

SOME SHAMANS OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA.¹

PERHAPS the most striking feature of California from the standpoint of an ethnologist is the great diversity which is everywhere apparent. The following brief notes on the shamans of three of the stocks of the northern part of the State are offered merely as an outline of the beliefs of these tribes, with the intention of showing to what an extent the diversity so characteristic of the State appears in this single feature of their culture. The three stocks considered are the Shasta, the Hat Creek and Achomawi, and the Maidu.

Among the Shasta, the beginning of a shaman, the commencement of his career, is in a dream or dreams. It is said that a man suddenly begins to dream frequently that he is on the edge of some high cliff, or on the top of a tall tree, and is about to fall, when suddenly he awakes. Or the dream may be of being on the bank of a river, in which the man is about to drown, when he awakes with a sudden shock. Both men and women may have such dreams, and the dreams are a sign that the person is to become a doctor. So soon as dreams of this sort occur, the person at once begins to exercise care in eating, restricting the diet to vegetable foods, and being careful not to smell meat or fat cooking. They also paint their faces and bodies ceremonially. After the dreams have continued for some time, the person suddenly falls over in a swoon ("dies"), while engaged at some every-day duty. In this swoon, the person about to become a doctor sees what is known as an "Axeki" (Pain). The Axeki are small in stature, but otherwise like men, and carry a bow and arrow. The Axeki talks to the person, sings to him, and he or she must answer, repeating the song sung. Should any one fail to answer or repeat the song, the Axeki shoots and kills him. The song being repeated, however, the Axeki declares that he will be the friend of the person, and then tells him his name and where he lives. This dwelling-place is usually in some large rock or mountain.

The novice, on recovering from the swoon, must dance for five nights. In the course of this dance the novice performs several tricks to show his power, and is swung over the fire by those who are in attendance at the dance. During the whole period of the dance the Axeki is supposed to be present, visible only to the novice however. Throughout the period the Axeki directs the novice in his actions. When he first appears to the novice, the Axeki gives him a "pain." This "pain" is a small needle-like object, about

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three inches long, and appearing, it is said, like ice. Toward the end of the five nights' dance, the new doctor exhibits this object. He is supposed to keep it in his own body much of the time, but it can always be produced at will. When a shaman is angry with any one, he throws a "pain" at them, and thus causes sickness. A doctor may have many such "pains," as he may see a number of different Axeki at different times, and secure a "pain" from each one. Doctors generally begin their dreams and dancing early in the winter, as it is then that the Axeki are always about the camp.

There are a large number of these Axeki. Every rock and cliff, every mountain has one in it. Their nature is apparently evil, for they are always trying to injure people by shooting a "pain" into them. The doctors were the only persons who could extract "pain." It is not sucked out, but is seized in the hand, and pulled out. Once having extracted it, the shaman places his hands in a basket of water. After a while, the thing is placed in a mussel-shell, pitch is put over it, and another shell put on as a cover. The whole is then put in the fire. Should it be supposed that the "pain" was sent by some other doctor in spite, then the "pain" is sent back to the sender, and told to kill him. The "pains" after being extracted can talk, and always call the shaman "father." He speaks to them as "son." They tell him who sent them. When a doctor dies, all the "pains" he has fly back to the Axekis who have given them to him.

Among the Achomawi and Hat Creek Indians, the method of acquiring doctorhood is somewhat different. Here it is connected with a period of fasting, bathing, and prayer, which is part of the life of every young man. Immediately after the ceremonial ear-piercing, the youth runs away into the mountains, and lives for some days alone, bathing frequently in remote mountain lakes. He sleeps little, builds big fires, and piles up rocks in heaps, or places them on the tops of larger stones. In the course of this period of fasting he sees a vision, or dreams a dream. He never tells this to any one, and the spirit coming to him in his dream is his guide and helper through life. When he returns from his vigil, he has to observe many regulations in diet. Although all youths go thus to the mountains for their time of fasting, not all by any means see visions, or dream dreams. Most of those people who do become shamans, and no one may become a doctor without having had such dreams or visions.

Some time after his return he goes out into the woods, and tries to find a "QaQu." This is a bunch of feathers, described as like a small feather-duster. They are found growing singly in remote spots. When the novice finds a "QaQu," he endeavors to pick it,

but cannot pull it up, as when he pulls, the whole earth comes up with the "QaQu." He leaves this, and looks for another, which he succeeds in pulling up. When uprooted, the "QaQu" drips blood continually. In doctoring a patient, if the case be serious, the shaman goes out and finds a "QaQu," and holds it while dancing near the patient, also using it as an aspergill, to sprinkle the sufferer with water. The "QaQu" talk to the doctors, and tell them in what part of the body the "pain" is. When he knows this, the doctor sucks out the "pain." The "pain" is a small black thing, like a bit of horse-hair. When removed, the doctor shows the "pain" to the patient and to others, then he chews it up, and swallows it, or else spits it out into a small hole dug in the ground, which is then filled up again, and stamped down hard. The "pains" were obtained from the "QaQu" by doctors who wished to injure any one, and were then snapped toward the victim. The "pain" flew very fast toward the person, who, when the "pain" struck him, felt as if a wood-tick had bitten him on the back of the neck. The "pain" always struck at that spot, it is said, and then crawled up under the hair to the crown of the head, and there bided its time, till the period set by the doctor had elapsed. Then the "pain" entered the man's head, and travelled to the portion of the body to which the doctor had sent it. The doctor who sends a "pain" knows when the victim dies. As soon as this takes place, he goes at once into the woods, finds an old stump, and places on this a skin and a cap, and addresses it as a person. He then begins to talk to the "pain," now free from its victim, and returning to him who sent it. He soothes and pacifies the "pain," for, after killing a person a "pain" is always very bloodthirsty. The "pain" returns flying rapidly through the air, and strikes the stump which has been dressed up, thinking it is the doctor, for the "pain" always tries to kill the doctor who sent it, when it returns. Once the "pain" has struck the stump, the doctor catches it, and quiets and soothes it. It is only by these means that the doctor escapes being killed by the returning "pain." Sometimes the doctor who extracts a "pain" from a patient gives it back to the one who sent it. The latter then thanks him, and keeps the "pain" carefully in a hollow bone, stuffed with yellow-hammer feathers. If it was found out that a doctor had shot a "pain" into some one, then the doctor was sought out and killed by the family of the injured man, or by the man himself if he recovered. If a doctor failed to cure a number of cases in succession, he was always killed. As a rule, doctors were more often men than women, but women doctors have in some cases acquired a great reputation.

Of the Maidu, only that portion living in the Sierra in the northern part of the Maidu territory are here referred to. These show

again different customs. Here a doctor's position is almost always hereditary, and should a shaman have a number of children, all, men and women, become doctors after his death. Each doctor has a number of guardian spirits, and his children inherit these spirits, although they always acquire other new ones in addition. Soon after a shaman's death, his children begin to dream, seeing spirits and animals of different sorts. The person dreaming in this way becomes ill, and the dreams come more and more frequently. The man must answer these spirits, must talk to them, pay them beads and food and tobacco, or else they will turn on him and kill him. The guardian spirits of a person are always angry when the person dies, and some other person inherits them. So soon, therefore, as a person is in this state, his friends and family call a festival in his honor, to which several old doctors are asked. They come, sing and dance, try to aid him in pacifying the many spirits that trouble him, and make offerings for him of beads, food, and tobacco. The man himself must also sing and dance, not for a few nights only, but every other night, perhaps all winter. After one or two winters spent thus in dancing and singing, the man has pacified the spirits, and begins to doctor people.

Should a person, whose parents had not been shamans, desire to become a doctor, he can do so. To become one, he must go off by himself into the mountains, fast, build fires, swim in lonely lakes, and make frequent offerings of beads and food, and also of blood drawn from his ears. These offerings are made at spots known to be the dwelling-place of spirits. After some time he begins to have dreams and visions, seeing the spirits to whom he has made offerings. He then returns to his village, and begins to dream regularly as do those who inherit their father's spirits. Subsequently he has to go through the whole series of ceremonies and dances that the hereditary doctors do.

Doctors throw "pains" at people. The "pains" are like bits of sharpened bone or ice. Sometimes, however, they are like little lizards, frogs, mice, etc. When a "pain" has been thrown at a person, the only way to recover health is to have a doctor suck out the "pain." When the doctor gets it out, it talks to him, and calls him "father." It tells him who sent it. The doctor then either makes it disappear by rubbing it between his hands, or else buries it. The doctors get these "pains" from the spirits they meet far away in the mountains, or who come to them in dreams. The "pains" must be kept very carefully, and are usually secreted in some hollow log, far from the village. There were women doctors, but the men were more powerful, and far more important.

These outlines of the beliefs held in regard to shamans and the

cure and cause of disease, by the three tribes mentioned, will serve to show the considerable differences existing in a rather small area. Although each of these stocks is practically in contact with one of the others, there are many rather interesting differences. The strongly hereditary character of the shaman among this portion of the Maidu is noteworthy, together with the inheritance of the guardian spirits. On the other hand, the Hat Creek and Achomawi method of acquiring the position of doctor is suggestive of the usual method among tribes to the North and East of gaining a personal totem. Even within single stocks, as for example, the Maidu, the differences are almost as great as we find in this case between the three different stocks; and all the surrounding stocks again show equal or even greater differences than those noted here. The diversity which has been shown to be characteristic for the State in other features is thus seen to be present here as well, and offers a most fruitful field for study and comparison.

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