



CHINIGCHINICH

FRIAR GERONIMO BOSCANNA

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BY
FRIAR GERONIMO BOSCANNA

A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGIN, CUSTOMS, AND
TRADITIONS OF THE INDIANS AT THE MISSIONARY
ESTABLISHMENT OF ST. JUAN CAPISTRANO, ALTA-
CALIFORNIA

TRANSLATED BY ALFRED ROBINSON

Chinigchinich By Friar Geronimo Boscana.

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CHAPTER 16. THE CHARACTER OF THE INDIAN

To complete this history, and to give a relation of all my observations during a period of more than twenty years' residence in the province, it will be important to delineate the character of the Indians, as I have been enabled to learn it. The undertaking will be arduous, I know, and a curate of forty years' residence among them, once told his bishop, "they were incomprehensible"--to which I agree; but nevertheless, I will make the attempt. My idea is that the natural, or Divine precepts implanted in the heart of man by his Creator, are by the Indians observed in a retrograde manner, or in the opposite sense--that is, the affirmative with them, is negative, and the negative, the affirmative; and this opposition appears innate among all classes of them. An Indian curate of the Indians, appears to be of the same opinion, if we may judge from his description.

"The Indians," he said, lead a life of indolence, rather than devote themselves to the enlightening of their souls with ideas of civilization and catholicism; it is repugnant to their feelings, which have become vitiated by the unrestricted customs among them. Their inclinations, to possess themselves of the property of others, are unbounded. Their hypocrisy, when they pray, is as much to be feared, as their insolence, when in tumultuous disorder. They are never grateful for any benefit, nor do they pardon an injury, and they never proffer civilities, unless to accomplish some interested motive.

They are ready to expose themselves to the greatest danger, to satisfy their predominant passions. The future from them, is ever veiled by the present. Their inconstancy and want of confidence deprive them of friends, and he, who, by deception, holds them in subjection, may reduce them to almost abject slavery." Such is the picture of them drawn by this Indian curate, who was of Mexico, and I think, although referring to the Mexicans, it is sufficient to comprehend the general character of the Indian. Those of California are less curious, and in no wise so industrious; for the Mexicans, when in their gentility, sowed and prepared the *maize*, as well as other grain for eating, and the females

spun and wove a covering for the body, out of cotton, which they also cultivated.

The Indians of California may be compared to a species of monkey; for in naught do they express interest, except in imitating the actions of others, and, particularly in copying the ways of the "*razon*," or white men, whom they respect as beings much superior to themselves; but in so doing, they are careful to select vice, in preference to virtue. This is the result, undoubtedly, of their corrupt, and natural disposition.

The Indian, in his grave, humble and retired manner, conceals a hypocritical and treacherous disposition. He will deceive the most minute observer, as has been the case with many, or with all, who have endeavored to learn his character, until time has revealed to them his true qualities. He never looks at any one, while in conversation, but has a wandering and malicious gaze.

For benefits received, he is never grateful; and instead of looking upon that which is given, he beholds only that which is withheld. His eyes are never uplifted, but like those of the swine, are cast to the earth. Truth is not in him, unless to the injury of another, and he is exceedingly false.

MYTHOLOGY

These Indians had the same belief as the Ancients, regarding the course of the sun, and believed that when he set, he went to repose in the arms of Thetis. He had twelve Palaces, which were placed at equal distances around the earth; in each of which, he was accustomed to pass a month. These twelve palaces were marked by a circle, called the zodiac, but with signs, which alluded to certain passages in the fable.

CHARACTERISTIC ANECDOTES

A chief of a rancheria, or village, not far distant from the Presidio of St. Diego, who had observed, with much attention, the manner and authority with which the "*Comandante*" governed his officers and soldiers, as well as the inhabitants of the place, had heard, also, that the King of Spain was their grand chief, to whom, they all owed allegiance, and in case of disobedience were liable to severe punishment, and even death.

Desirous of imitating the domination of his royal master, he commenced a tyrannical use of his power, which gained him many enemies. However, it was of short duration. In 1822, when D. Augustin Yturvide was proclaimed Emperor of Mexico, and when his government was recognized, in due form, at St. Diego, there were many Indians present, who listened attentively, to the declaration that Mexico no longer acknowledged the Spanish authority. The king (or viceroy) had been deposed, and another placed in his stead, with the new title of Emperor. A few months afterwards, a grand feast was observed in the Indian village, to which all the neighboring Indians were invited.

To commence the ceremonies, they burned their chief alive! and elected another. The feast continued eight days, when the Indians dispersed and returned to their several homes. Those who lived in the Presidio, were censured for such inhumanity, which produced the following remarks:- "Have you not done in Mexico the same with the King of Spain?" (meaning the Viceroy). "You say he was not good, and you killed him! Well, our captain was not good, and we have burned him. Should the new one be bad, we will burn him also!"

How little is the faith of these Indians in the teachings of the Catholic truths! A missionary, of the mission of St. Luis Rey, who had baptized several adults, the youngest of whom had reached his fiftieth year, attempted to explain, after the ceremony was concluded, the sort of life which they were to observe for the future; and he told them what they were to do to avoid the influence of Satan. By invoking the sweet names

of Jesus and Mary, be said, and by the sign of the holy cross, well performed, we destroy the power of the devil, and drive out all unholy thoughts. A *satrap*, or governor, of one of the rancherías, smilingly observed to the others, "See how this pádre cheats us! Who believes that the devil will leave us, by the sign of the cross? If it were to be done by dancing, as authorized by Chinigchinich, he would depart; but that he will do so, by the means which he says, I do not believe!" The others united with him in laughter, and appeared unimpressed with the efficacy of such ceremony.

About the middle of December, 1823, a comet appeared in the north, which was visible until the latter part of January, of the ensuing year; and in September, 1825, another was seen. The latter appeared in the south-east, with its direction to the north-west, and was visible, though faintly, till the first of November.

The Indians, who had observed them, believing they were their deceased chiefs, consulted together, as to the cause of their appearance, and were all of one opinion, that they denoted some important change in their destiny; but how, or in what manner, it would be, they were ignorant. Some thought that they would return to their primitive mode of life; that it was "*Sirout*," whom they had seen, he, who was the father of their grand captain *Ouiot*; and when he came, he ever brought good things, for their profit and happiness. Others said no! that it denoted that they were to live free, and do whatever they pleased, without being under subjection to any one; yet they would still remain occupants of the mission. The elder ones said, *Sirout* foretold, that another people would come, who would treat them as slaves, and abuse them--that they would suffer much hunger and misery, and that the chief thus appeared, to call them away from the impending calamity. Others said, that the comet was "*Tacu*," the father of "*Ouiamot*" or "*Chinigchinich*," which was generally assented to. These ideas have, undoubtedly, arisen from the fact, that when the declaration of independence was proclaimed in Mexico, the Indians were made to believe, that they would no longer be subject to the regulations of the missions; that each family, or person, would live separate, as colonists. But the government, considering them unfit for

such a condition, has not made any innovation, up to the present time of November, 1825.

An Indian "*vaquero*," of the mission of San Luis Obispo, who had been despatched on business, to some place not far distant, did not make his appearance until the day following, and then so pallid and trembling, that he could hardly speak. Upon inquiring as to what ailed him, he replied, "that being in a certain place, a phantom appeared before him, which prevented his progress; and his horse, though vigorous, remained immoveable at the sight. The phantom commanded him to tell his people not to travel in that direction, for if they did, he should molest them! Immediately, three of us, *pádras*, went out, with "*vaqueros*," and other Indians, and remained all that day about the same spot, but nothing was seen of the phantom.

In a certain "*rancho*," or farm, were several *Pima* Indians, and some *Sagues*, who were employed in erecting a building; he who directed them, was one of the *razon*, or native Spaniards. One day, whilst superintending the work, he discovered, concealed, in one of the apartments, a small wooden ball, which had around it, an unfinished crown of thorns. He enquired of a "*Sagui*," what it was for. "Ah! Sir," he replied, "you have really escaped; with this ball you would have been destroyed. You were to be killed for having chastised the *Pima* Indian, and only two days more were required; that is, until the completion of the crown of thorns around the ball; then, immediately, you would have been attacked with pains in the head and heart, and would have died.
