

LAVA BEDS OF SNAKE RIVER.

AN INDIAN TRADITION.

THE ABORIGINES of the Pacific Coast, with whom the writer is thoroughly acquainted, having been born and reared among them, are a people who, having no means of recording history or events, possess many strange and interesting traditions, which have been handed down from generation to generation till their origin has become lost in the dim past. Many of them are founded on some physical peculiarity of the country in which the Indians live, and this evidence of their truth wins for them credence, and inspires reverence for many objects held by these traditions to be sacred. One of these traditions, explaining the origin of the lava beds of Snake River, in Idaho, is quite interesting, as told by the Shoshone and Bannack Indians. These two tribes, as far back as the white race has known them, have intermarried and remained peaceable with each other, but have engaged in oppressive warfare with their less powerful neighbors. At times they carried on savage and inhuman warfare with the frontiersmen, who were fast settling up the vast scope of country dominated by them, and who have now wrested it from their possession, are tilling the soil and searching for the precious metals in the high and rugged mountains, from which Idaho, the "Gem of the Mountains," derives her name.

Snake River runs through a continuous lava bed for nearly six hundred miles, and affords many strange and interesting sights to the tourist. The stream is a large one, and at one time a steamer was used above what is known as "The Canyon," at the west end of the vast lava field. At one place, this large volume of water falls three hundred and seventy-five feet, in two leaps. These are known as "Shoshone Falls," and are pronounced superior in grandeur to the great Niagara by those who have seen both. North and south of the river are ranges of high mountains, some of the peaks being white with snow nearly the year round, forming a grand scene for lovers of the works of nature. In the valley proper, which is one vast field of lava rock, the molten mass seems to have cooled suddenly, as in many places the hard, basaltic rocks lie in waves, while in others there are large openings, into which good-sized creeks flow from the mountains and are lost. At one point, just below the Shoshone Falls, where the river runs through a deep gorge, a large volume of water flows from an opening in the perpendicular bank, and falls into the stream. When we consider these strangely interesting freaks of nature, it is not surprising that the imaginative natives should have traditions of them handed down by their forefathers. In this great field of lava there are no visible craters, and to-day the point from which flowed the lava which covers this vast valley, is unknown. But the Bannacks and Shoshones have a tradition on the subject, which they believe with great faith, and as proof that it is indisputable

point to the lava fields, unable to understand why the white man remains incredulous in the face of such convincing proofs.

The tradition states that away back in the dim past, the number of "snows" of which they do not attempt to enumerate, the valley was covered with forests, in which game of all kinds roamed in abundance, and where flowed clear streams, the homes of large numbers of delicious fish. The red men held full possession and were as happy and contented as if in Paradise. But at last a strange people came in large numbers, who commenced to usurp the hunting and fishing grounds. Valley after valley and forest after forest the tribes were obliged to yield to the intruder, who lived in caves and huts built of stone. They were skilled and brutal warriors, and soon killed so great a number of the Indians that the head chiefs called a council of the two tribes, to consult as to what course to pursue to get rid of the usurpers and again come into possession of the beautiful lands of Snake River. They assembled in large numbers on the summit of a high mountain, and the great Medicine Man, who alone could receive inspiration from the Great Spirit, carried on incantations and prayed long and fervently for wisdom, after which he made a long and eloquent speech, in which he advised the braves to be patient, and not arouse further trouble. He would go into the deep forest and pray for more knowledge, and hoped and expected to receive such wisdom that he could devise plans for expelling the usurpers from the country. All assented to his suggestions, and he departed alone on his journey.

For awhile he wended his way through the heavy forests, occasionally catching a glimpse through the sighing pines of a bright star, toward which he kept traveling. The hooting of owls, howling of wolves and mournful sounds of other animals, with an occasional cry of a panther, filled his soul with fear; but he kept on his journey, all the while praying to the Great Spirit to protect him, for the safety and freedom of his much-wronged people, who were anxiously waiting for his return. At last he entered an opening where there was light, and saw a large number of mountain lions, wolves, foxes, panthers, wild cats and kindred animals. One of the mountain lions, which was very large, had hands instead of fore feet, and a head like an Indian. The Medicine Man realized that he was in the land of spirits, and that this animal was the ruler of them all. He tremblingly approached, when the lion greeted him kindly, and told him, in the Shoshone language, that he had been apprised of his coming. Then in a loud voice he summoned all the animals around him, and requested the Medicine Man to state to them the nature of his mission, as they were all good spirits, and ready to hear what he had to say. The Medicine Man, in the most pleading language, told them of the great sufferings of his people at the hands of a tyrannical race, who had seized their lands and were gradually and surely annihilating the two great tribes. He could not tell who they were nor whence they came, but implored the spirits to