

THE MI-WOK INDIANS.

The Mi-wok is the largest Indian nation in California, both in population and extent of territory. Their ancient dominion extended from the snow-line of the Sierra Nevada to the San Joaquin river, and from the Cosumnes to the Fresno. The mountain valleys were thickly peopled as far east as Yosemite; the great and fertile San Joaquin plains, and the banks of the long fish-full streams of the Mokelumne, the Stanislaus, the Tuolumne, the Merced, the Chowchilla and the San Joaquin were anciently crowded with multitudes of these Indians. Even the islands of the San Joaquin were made to sustain their quota, for on Feather Island there are said to be the remains of a populous village. The rich alluvial lands along the lower Stanislaus, Tuolumne and Merced contained the heart of the nation,

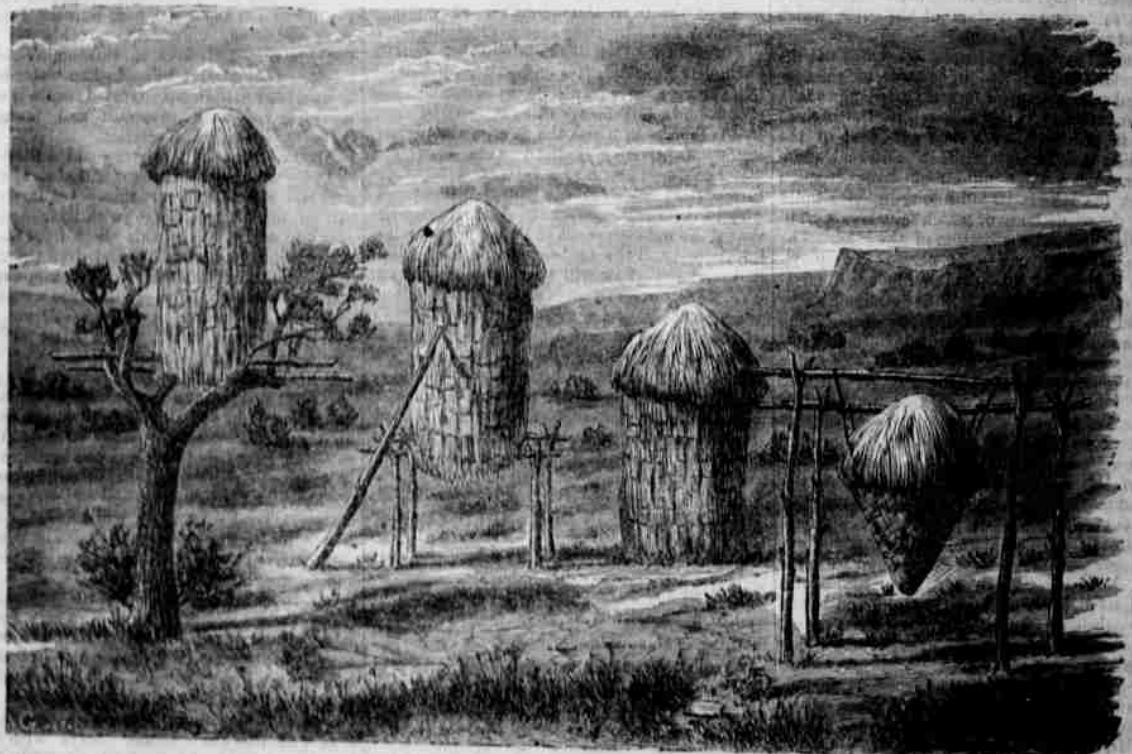
probably the origin of the word "Cosumnes," which is pronounced koz-n-u-my (accent on first syllable). Although the largest, this is probably the lowest nation in California, presenting one of the most hopeless and saddening spectacles of heathen races.

They eat all creatures that swim in the waters, all that fly through the air, and all that creep, crawl, or walk upon the earth, with a dozen or so exceptions. They have the most degraded and superstitious beliefs in wood-spirits, who produce those disastrous conflagrations to which California is subject; in water-spirits, who inhabit the rivers, consume the fish, and in fetishistic spirits, who assume the forms of owls and other birds, to render their lives a terror by night and by day.

In occasional specimens of noble physical stature they were not lacking, especially in Yosemite and other mountain valleys; but the utter weakness, puerility, and imbecility of their conceptions, and the unspeakable obscenity of some of their legends, almost surpass belief.

within the masses of hair. The Chief, Captain John, was at least 70 years old, yet his head was still perceptibly flattened on the back, and I could almost encircle it with my hands."

For food they depend principally on acorns. They had, in common with many tribes both in the Sierra and in the Coast range, a kind of granary to store them in for winter. When the crop was good and they harvested more than they wished to carry to camp just then, with a forethought not common among barbarians they laid by the remainder on the spot. Selecting a tree which presented a couple of forks a few feet from the ground, but above the reach of wild animals, they laid a pole across, and on that as a foundation, wove a cylinder-shaped granary of willow wicker-work, three or four feet in diameter and twice as high, which they filled with acorns and covered with thatch. There they remained safe. As these were often miles from a village, the circumstance denotes that they reposed no small confidence in each other's honesty. It goes near to refute altogether the frequent allegations that they are



ACORN GRANARIES OF THE MIWOK INDIANS.

and were probably the seat of the densest population of ancient California.

The language of the nation was more homogeneous than many others, not half so widely ramified. From the upper end of the Yosemite, traveling 150 miles with the sun, and from the Cosumnes southward to Fresno, there was scarcely a change of a syllable. There are, as always, many abrupt dialectic departures, but the root remains and is quickly caught by the Indian of a different dialect. They were nothing more than the different local pronunciations, such as are apparent in the English language, seemingly entirely different to a foreigner, but only an unimportant, well understood variation to a native.

North of the Stanislaus these people called themselves mi-wok ("men"); south to the Merced, mi-se; on the Fresno, mi-wi. On the upper Merced the word "river" is se-kul-la; on the upper Tuolumne, se-kul-wi; on the Stanislaus and Mokelumne, se-kul-a-mu-tuk. This is undoubtedly the origin of the word "Mokelumne," which is locally pronounced "mokal-u-my" (accent on second syllable).

So also ko-sum, ko-sum-mi (salmon) is

a majority of all who have any well defined ideas whatever on the subject, believe in the annihilation of the soul after death. He was referred to as *itch*, representing the memory of a being that once was. While other tribes mitigated the final terror by an assured belief in a Happy Western Land, the Mi-wok go down with a grim and stolid sullenness to the death of a dog that will live no more.

For houses the Mi-wok construct very rude affairs of poles and brushwood, which they cover with earth in the winter; in summer they move into mere brushwood shelters. Higher up in the mountains they make a summer lodge of puncheons in the shape of a sharp cone, with one side open, and a bivouac-fire in front of it.

The only special points to be noted in their physiognomy are the smallness of their heads, and the flatness of the sinciput, caused by their lying on the hard baby-basket when infants.

Major Stephen Powers, in Powell's Contributions to North American Ethnology, from which this sketch is taken, says: "I felt the heads of a rancheria near Chinese Camp, and was surprised at the diminutive balls which lurked

a nation of thieves. Now-a-days, they make most of their granaries close to camp, either right on the ground or elevated on top of some posts.

They are very fond of hare, and make comfortable robes of their skins. These are cut into narrow slits, dried in the sun, and then made into a wide warp by tying or sewing strings across at intervals of a few inches. Soap-root is used in the manufacture of a kind of glue, and the squaws make brushes of the fibrous matter enclosing the bulb, with which they sweep out their wigwams. With millions of tall straight pines in the mountains the Mi-wok had no means of crossing rivers, except logs or clumsy rafts. All their bows and arrows were bought of the upper mountaineers. White shell buttons, pierced in the center and strung together were used as money, rated at \$1 a yard; periwinkles at \$1 a yard.

The chieftainship, such as it is, is hereditary when there is a son or brother of commanding influence, which is seldom; otherwise, he is thrust aside for another. The Chief is simply a master of ceremonies. When he decides to hold a dance in his village, he dispatches