

THE EVENING NEWS.

Monday, March 14, 1870.

A NARRATIVE OF THE TRADITIONS, MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF THE MEXICAN INDIANS.

Written from the verbal narrative of Elder Ira Hatch, by James A. Little.

ASTRONOMICAL NOTIONS.

They have to correct ideas of the shape and motion of the earth or of the planets which surround it in the heavens. They believe that the sun rises over by the little Spanish town of Plana, and sets by going down a hole by New-Ak-kie, which signifies Snow Mountain—evidently the San Francisco mountain of the whites. They say they enjoy the rest of the day, which shines on them; the rest of the day of light and heat; hence the prominence the sun holds in their religious faith.

AGRICULTURE, &c.

They carefully cultivate the earth, and raise grain and a good assortment of vegetables. The soil and climate are adapted to the growth of fine peaches, of which they produce large quantities. Their domestic animals and fowls consist of sheep, goats, chickens, doves, asses and a very few horses. They grow cotton for home consumption, and with it and wool they manufacture their clothing, which is generally of a very serviceable quality. With them, cattle and horses are very insecure property on account of the raids of the Nijalos and Apaches.

Their villages are located on high mountains, usually with a gradual descent to the north, but surrounded on the other sides by precipitous rocks, which are only surmounted by steps cut in their surface.

They obtain water in the winter season from natural or artificial cisterns in the rocks, from which they draw it with a large gourd with a hole in the side. When this supply fails, in the dry season, they obtain it from a public well dug in the plain below the village. To fetch this water constitutes quite an item of the women's labor each day.

PUBLIC WORK.

A description of the way this well is cleaned out in the spring, illustrates the manner in which their public work is usually conducted. The well at the Oriba village was forty or fifty feet deep and about the same in diameter at the top but in descending it gradually lessens in diameter to five or six feet across at the bottom. In the winter the well is partially filled with the wash and dust from the surface. When water is no longer obtainable from the cisterns out. The bottom of the well is reached by spiral stairs cut in its sides. Two or three men throw the dirt a little up from the bottom, from which it is carried on a slightly concave dish, resembling a large plate, which is made of wood splinters and painted with a variety of colors. It is carried on the open palm of the hand, with the forearm perpendicular. The striking feature of this busy scene is the appearance of two men, dressed like clowns and in complete disguise; they are called, in native parlance, co-che-na. Both carry a whip made of the leaves of the soap root, which they can use with telling severity. In addition to the whip, one carries a lasso, which he is constantly whirling over his head ready to throw at a delinquent. The other carries a thin piece of board, shaped like a dart and attached to a string; this is kept whizzing through the air as a warning that the co-che-na is approaching.

These co-che-nas commence their labors, in the morning of public days, by going through the village at the proper time to see if there are any loitering behind, if so they are sharply stirred up to duty in a way from which there is no appeal. The food for dinner is taken to the well by the women, who labor with the men. Just before it is partaken of, the co-che-nas suddenly disappear and leave the laborers to partake of the repast in peace.

It is usual for the chief, in the morning of the day set apart for public labor, to preach to the people from the housetop, on the usefulness and necessity of the labor required of them.

The labor of furnishing wood for domestic purposes devolves upon the men. It has to be brought from eight to twelve miles. Some keep a donkey for this service, but the backs of those who are too poor to do this must carry the burden. It seems almost superfluous to add, that the wood is used with the strictest economy.

THEIR BUILDINGS.

Their houses are built of flat lime and sandstone, laid in a kind of clay mortar, which makes a very good cement. Well hewn timbers, some of them two feet in diameter, were used in their construction. We could not learn of any timber within a less distance than 25 or 30 miles from which these beams could have been obtained. The people say their ancestors hauled these timbers with oxen yoked by the horns, similar to the Spanish custom of working cattle at the present time.

While the elders were at the Oriba village, some of the men came in with cottonwood poles, which they said had cost them a three days' journey to the Pah-u, or Little Colorado river. They brought red pine poles, for their long ladders, where strength and elasticity are required, from the San Francisco mountains, a journey of six days. They exhibit wonderful strength and endurance in carrying burdens. When loaded, they seldom walk, but take a light elastic trot, similar to that of Chinamen under the same circumstances.

Their houses have terraced roofs, and are always two stories high and often three. The upper stories are set back a few feet from the front of the one immediately under it, leaving a portion of the roof for outdoor purposes. There are no side doors in the lower stories, but they are entered by ascending the ladder to the roof and then descending through a hole in the floor. The second and third stories are entered by side doors opening on to the roofs of the stories below.

STREETS, ETC.

The principal streets of the villages usually run east and west, and with few exceptions the houses front to the south. Every village has its public square, and the houses are so arranged that this square answers for the stage of a large amphitheatre, in which the audience can occupy the roof of the houses.

Everything about their villages has been constructed for defense against a common enemy. Near the Oriba village is a large cave in the rocks, which the natives call Shu-mi-co-le, a place of evil spirits. There are many traditions and superstitions ideas connected with this place. It is generally shunned by the people, and visited only on occasion of some special ceremony connected with it. The elders, while there, found it an excellent place of retirement, where they could enjoy undisturbed quiet.

Their incarnation of evil is a very bad man, who lived several generations ago. To their minds, he controls the evil powers the same as the Sun Father does the good. They are traditioned that this impersonification of evil will return some time in the future to afflict them, and that on his departure, he will take with him all who do not do right.

(To be Continued.)

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