

## THE DESERET NEWS: WEEKLY.

### WAHNO; THE NORTHERN POLAR CONTINENT.

The country of Wahno I can best describe as a deep, oval valley, surrounded for two-thirds of its circuit by high mountains, and for the remaining third by low hills. I should judge the valley to be over a hundred miles across its shortest diameter, and from 150 to 200 at its longest. The chasm in the center, from which the pillar of fire rises, must be at least thirty miles across and is nearly circular. How to give a right idea of this marvel I know not. It is impossible to approach nearer than two or three miles of the opening at any point, on account of the intense heat, for it radiates a constant and steady heat, although the light is variable. The natives have a tradition that, many years ago, molten billows rose to the top of the opening and overflowed at several points, causing death and desolation, and the remains of ancient lava in several ravines confirm this tradition. The chasm seems to me a vast crater, or opening into the central fires of the earth, that is never closed. It is Symmes's Hole, except that Capt. Symmes supposed it to be an immense opening where the water flowed into and through the earth. While here in fact heat and electricity flow out. The electricity is manifest by the shocks it gives, as well as by its flashes, the shocks increasing in intensity as one approaches the chasm. I have tried many points of view, as near as I could venture to the opening, but could nowhere see anything but the black, jagged rocks and the rising flame, or radiated light, for it is not actual flame. The appearance is as if it were the opening of an immense furnace. It is not like any volcano I have seen, for it throws out nothing but light, heat and electricity, and there is no noise besides the crackling of the electricity as it reaches the cold upper air. As I sit watching it with profound interest I much regret the want of that scientific knowledge that would enable me better to comprehend and describe this tenth wonder of the world.

The climate and productions of Wahno are peculiar, as may be supposed from its situation and circumstances, so unlike those of any other known country. The difference between summer and winter is but slight. The sun makes the long day of summer somewhat lighter than that of winter, but I doubt if a thermometer would show much difference of temperature. The average heat, as I feel it, in the inhabited belt, about half way between the mountains and the great chasm, is like that of winter in the tropics. The vegetation ranges from tropical to arctic, according to distance from the central fire, and the heat of the soil comes quite as much from beneath as from the air. Vegetation, however, is diminutive, ranging nowhere to more than a fourth of the height of the same trees and shrubs in the temperate and torrid zones, and the foliage and fruit are remarkably dry and hard. This is no doubt caused by the constant heat and the want of rain, for it never rains, and snow falls only upon the mountains and their foothills. The only water of the valleys comes in little brooks from the melting snow on the mountain sides, and it is along the valleys watered by these brooks that the trees and shrubs grow which furnish food for the people. There is also a species of pine, or spruce, growing near the mountains, in the cones of which are very highly flavored and nutritious nuts, and the supply of these is inexhaustible. Most of the trees in the lower part of the valley are in perpetual flower and fruit, and nowhere else have I found the flowers so generally or so delightfully fragrant. Even the dry intervals between the brooks, where there is no appearance of moisture, are thickly covered with a flowering moss, which sends forth a most delicate and exhilarating odor as it is crushed underfoot. It is upon this moss that the people sleep, and no couch could be softer or sweeter. There is a constant and gentle breeze from the mountains toward the central chasm, which occasionally, but not often, is unpleasantly cool. The clouds come up over the mountains and sometimes overhang the outer edge of the valley, but the current of heated air drives them back, and there is always clear sky over the center of the valley. The fruits of the country I will describe when I know them better. I have at length learned to satisfy my

appetite with them. Indeed I repeated my feast of duck but three or four times, partly because of the horror and repugnance it excited in my neighbors, but more because my appetite gradually diminished and my taste changed, so that I now prefer the vegetable food of the country, and do not require more than four or five times as much as one of these human birds around me. I am growing thin, too, and white and spectral, no doubt, yet with no feeling of illness; and though my muscular strength is less, my vivacity and enjoyment of life were never greater, except when thoughts of Gertrude and home make me wretched. But I cannot hope to rejoin my friends in this world, and I feel myself as widely separated from them as if I were already in the land of spirits.

#### MARRIAGE TO A WAHNO BEAUTY.

It is now the winter of 1862, as I compute time. It is seven years since I last wrote in this journal, though I have recorded in that time some odd fragments of experience and observation. The whole period, as I look back upon it, is almost a blank. There is one portion of it I wish I could make wholly so. I have described elsewhere the ideas and habits of the Wahnos as to marriage. I regret to say that, though I do not approve their custom, I have not been faithful to Gertrude. One of the most beautiful of the golden haired girls around me offered herself to me as my bride, about three summers ago. I do not believe I should ever have made the first advances to any one of the Wahno women, but when I saw how truly the little Monen (so she was called) loved me, the sense of my homelessness and desolation, and the thought that I was as utterly lost to Gertrude as if dead, conspired with awakened passion to beguile me, and I yielded. I felt too that marriage with so frail and spiritual a creature could be little more than a play, and I called her my doll wife. But her love was fatal to her, as I ought to have foreseen that it would be, and I now sit half my time, repenting, at the grave which holds my sweet Monen and her unborn child. God forgive me! I am sure I did not deliberately wrong her, and I came truly and tenderly to love and cherish her after our marriage. Since her death I feel that I must soon escape from this country or die. I grow so desperate at times that I think I will embark upon the boat that brought me here, which I have carefully preserved, and risk the perils of arctic ice and cold for the small chance of being driven by wind and tide to some part of the world whence I can again reach my beloved Elbe and my home.

#### PREPARATIONS FOR THE HOME VOYAGE.

It is the summer of 1864—July, I think. After more than a year's labor, I have my boat ready for its perilous, and nearly hopeless voyage. I have made myself double suits of clothing, very warm, from the skins of the mountain squirrels,\* with several blankets of the same. I have filled my boat with the most nutritious fruits, taking a large supply of the dried *tene*, which will answer the purpose of brandy if I become cold and exhausted. My plan is to get into some ocean current, if possible, and then remain quiet and as warm as may be, in the bottom of my boat, and pray for a happy termination of my voyage. This journal I shall now envelop carefully in my skin pouch, trusting that, if I am destined to be entombed in the ice, it may at some time be found, and reveal the story of my long banishment from home and my discoveries in the northern regions. If I and my story perish together, God's will be done. Amen.

KARL FORSSMAN.

#### FRAGMENTARY SKETCHES BY FORSSMAN.

#### SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WAHNO.

The people among whom I am now well naturalized, and who treat me with great kindness, are yet in many respects a puzzle to me. They hardly seem to be of the human race. They have almost no government, a vague and undefinable religion, no regular industry, no commerce, and I had almost said, no vices and no virtues.

They are mere children in comparison with other races of men. Their goodness is negative rather than positive—childish innocence rather than manly virtue. In former years I have sometimes doubted the perfection of the Creator, when I have seen the crime and degradation prevailing among men; but I now perceive that a condition which offers no temptation to wrongdoing gives no opportunity for virtue, and I think I prefer to live where the extremes of character are possible, and take the risks, rather than where life is

so insipid, and there be only a sort of weak, average goods. The secret of the meagre life these people is that they need so little and that little is furnished by nature. There are not even obnoxious insects and reptiles and ferocious animals, as in the tropics, to arouse activity in self-defense. It requires little exertion to construct the light basket cottages which the Wahnos seek privacy and sleep; their waking life is nearly passed in the open air and in society. The feathers for their girdles are easily obtained, and the graceful arrangement of them is amusement rather than labor. Their food is at hand, and is to be plucked from the branches or led from the earth, as they need it. There is no fire, no cooking, no washing of clothes; and a few nut shells, hold about a gill each, two or three baskets and an implement of stone, serving like a hatchet without a handle are all the articles essential to house-keeping. But there is really no house-keeping in the German sense. There are no regular meals; each eats when is hungry, and seeks and prepares his own food. The children begin to do, as soon as they can walk, and receive very little care from their parents afterwards. There is no period for sleep; each one takes his nap when chooses. As might be expected, this scarcely any family life, and dictations of relationship are not much served.

#### COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE.

With the Wahnos marriage is not a union for life, though it offends so where the parties continue to prefer each other. The offer of marriage is always made by the woman and though the man may decline an offer is held unmanly and improper to do, unless he can show good reasons. Advances are made by the men, and when a girl or woman has made up her mind as to a husband, she approaches a candidate, makes a certain sign, and moves quickly away, without waiting for an answer. If he fancied the alliance he follows her to her tent, and they are thenceforth considered man and wife and sacred to each other, for so long as they mutually so agree. Either may leave and seek another mate at any time, without a violation of the recognized social code. But separations without good reasons are rarely condemned, showing that these ideas of marriage exist among them in spite of its perversions. It should be said, however, that what are accounted sufficient reasons for divorce would hardly be so held in a Christian community. There is nothing to be seen here of the grossness of tropical men. Indeed there is more purity and delicacy than have been seen among any other race. The people are not very prolific, and they are short-lived, though seldom sick. They reach maturity at ten or twelve and a person of forty is considered old. But the old are not decrepid and helpless; they maintain their buoyancy most to the last, and then die because their always feeble vital force is exhausted.

#### RELIGION OF THE WAHNO.

The only religious notion of these people, so far as I can make out, connected with the gulph and pillar of fire. This *Wah* or *Weyah* is both God and his special residence, and they expect a future and better life in or beneath this subterranean heaven. Their notions as to the exact location of this haven, and the character and employments of its inhabitants, I can not ascertain. They know nothing of evil spirit and in their ethics a wrong act is but a mistake; at least the same word answers for both and I never could make out whether they perceive any difference between an accidental and an intentional wrong act. If a man hurt his hand it is *pao*, bad; if he steals it is still *pao*, nothing more.

I was well drilled by my mother, when I was young, in the Heidelberg catechism, and I have tried to impart to some of the most intelligent of these people instruction in the first principles of Christianity, but they listen with blank incredulity. Once when I had told the story of Eden and the fall of man to a grave old Wahno, he looked at me in pity for a moment, and then exclaimed, "And your Weyah did so—the old idiot!"

Of course it was useless to teach men who could treat the sacred mysteries with such irreverence. My doll wife, the loving little Monen, tried hard to comprehend my instructions, in order to please me, but she could never see that my God had anything

\* I have a part of Forssman's fur jacket, which the widow Zocker gave me. The fur is long and fine, of white, slightly mottled with dark brown, and is very beautiful. I judge the animals from which it was taken to have been of the size and form of the German grey squirrel.

to do with Wahno or its people, or that my religion could be suited at all to them. When I spoke of sin, Satan, and the divine scheme of redemption, she would hold up her little hands in horror, and cry out "Pao, nenita pao!"—bad, all bad. After many similar attempts, which made my little Monen unhappy, without in the least convincing her, I gave up the effort to convert her to Christianity, excusing myself with the idea that, since the Heavenly Father had left these people so long in ignorance of his word, the knowledge of it might not afterwards be essential to their future welfare. This is contrary to what was taught me and may be all wrong, but the same thought has often presented itself to me when considering the condition of the large majority of men in all ages, and I have said to myself: Surely Jehovah is their God as well as mine, and He has never been wanting in a Father's love and care to any of his children.

#### WAHNO LITERATURE.

The Wahnos have many ballads, some of which I hear sung or recited almost every day. I have translated two of them, which show the simplicity of the language and the very limited range of thought of these people. I think the oldest and wisest of them about equal to German children of ten or twelve years of age in mental development and power; and if they shall ever reach anything higher it must be through some influence from abroad, for there is nothing here to call out and strengthen their powers. One of their favorite songs, to which they dance, begins:—

"Tan, pepah, Weyah, tan;  
Lelin, mahah, tan."

I translate the song as follows, without attempting measure or rhyme, in which they are very exact:—

Dance, sing, dance before Weyah!  
Matrons, maidens, dance;  
Parents, children, dance!  
The squirrels are frisking, the birds  
singing,  
The flowers open to pour out delight;  
Weyah dances and sparkles,  
The mountains smile back again.  
The sun is Weyah's little wife;  
When she leaves him her night is long  
And his day is dim.  
Come back, O sun, to the bosom of  
Wah.

Dance, sing, dance before Weyah;  
Matrons, maidens, dance;  
Parents, children, dance!

The berries are red on the boughs,  
The ground nuts fill the soil,  
The rind of the *tene* is dry  
And its pulp is rich and lively—  
Oh, it fills us with delight;  
It puts wings to our feet;  
It puts light in the maiden's eyes;  
It makes the old young again;  
It drives away pain and tears—  
Oh, the *tene*, the delicious *tene*,  
All things are nought without *tene*.

Dance, sing, dance before Weyah;  
Matrons, maidens, dance;  
Parents, children, dance.

Our dead are with Weyah,  
They sleep in his warm bosom.  
Their fruits are better than ours,  
Their flowers more fragrant;  
Their *tene* is larger and sweeter,  
Wah smiles and calls them his children;

They dance always before him.  
We too will be children with Weyah.

Matrons, maidens, dance!  
Parents, children, dance!  
Lillee Yah, lilli Yah, loo, leloo, loo!

Of the last line I cannot ascertain the meaning. It is chanted in a low monotone at the close of every song, in a serious manner, but I doubt if any definite idea is attached to it. If it ever had significance it is apparently forgotten by the present generation of Wahnos. At least they are unable to interpret it to me. It has for me somewhat the effect of the Gloria in church services.

The only Wahno ballad that has any touch of the tragic is the following, which is a great favorite, being oftener recited than any other, and always moving these address creatures to tears, in spite of its amiability:—

Litnome was a light and fragrance,  
The swift dancer, the bird-like singer,  
The fairest of Wahno's girls.  
All the young men gazed at and loved  
her,  
All looked for her beckoning.

She paused in the midst of the dance,  
She fixed her soft eyes on Helelo,  
She beckoned to him and fled,  
Fled like a timid bird to her nest.

Helelo stood still, doubtful, sad;  
He followed not; the young men re-  
proached him.

At her tent Litnome waited him long,  
Then she knew she was rejected,