

THE RENEGADE INDIANS OF SAN GABRIEL.

BY FRANK J. POLLEY.

[Extracts from Unpublished MSS. of the late B. D. Wilson.]

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(Benjamin Davis Wilson was born in Nashville, Tennessee, December, 1, 1811. He came to California in 1841 by way of New Mexico. He took a prominent part in public affairs, both under Mexican and American rule. He was the first County Clerk of Los Angeles county after the organization of the State. He was Mayor of Los Angeles city, and served two terms as State Senator. He was appointed Indian agent of the southern district of California by President Fillmore and assisted Gen. Beale in forming the reservation at Fort Tejon. He died, March 11, 1878.)
J. M. G.

The fact renegade Indians existed, prima facie presupposes their ill-treatment by the Mission fathers. It has been so charged and denied since the time of La Perouse. The full truth is yet unknown. No rule can be given other than that of caution; many men at different times and places act differently, and so each case ought to be solved from the testimony pertinent thereto. Only a few facts are capable of proof. It is known that several of the renegade neophytes became locally celebrated. In times of excitement the priests enforced strict discipline in the exercise of judgment and ranch men were called in to assist in recapturing those who led in raiding stock.

Prior to the introduction of evidence it is well to remember the mission, presidio and pueblo governments, and how they often clashed. The soldiers and colonists were not always to the priests' choice; and there are instances of earnest remonstrances by the priests at the scandalous acts of many who came in contact with the Indians.

A converted Indian lost caste with his tribe; he was under the spell of the church and therefore to break from it and win the regard of his tribesmen required some decision of character. Such men made enemies to be feared by the white men.

Instances of Indian revolts and attacks on the missions may be easily collected from the books. Therefore no citations are given nor effort made at present towards a more graphic note and what follows is offered and is to be taken only as a contribution to the general subject. The quotations have not appeared in print and yet they were prepared by Mr. Wilson, of San Gabriel, for publication. It is not safe historic criticism to assume the Indians cowardly. The Cahuillas attacked the Irving party, maintained a

cavalry duel all day and towards evening drove the desperadoes into a blind ravine, from which only one man returned alive. Judge Benjamin Hayes took the testimony at the inquest. The verdict was: "Edward Irving and other white men, names unknown, were killed by the Cahuilla Indians, the killing was justifiable."

The particulars of this celebrated case are easily accessible. Undoubtedly the verdict was correct.

Wilson's testimony as to their bravery is similar. He was an old and experienced Indian fighter and assisted the authorities at San Gabriel in recapturing runaway and renegade Indians. He is not ashamed to recount that several times he and all the men he had in assistance between here and the present Riverside county, were badly defeated.

The first extract from his MS. is about the renowned Indian desperado Joaquin.

Wilson had been in search of the tribe harboring the renegades, when suddenly upon emerging into an open plain he discovered a small number of Indians.

"The leading man of the four happened to be the very man of all others I was seeking for. The first marauder, Joaquin, who had been raised as a page of the church in San Gabriel Mission, and for his depredations and outlawry bore on his person the mark of the mission, i. e., one of his ears cropped off and the iron brand on his hip. This is the only instance I ever saw or heard, of of that kind; and that marking had not been done at the Mission, but at one of the ranches—El Chino, by the mayor domo. While in conversation with Joaquin the command was coming on, and he then became convinced that we were on a campaign against him and his people. It was evident before that he had taken me for a traveler. Immediately that he discovered the true state of things he whipped from his quiver an arrow, strung it on his bow, and left nothing for me to do but to kill him in self-defense. We both discharged our weapons at the same time. I had no chance to raise the gun to my shoulder, but fired it from my hand. His shot took effect in my right shoulder and mine in his breast. The shock of his arrow in my shoulder caused me to involuntarily let my gun drop, my shot knocked him down disabled, but he discharged at me a tirade of abuse in the Spanish language such as I never heard surpassed.

I was on mule back, and got down to pick up my gun, by this time my command arrived at the spot. The other three Indians were making off over the plains, I ordered my men to capture them alive but the Indians resisted stoutly and refused to the last to surrender, and wounded several of our horses and two or three men, and had to be killed. Those three men actually fought eighty men in open plain till they were put to death.

During the fight Joaquin laid on the ground uttering curse and abuse against the Spanish race and people. I discovered that I was shot with a poisoned arrow and rode down some 500 yards to the river. Some of my men on returning and finding that Joaquin was not dead, finished him. I had to proceed immediately to the care of my wound. There was with me a Comanche Indian, a trusty man who had accompanied me from New Mexico to California. The only remedy we knew of was the sucking of the poison with the mouth out of the wound, indeed there is no other remedy known even now. I have frequently seen the Indians prepare the poison and it is nothing more than putrid meat or liver and blood poisoned by rattlesnake venom, which they dry in thin sticks and carry in leather sheaths.

When they went on a hunting or campaigning expedition they wetted their arrows with the sticks and when it was to dry they softened it by holding it near the fire a little while. By the time I got to the river my arm and shoulder were immensely swollen all over. My faithful Comanche applied himself to sucking the wound which was extremely painful. He soon began reducing the swelling and in the course of three or four days it had entirely disappeared and the wound was in a fair way of healing. It never gave me any trouble afterward although there was left in the flesh a small piece of flint which I still carry to this day. As I was unable to travel while the wound was healing, I kept with me five men of the command and ordered the rest to proceed down the river on the campaign till they found the Indians." * * These men after several days returned, they found the Indians fortified in the rocks and attacked them. They fought them a whole day and finally were obliged to leave them in their position, and come away with several men badly wounded. "I had to abandon the campaign as beside the wounded men the command had all their horses worn out."

This tired band arrived at Wilson's home and there some deserted; fully twenty men returning to other pursuits.

The narrative then gives the recruiting of a new force and its successful expedition.

He had met some American trappers who promised assistance. He also wrote Don Enrique Avila who promised ten men. "He came with us and we started 21 strong." Some seven or eight days' march brought them to the rendezvous near the Mohave river, Wilson says:

"We discovered an Indian village and I at once directed my men to divide in two parties to surround and attack the village. We did it successfully, but as on the former occasion the men in the place would not surrender and on my endeavoring to persuade them to give up, they shot one of my men Evan Callaghan in the back. I thought he was mortally wounded and commanded my men to fire. The fire was kept up until every Indian was slain.

I took the women and children prisoners, and we found we had to remain there over night on account of the suffering of our wounded.

Fortunately the next morning we were able to travel and we marched on our return home bringing the women and children.

We found that these women could speak Spanish very well, and had

been neophytes, and that the men we had killed had been the same who had defeated my command the first time and were likewise Mission Indians.

We turned the women and children over to the Mission San Gabriel where they remained. These campaigns left our district wholly free from Indian depredations till after the change of government.

'Our march this time was through the San Gorgonio Pass where the railroad now runs. Our object being this time to capture two renegade neophytes who had taken up their residence among the Cahuillas and corrupted many of the young men of the tribe with whom they carried on constant depredations on the ranchmen of this district.

At the head of the desert in the place called Agua Caliente we were met by the chief of the Cahuillas whose name was Cabezon (big head) with about 20 picked followers, to remonstrate upon our going upon a campaign against his people for he had ever been good and friendly to the whites. I made known to him I had no desire to wage war on the Cahuillas as I knew them to be what he said of them but that I had come with the determination of seizing the two renegade Christians who were continually depredating on our people. (The chief urged there was no water or grass in the country. Wilson seized him, placed him under arrest and told him a white man who had had long experience could go wherever an Indian could.) "I then told him that there were but two ways to settle the matter. One was for me to march forward with my command looking upon the Indians I met as enemies till I got hold of the Christians, the other way was for him to detach some of his twenty men and bring the two robbers dead or alive to my camp." (He protested but finally arranged that if Wilson would release his brother and some others he and others would remain as hostages, and Adam his brother would bring the malefactors to him if Wilson would wait where he was in camp.)

"I at once accepted his petition and released Adam and the other twelve, and let them have their arms. I told them to go on their errand but asking how many days they would require to accomplish it. They asked for two days and nights. We stayed there that night and all the next day with the most oppressive heat I have ever experienced. It was so hot that we could not sit down but had to stand up and fan ourselves with our hats. The ground would burn us when we attempted to sit. Late the following night the chief called me, and asked me to put my ear to the ground, stating that he heard a noise and his men were coming. I did as he desired and heard a rumbling noise which at every moment became clearer. In the course of an hour we could begin to hear the voices and the old chief remarked to me with satisfaction that it was all right, he could tell by the singing of his men that they had been successful in the errand. I ordered

thirty men to mount their horses and go to meet them to see if it was all right as it was impossible those Indians were coming with hostile views. In due time the horsemen came back and reported that they believed all was right. I had my men under arms and waited the arrival of the party which consisted of forty or fifty warriors. Adam ordered the party to halt some 400 yards from my camp, himself and another companion advancing each one carrying the head of one of the malefactors which they threw at my feet with evident marks of pleasure at the successful results of the expedition. Adam at this same time showing me an arrow wound in one of his thighs which he had received in the skirmish that took place against those two christians and their friends.

Several others had been wounded but none killed except the two renegade christians. By this time, day was breaking and we started on our return. The campaign being at an end we left the Indians with the two heads. We took our departure from Aqua Caliente after giving them all our spare rations which were very considerable as they had been prepared in expectation of a long campaign."

Thus the old mission days passed away and many an Indian heart burned itself out with slow fires of hate. Among the thousands there it would be a miracle, were it not so and yet the strange part of it is that writers and historians seemed to have almost entirely overlooked the renegade element, or if not, they have under estimated its strength. Surely it is picturesque and dramatic enough even in the fine illustrative cases I have presented. Think of the night when the Lugos lay in wait in the dark cañon and a straying team carrying two ghastly corpses over our fertile plains, of the armed men facing each other in savage sullen silence in the court, the night ride and gathering of the Indian clans, the battle and calvary skirmish and the massacre and the carrying away of the remnant of the party thus exterminating a village, and the long homeward procession drawing near to our old Mission to deliver the remnant of the women and children within the walls that there enclosed the grounds, of a half savage Indian lying mortally wounded on the bare earth and cursing his life away in torrents of rage as his followers fight to the death against the foe, of what must have taken place on the two days' journey that resulted in the returning band of singing Indians as they bore the heads of the renegades in proof of their success and thereby to obtain the ransom of their chief who had stood and suffered in the camp of the white men during the awful heat, think of the runaways and captures, of the branding and cropping, of the plots and trials, the daring endeavors, the night raids of stock, the ambush for the travelers, the long journeys for help and organization of marauding bands, the councils and the laconic eloquence; and a picture arises of a part of the mission life that is strangely at variance from

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the popular acceptance and causes the traveler who revisits these locations to pause and gaze upon the ruined structure of mission, ranch and village with feelings in which admiration, pity and regret are strangely mingled.