive a baptism that would associate them for ever with a cruel and wanton massacre. Their tired cattle were quietly grazing, and the little party were eating their meal in fancied security, when suddenly the dry sage-brush was fired, the air rang with demoniac yells, and swarthy and painted savages poured by the score from the rocks overhead. In a few moments the camp was filled with them, and their bloody work was soon ended. Only one of that ill-fated party escaped. Happening to be out, picketing his horse, when the attack was made, he sprang upon it, bare-backed, and never drew rein until he had reached Yreka, a distance of sixty miles.

The men of early times in these mountains were brave and chivalrous men. In less than twenty-four hours, a mounted force of miners, packers, and prospectors—men who feared no living thing—were at the scene of the massacre. The remains of the victims were found, shockingly mutilated, lying in a pile with their broken wagons, and half charred; but not an Indian could be found.

It was not until the next year that the Modocs were punished for this cruel deed. An old mountaineer, named Ben Wright—one of those strange beings who imagine that they are born as instruments for the fulfillment of the Red man's destiny—organized an independent company at Yreka, in 1853, and went



into the Modoc country. The Indians were wary, but Ben was patient and enduring. Meeting with poor success, and accomplishing nothing except protection for incoming emigrants, he improvised an "emigrant train" with which to decoy the enemy from the cover of the hills and ravines. Winding slowly among the hills and through the sage-plains, Ben's canvas-covered wagons rolled quietly along, camping at the usual watering-places, and apparently in a careless and unguarded way. Every wagon was filled with armed men, anxious and willing to be attacked. The ruse failed, however; for the keen-sighted Indians soon perceived that there were no women or children with the train, and its careless movements were suspicious. After several months of unsatisfactory skirmishing, Ben resolved on a change of tactics. Surprising a small party of Modocs, instead of scalping them, he took them to his camp, treated them kindly, and making them a sort of Peace Commission, sent them with olive-branches, in the shape of calico and tobacco, back to their people. Negotiations for a general council to arrange a treaty were opened. Others visited the White camp; and soon the Modocs, who had but a faint appreciation of the tortuous ways of White diplomacy, began to think that Ben was a very harmless and respectable gentleman. A spot on the north bank of Lost River, a few hundred yards from the Natural Bridge, was selected for the council. On the appointed day, fifty-one Indians (about equal in number to Wright's company) attended, and, as agreed upon by both parties, no weapons were brought to the ground. A number of beeves had been killed, presents were distributed, and the day passed in mutual professions of friendship; when Wright—whose quick, restless eye had been busy—quietly filled his pipe, drew a match, and lit it. This was the

pre-concerted signal. As the first little curling wreath of smoke went up, fifty revolvers were drawn from their places of concealment by Wright's men, who were now scattered among their intended victims; a few moments of rapid and deadly firing, and only two of the Modocs escaped to warn their people!

The Scotch have given us a proverb, that "He maun hae a lang spoon wae quietly along, and it may be Wright thought so. Perhaps the cruel and merciless character of these Indians justified an act of treachery, now passed into the history of the country; but, certainly, the deed was not calculated to inspire the savage heart with a high respect for the professed good faith and fair-dealing of the superior race. Ben Wright is gone now—killed by an Indian bullet, while standing in the door of his cabin, at the mouth of Rogue River. No man may judge him; but, to this hour, his name is used by Modoc mothers to terrify their refractory children into obedience. The Modocs were now filled with revenge, and their depredations continued, till it became absolutely necessary for the Territorial Governor of Oregon to send armed expeditions against them. For several years, they were pursued by volunteer forces through their rugged mountains, where they continued the unequal warfare with a dauntless spirit; but, year after year, the number of their warriors was diminishing.

In 1864, when old Sconchin buried the hatchet and agreed to war with the pale-faces no more, he said, mournfully: "Once my people were like the sand along yon shore. Now I call to them, and only the wind answers. Four hundred strong young men went with me to war with the Whites; only eighty are left. We will be good, if the White man will let us, and be friends forever." And this old Chief has kept his word—better, perhaps, than his conquerors have

theirs. The Modocs themselves offer a better reason for the great decrease of their people. They say that within the memory of many of this generation, the tribe were overtaken by a famine that swept off whole ranches, and they speak of it as if remembered like a fearful dream. As is usual with savages, the chief labor of gathering supplies of all kinds, except those procured by fishing and the chase, devolved upon the Modoc women. Large quantities of *kamas* and *wocas* were always harvested, but the predatory character of the surrounding tribes made it dangerous to store their food in the villages, and it was customary to *caché* it among the sage-brush and rocks, which was done so cunningly that an enemy might walk over the hiding-places without suspicion. Snow rarely fell in this region sufficiently deep to prevent access to the *cachés*; but the Modocs tell of one winter when they were caught by a terrible storm, that continued until the snow was more than seven feet in depth over the whole country, and access to their winter stores impossible. The Modocs, like all other Indians, have no chronology; they do not count the years, and only reckon their changes by the seasons of summer and winter. Remarkable events are remembered only as coincident with the marked periods of life; and, judging from the probable age of the survivors of that terrible famine, it must have occurred over forty years ago, long before any of the tribe had ever looked upon the face of a White stranger. These wild people generally regard such occurrences with superstitious horror; they rarely speak of the dead, and even long residence among the Whites does not remove a superstition that forbids them to mention even a dead relative by name. From those who have lived among the Whites since early childhood, the particulars of this season of suffering and

desolation are obtained; and they say that their parents who survived it still speak of that dreadful winter in shuddering whispers.

It seems that the young men of the tribe had returned, late in the season, from a successful hunt, when a heavy snow-storm set in; but these people—like children, in many things—had no apprehension, as their present wants were supplied. But the storm increased in fury and strength; the snow fell in blinding sheets, for days and days, till it had covered bush, and stunted tree, and plain, and rock, and mountain, and every landmark was obliterated. The survivors tell of frantic efforts to reach the *cachés*; how strong men returned to their villages, weak and weary with tramping through the yielding snow in search of the hidden stores. They tell how the little brown faces of the children, pinched with hunger, drove the men out again and again in search of food, only to return, empty-handed and hopeless; how everything that would sustain life—deer and antelope skins, their favorite dogs—even the skins of wild fowl, used as bedding, were devoured; how, when everything that could be used as food was gone, famine made women out of strong, brave warriors, and a dreadful stillness fell upon all the villages. They tell how death crept into every house, till the living lay down beside the dead and waited. After weeks of pinching hunger, and when in the last extremity, an opportune accident saved the largest village, on the south-eastern extremity of Rhett Lake, from complete extinction. A large band of antelope, moving down from the hills, probably in search of food, attempted to cross an arm of the lake only a short distance from the village, and were caught in the breaking ice and drowned. Those who had sufficient strength left, distributed antelope meat among the families, and it was then that