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LOST AND FOUND

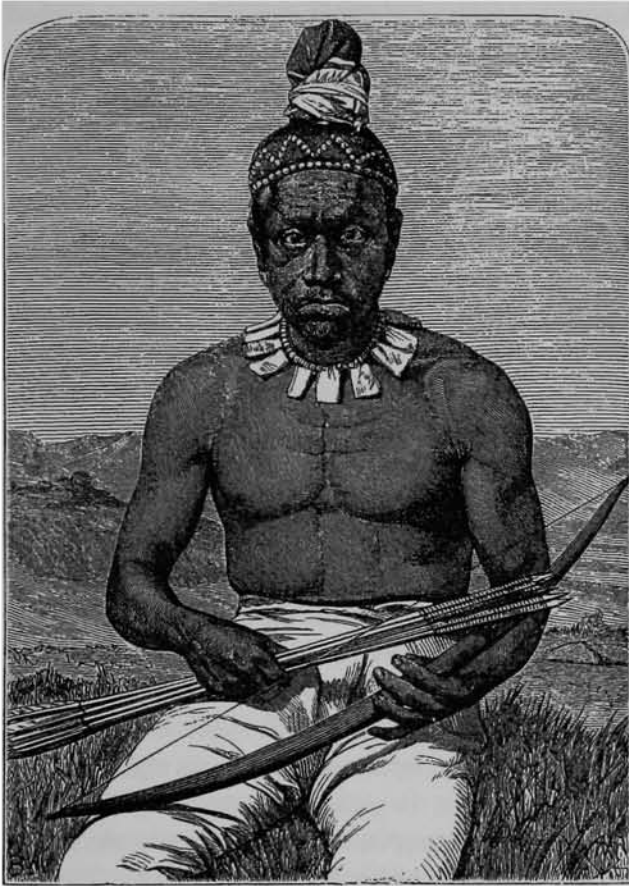


Fig. 244. Indigène de la Californie.

*There are two items of interest in this installment of *Lost and Found*. The first is an empathetic and rather evocative article describing the mourning rituals surrounding the death of Cinon Duro of Mesa Grande almost a century ago. An abbreviated version of this article was published anonymously in the *Washington Post* on October 20, 1907, and later reprinted by Robert Heizer in a collection entitled *Some Last Century Accounts of the Indians of Southern California* (Ballena Press, 1976). The longer, more detailed version reprinted here originally appeared in the *Southern Workman*, Vol. 37, No. 10, pp. 527–538 (Oct. 1908). Unfortunately, six photographs that originally accompanied the article could not be adequately reproduced and have been deleted.*

*The second item of interest is a woodcut (shown both here and on the cover) from the fourth edition of Louis Figuier's *Les Races humaines* (Paris, 1880). The man*

depicted is probably Nisenan or from a neighboring group; details such as his hairstyle, facial hair, beaded hairnet, abalone bangle necklace, and bow, as well as the background topography shown, all support such an identification. The fine central California drawings of Henry B. Brown from 1851–52 show individuals featuring many of the same characteristics. The woodcut is clearly based upon an original photograph that presumably is no longer extant. We are greatly indebted to François Gendron of the Institut de Paleóntologie Humaine, Paris, for calling this obscure image to our attention.

The Passing of the Old Ceremonial Dances of the Southern California Indians

D. EDITH KESSLER

The past year has witnessed the disappearance of one more link in the chain which binds the remnant of Indian life in Southern California to its past. This life itself is rapidly disappearing through the inroads the process of civilization always makes upon the aboriginal. The representative tribe of these stolid brown people is the Mesa Grande in San Diego County, and their principal men have long fostered the quaint customs, the dances, and fiestas which have been the heritage of the people since “the beginning,” handed down from chief to chief, head-man to head-man, from that far time when “the hills were young.”

Of all the fiestas, that of the Eagle Dance is perhaps the most important. During this ceremony a young eagle, the symbol of power upon earth, is killed, and its spirit, laden with messages, joins that of the dead chief. This ceremony has recently been held for the last time in the history of the people. It has always been a fiesta of rare occurrence, being held only in commemoration of the death of the ruling chief or a person of great importance. The Fiesta has not been celebrated for more than twenty years, and this final one marks the death of the last of the hereditary chieftains of the tribe and, in consequence, the passing, not only of this title with its sacred trust of legend

and history, but of this peculiar and mysterious tribal rite, whose deep significance is now doomed to oblivion.

The death of the last hereditary chief, old Cinon Duro, or, to use his Indian name, Mata Whur—"hard rock"—marks literally the passing of the Southern California Indian as an entity, for with this ancient custodian the wealth of their tradition was buried, excepting fragmentary records gathered by a few enthusiastic ethnologists. This ancient man had no son to whom he could entrust the sacred mission; he was over a hundred years old and had practically outlived his own descendants, for in 1860 he had four sons. This in itself is a pathetic example of civilizing "influences," a fact which is further emphasized at the spectacle of the dances, when the gap between the little group of eight or ten dancers, all over ninety years of age, wiry, athletic, tireless, and the lounging spectators of their own people, young fellows none of whom are over forty, is especially noticeable.

Even at his extreme age, Cinon's death was an unexpected shock to his people, coming accidentally through a fall from a horse. This was one year ago, and his burial rites were solemnized in both the Catholic faith, which the Indian religiously observes, and the ancient nature worship, which is his religion. None appreciated the tragedy of his race more than this ancient chief, whose last words were "Nosome! Hoomow-no-some!"—"It is finished, the tribe is finished."

Cinon was thus pre-eminently the figure upon which the destiny of this people hinged, the center of interest in this tiny drama of struggle and defeat; and so the tragedy of his life, involving the greater tragedy of the life of his tribe, binds the chain of events with a minor thread of pathos and dignity.

The funeral services held at the little adobe mission on the brown hill slope, were pathetically simple. In the waning afternoon the remnant of the tribe gathered, some hundred or more in number, and clustered about the simple pine box which served as a coffin. Old Angela, the native lay reader, a woman over a hundred years of age, intoned the office for the dead above the placid countenance of the sleeping chief, and the round-eyed little acolytes solemnly swung their censors before this mystery of death and loss they did not understand. Old Angela knows every intricate Latin service of the church by heart, and has been the chief dependence of the little mission for many years.

As the procession emerged from the church door and proceeded to the primitive graveyard adjoining it, with its sagging wooden crosses and weed-grown mounds, the smothered sobbing of the women became unrestrained, and men and women alike broke into loud wails, rising and swelling in a hopeless abandonment that gripped the heart. The older ones gathered about the open grave, and led by the white-haired Antonio, only brother to Cinon, they bowed above it, swaying in an ecstasy of grief. It was as though they had plumbed the depths of sorrow, and manifestation could go no farther. To those accustomed to the restrained sorrow of the civilized, this abandonment to the throes of nature was hardly less than appalling.

Immediately upon the Catholic services of interment followed the seven days of the Fiesta for the Dead. For seven days and nights the entire people took up their abode at the rancheria or "*took-a-muck*," a large square enclosure of brush-built ramadas with an open plaza in the center, at one end of which was a carefully leveled circle of earth, beaten hard by the tramping of many bare feet, the dancing floor of the ancient Indian ceremonials. Here every day the "whirling" or "feather" dances were performed, and every night the fierce war dance was chanted and acted forth, until the seventh night, when the entire night, from the gathering of the heavy dusk to the first gleam of the grey dawn, was given over to the solemn rites of the gruesome Death Dance.

As the paling lavenders of the twilight deepened into the heavy purples of the gathering night, the domestic activity of the ramadas grew still, and the stealing quiet of the mountain air and the starlit night permeated the place. The distant neigh of a horse came distinctly through the hush, and the drifting smoke from the huge log fire at one side of the dancing floor wove fantastically about the squatting figures in the glow of its circle of radiance. In the gloom at the other end of the rancheria a group of boys were practicing the peon game and, lounging behind the silent row of old men, the younger members of the tribe were laughing and talking in low, animated tones.

To these young men the old religious rites are a spectacle; to them the ancient sacred Indian dialect of the chants, hoary with the age of more than a thousand past years, is a meaningless jargon, their own language being the Spanish of the Mexicans.

With no appearance of haste the people gather about the circle—matrons in calicoes and shawls carrying heavy,

round-eyed babies, young girls in starched white gowns and gay ribbons, and old crones, bent over their staffs, their solemn wrinkled faces surmounted by bandanna turbans of red and blue. These last are the chanting chorus, to whose strange songs the dancers beat the measure in the stranger figures of their rites.

The old women seat themselves upon the ground on the north side of the circle, slowly and laboriously, and relapse into a contemplative, cigarette-smoking silence. On a sudden the quiet is disturbed by a fantastically clad figure emerging swiftly from the outer darkness and stepping quickly to the edge of the ring. This lithe, slender figure is barefooted and naked to the waist. Across one shoulder and to his knees he wears an intricately woven garb of eagle feathers cunningly wrought with withes of twisted grass. Close about his head is tied a red cloth, holding at one side a nodding plume of eagle feathers. His back, face, and breast are barbarically decorated with crude markings of white and blue. Facing the west, he stretches to his full height and sends into the darkness a long calling cry. Thrice he repeats it, and then comes a reply, far and faint, with the unearthly intonation of a wandering coyote's wail. The imaginative spectator can readily conjure up visions of the lonely restless spirit out there in the vast glooming void.

Nearer comes the answering cry, sounding at intervals with high piercing inflections, and then suddenly, in the last tense silence, the "spirit" leaps into the firelit circle. It is similarly dressed to the summoner and circles about the space with crouching bounds, finally kneeling before the fire. As it holds its statuesque pose in the lurid dancing light, a low growling din begins, sounding from the mysterious gloom, intensifying as it approaches into a pandemonium of clamor like nothing human. Shrieks and groans in a diablerie of the underworld ushers in one of the most utterly elemental of spectacles—a sight to shudder at, bearing with horrible realism the symbolism of the Dance of Death—a horde of crowding, groveling, painted creatures, crawling on all fours, huddling into the light with blind uncertainty of direction. The painted totem or patron animal of each is rudely limned in white upon his bare back, and the frenzied cries emitted from each seem to typify the tortured spirit within. The kneeling "spirit" by the fire awakes to vivid life and, leaping through the flames, emerges before them, his two staffs burning, and dances from side to side, leading the whole crawling,

seeking procession, typifying the search for their dead chieftain through the afterworld, round and round the enclosure. Gradually the awful sounds diminish, lapsing slowly into a growling rumble and, at length, when all are close gathered in the center, the low moans die away and a dead silence settles upon the whole scene. Women now approach bearing gifts of bright calicoes, bags of tobacco, a coat and hat, and little meal cakes. These are thrown upon the huddled, silent figures, presents for the departed one, now that the quest is finished.

Gradually the mass dissolves itself into separate entities, and the rising figures join in a strange, interminable, shuffling movement, with the chanting of the women as an accompaniment. The presents have absolutely disappeared during the period of motionless silence. This last phase of the ceremony continues until the dawn announces the termination of the Fiesta of the Dead.

Almost immediately preparations were begun by the tribe for the great Eagle Fiesta, the final mark of honor to the last hereditary ruler of a people whose boast it had been that "when the hills were young they had played upon their crests." This Fiesta was to be given in one year, when the brown September hills and turning oaks and willows would mark the anniversary of his death. This Fiesta has also recently become a thing of the past, after a celebration which fitly marked the culmination of the efforts of its participants.

The celebration was the gift of the Duro clan, old Cinon's own, to its sister clans and all the tribes of Southern California. Its welcome also extended to the white visitors, and a large concourse of these availed themselves of this opportunity for closer study and recording of the customs of the passing people. Ethnologists, students of Indian music, artists, newspaper men, collectors for museums, and lovers of the picturesque, gathered from all parts of the country, each eagerly appreciative from his own point of view. Over five hundred Indians were present, representing the Pala, San Ysidro, Inaja, Rincon, Santa Ysabel, Mission, and Agua Caliente tribes, coming from the seashore, the desert edge, the fertile valleys to the north, and the far southern mountains.

For fully a month before the last three days of the Fiesta, practice dances were held in groups of three nights each, at the old rancheria, so that by the time of the actual ceremonials the tribe had fully entered into

the spirit of the occasion and the atmosphere of the great permanent camp of the ramadas was electric with anticipation. As usual the first two days and nights were but forerunners, working up to the final pitch of the last night. Then the sacred eagle would be killed with great ceremony, mysteriously and "without pain," and his freed spirit would carry the last communications from the living to the dead.

The solemnities of the night were prefaced during the afternoon by the *Tata-Huila* or whirling dance—a dance really joyous in character, which in contrast with the somber fierceness and tragedy of the night ceremonies seems almost a comedy of dances. There is but one principal performer, and an attendant who resembles the funny man in a circus act and who leads the dancer to fresh contortions and exploits. This man enters the circle first, with smiling countenance trotting around the ring and rattling his clapping sticks. Then, kneeling in the center of the circle, he strikes an attitude of invocation, holding it immovably for perhaps five minutes, while the real dancer appears, clad only in the "pluma," or feather skirt, and head-dress of eagle feathers. He also carries two short clapping-sticks and is elaborately painted with markings of white and blue. He pauses and bows before old Antonio, brother of the dead chief, who beats time with a rattle, formerly made of deerskin enclosing deer toes but now deteriorated to a baking-powder can filled with pebbles. Then the dance begins, a group of squaws intoning a low musical chant. Faster and faster he whirls, crouching, leaping, side-stepping airily, his flying feather garment seemingly buoying him up into the air. Under and over clap the time-beating sticks, higher he leaps, whirling about several times before touching the ground, an astounding exhibition of strength and agility. Ever whirling, whirling, a veritable dervish, he passes about the circle with a marvelous sureness of direction. All this time the family of Cinon toss at intervals handfuls of money and yards of calico upon the dancing floor, which are gifts eagerly gathered in by their guests. For fully half to three quarters of an hour the athlete, a man of some fifty years, continues his strenuous exertions, and then at their highest stops suddenly, and quietly and steadily walks from the circle—a performance in itself not the least of his feats.

Again, as in that night a year ago, the purple dusk settles into the star-gemmed blackness of the night. From

far and near the people of the mountain and the strangers in their midst gather to witness the closing of the book, the writing of finis to the history of the Eagle Dance, with all its wealth of sentiment and dignity and motive. Cowboys in leather chaps and jingling spurs jostle alike their Indian comrades, gay with cerise kerchiefs, and young city fellows in khaki; matrons in calicoes, society girls in white shirt-waist suits, business women with note books, and Indian maidens with red ribbons entwined in their glossy locks, all mingle with one common interest. An ethnologist from a distant city stands by the adjusted mechanism of his phonograph which is to perpetuate the quaint, aboriginal chanting, the ancient language of the primeval Yuman stock, the heritage despised and forsaken by the last of its possessors. Outside, beside the restive, tethered ponies, automobiles chugg and churr, a strange juxtaposition of extremes.

Again the calling cry of the summoner, but this time it is answered by a filing line of ancient figures, the handful of "old men" in full war regalia. Standing before the group of cantadores, the women who have grown old beside them, they begin a slow, shuffling step, grunting a low, strongly accented "Mh-m-m-hm!" They are led by the centenarian Antonio, and his shrunken form and the pathos and dignity in his drawn, parchment-like face is the epitome of the whole inexorable drama.

And now, mingling with the utter barbarism of the dancers' voices, comes a gentle under-breath of tone, droning, almost inaudible, like the hum of insects on a midsummer afternoon. It gathers in volume with a steady swelling rhythm, low, musical, with slight minor inflections. The voices are as one voice with a full baritone quality that slides easily and accurately through the many intricate changes of the theme. Higher in the scale, louder, and more intense, grows the resonant melody, plaintive and heart piercing in its weird modulations of thirds and fifths that are never cognized in our modern system of notation—the primitive nature cry of a nature people.

Fiercer grows the movement of the dancers, as they stamp and crouch, with out-thrust arms and wild bursts of guttural melody and more passionately the swaying, climbing cadences of the singers rise, in strange accents of twos and threes, the essence of the elemental. From the midst of the turning, twisting figures one beplumed dancer leaps, and with his staff scatters about the dancing floor living coals from the bed of the fire. The old warriors

circle about this central figure, with their bare feet treading the glowing embers, and occasionally stooping to gather them in their hands and place them to their lips, a veritable fire eating assembly. Singers and dancers alike are wrought to a frenzy of exaltation, and the scene is truly awe-inspiring even in this its expiring gasp,—when on a sudden all ceases, and a thick, utter, motionless silence falls upon the entire scene. Then the old men walk slowly about uttering a peculiar, indrawn, neighing sound, and the War Dance is finished.

The spectators move cautiously about, looking at each other with uncertain smiles and conversing in low tones, while a huge oak log fire is being built in the center of the beaten earth of the vacant circle. Then Antonio appears, marching with solemn tread around the blazing logs and keeping time with his rattle to a plaintive, reiterated monotone of chanting. Gradually he is joined by groups of the relatives and friends of the dead chief, all singing the mournful, low-toned refrain, and moving in single file about the fire with a curious twisting step which throws the body far to one side and then to the other. Forty or fifty people join in the procession, young and old, gay gallants with brilliant neckerchiefs, and their grandfathers in overalls, old women and young girls, some of them bowed with grief, the tears streaming down their faces, and all with a settled solemnity of aspect.

With a startling suddenness, a piercing wail arises from one side. It is Trinidad, only daughter of Cinon. Her grief rises high and shrilly, dominating the chanting chorus. Then, as the burden of this mourning becomes unbearable, it is all hushed at a signal, and the announcement is made that at the rising of the morning star the sacred eagle will be killed by magic, painlessly, by the Indian medicine men, who will thus show their superiority over the white medicine men.

The bird is borne in by the four *hechiceros* or medicine men, each of whom is hideously painted and garbed elaborately in feather skirts and head dresses, which are a mark of rank in the tribe. The leading conjurer, Narciso, a powerfully built man, carries the eagle about the inner circle, close to the flaring, smoking blaze of fire. The bird stares straight ahead with wide-open curved beak and lolling tongue. It is for some reason strangely stupid. Its feet are bound together with cords but it makes no movement to attack its captors with its powerful beak. Whether the outer circle passes, swaying and mourn-

ing, or the chief conjurer pauses before a grimacing assistant, all is alike to the impassive dignity of the bird, who suffers as a monarch should, without a sign. Even when, with shrieking and muttering incantations, the medicine men strike it with their feathered wands and blow tobacco smoke into its eyes, it does not heed, but stares inscrutably back into their contorted faces, perhaps beyond, into the vista of its fast approaching destiny, when it shall be traversing the starstrewn path of the milky way, “the pathway of departing spirits,” on its heavenly mission. The witch doctors seemingly exhaust every effort in the working of the charm; they breathe heavily as though spent with exertion, grimacing, crouching; with mystic passes they point their wizard wands at their helpless victim, and at length, when more than one white spectator has turned away, the fine head suddenly lifts and is thrown back as though in a final struggle for its swiftly departing life, then sinks slowly from side to side, and finally hangs limp upon the feathered breast. The messenger has departed.

The dead body is carried in triumph by one and another during the interminable figures of the dance. A raw chill creeps into the air. The remaining spectators gather their wraps more closely about them. The fire becomes a smoldering heap of embers. Low on the eastern horizon the long night watch of the stars is paling before a grey creeping tinge of light. The dancers halt. The head men, the capitans, pluck the large feathers from the bird for the making of dancing skirts. The denuded body is wrapped in red cloth and a grave is dug in the warm earth underneath the spot where the fire has burned all night. Reverently the old men kneel about the tiny grave. Softly the mourners chant as the bird is lifted to the north, the south, the east, and the west. Then, as the grave is filled and smoothed by the old hands of the kneeling men, the white-haired Antonio lifts his arms to the skies—the last high priest of an ancient rite—and speeds the departed messenger, pleading that sorrow, sickness, hunger, and death may not visit the pueblo, and invoking the power of the great Eagle god who brought the people for many moons from the far south across the mountains and the desert, in that far past time when “the earth was young.”

And so the Fiesta of the Eagle Dance has passed, to add one more to the number of the obsolete ceremonials of a dying people—the Fiesta of the New Moon, when the moon god was placated, the fiesta of the entrance of

the boy into the ranks of manhood, a test of endurance and bravery, and the fiesta of the passing of the girl to womanhood, a yet more trying ordeal.

It is perhaps some hundreds of years since these last have been held, but the oldest men and women can recite from the dimness of their memories vague tales of the mystic ramada where the serpent painted in colored clays lay upon the floor, where the boys drank the mystic draught which induced a muscular intoxication in which they ran and leaped for hours until they fell exhausted, and then dropped asleep to dream the troubled dreams in which their totem animal came to visit them. Every word muttered in their drunkenness was carefully noted. And then followed the solemn exhortation of the high priest, the oath of faithfulness in the marriage relation and tribal fealty.

Still more solemn and terrible was the ordeal of the girl entering womanhood. A long pit was dug, perhaps a hundred feet long. A great fire was made in it and when

this died leaving the cavity yet warm a huge serpent was painted from north to south in red and white clays. The pit was lined inside with white sage, and the mothers brought their daughters to the terrifying mouth. The girls were placed within it and covered with straw and sage. For a week they remained there, being given only mush made of seeds. All about the pit the tribe feasted and exhorted the maidens to overcome their physical nature. Sometimes, for two or three years after, the girls would be allowed to eat only this mush or "atole," made of white sage and the seeds of the wild oats. On their release from the pit they were compelled, with terrible imprecations, to take the vow to be faithful wives and mothers.

These stern and savage ceremonials have given way before the white man's rule, yet the impress of these Indians' primitive code of ethics is shown in their temperate lives, and in the wiry sturdiness of constitution that can endure, after passing the century mark, the rigors of the night-long vigils of the dancing fiestas which still remain.

