From the online library at www.worldwisdom.com

THE KATO

THERE were in California two areas inhabited by branches of the great Athapascan stock. In the extreme northwestern corner of the state, and extending into Oregon, was the Tolowa group of settlements. In Humboldt county, separated from the Tolowa by the Algonquian Yurok, were people speaking three other Athapascan dialects: first, the Hupa, on the lower course of Trinity river, and the slightly differentiated Chilula and Whilkut on Redwood creek; second, the Mattole group, on the coast at Cape Mendocino, with small settlements on Bear creek and Mattole river; third, the Wailaki group, in Humboldt county, northern Mendocino, and the extreme southwestern corner of Trinity. The occupied areas are now greatly restricted.

The Tolowa and Hupa, belonging to that highly specialized culture area of extreme northwestern California, have been described in the preceding volume. The Mattole were all but exterminated about 1860, and little can be said of them. The Wailaki group, and particularly the bands that speak the sub-dialects Kato and Wailaki, are to be discussed in the following pages.

The Wailaki group includes five sub-dialects, or what might be called five tribes, if only the people were somewhat more definitely organized on tribal lines.

Farthest north of this group were the Nongatl, on the middle course of Mad river above Blue Lake (the inland limit of the Algonquian Wiyot territory).

South of them were the Lassik, on the upper course of Mad river, and on Eel river and its eastern affluents from the mouth of Van Doosen creek (the limit of the Eel River Wiyot) up to Kekawaka creek.

Still farther southward were the Wailaki proper, on Eel river and its north fork, from Kekawaka creek to Yuki territory at Round valley.

The Sinkyone territory lay west of the Lassik and Wailaki, principally on the lower South fork of Eel river, and was bounded on its own western frontier by the Mattole in the north and the ocean from Point Delgada to Usal creek in the south.

Farthest south of all the Athapascans in California, in a sinus that pushes well down into Yuki territory and all but bisects it, were the Kato, occupying in particular Cahto and Long valleys, and in general the country south of Blue Rock and between the headwaters of the

two main branches of Eel river. This region lies among the rolling hills of the western part of the Coast range. It is veined with streams, most of which during the long, dry summers become considerably attenuated, but are swollen into torrents by the heavy rains of winter. Deer are still abundant in the loftier hills.

The name Kato is a word occurring in varying forms in several Pomo dialects, and means lake. The Yuki call the inhabitants of Cahto valley Lál-shiik-no'm ("lake black tribe"), and those of Long valley Kolúkum-no'm ("other valley tribe"). To the Wailaki they are known collectively as To-chéhl-keyan ("water wet tribe"), but for themselves they have no collective name, although the inhabitants of Long valley, of whom there were formerly six villages, called themselves Tlokyáhan ("grass tribe").

The Kato had for their neighbors the Athapascan Sinkyone and Wailaki on the north and northeast respectively, the Yuki and Huchnom on the east, and the Coast Yuki on the west; while southward were the northern Pomo, who, though separated from them by a narrow strip of Yuki territory, were their best friends. To their congeners, the Sinkyone and the Wailaki, no less than to the alien Yuki, the Kato were hostile, the commonest cause of war being trespass. These northern and eastern neighbors would frequently set fire to the brush on Black Rock mountain, either by accident or with the intention of making a game drive; and the Kato, because this was a place where they garnered food, would proceed against their enemies. The fighting seldom resulted in more than one or two fatalities.

Expeditions were made to Blue Rock, about twenty miles northward, where they exchanged baskets, arrows, and clothing for similar articles of the Wailaki; and to the coast, where they obtained shell-fish and seaweed by their own exertions.

There is a very definite tradition, which is recounted also by the Pomo at Sherwood and Ukiah, to the effect that in the beginning of the nineteenth century a party of white men, mounted on large pinto horses and armed with muskets, came into the country from the southeast and lived there one summer. Some of them spoke Indian languages, but among themselves they used a foreign tongue. They gambled with round, black cards and ate the usual Indian food. They gave the natives to understand that they were the returned dead of the tribe, and to prove it they would lead them to the graves which, they asserted, were

the ones in which they had been buried. When one of them found a woman who had been a widow, he would claim her as his former wife, and she would come to live with him again. When they were ready to depart, some of the Indians who thought that their deceased relatives were among the number wished to accompany them, but the visitors declared that they could not go until they had died. The father of the informant was a boy at that time and saw the strange men frequently. To this day the Kato believe that these visitors were the returned dead. It is scarcely to be doubted that they were Mexicans, who were keen enough to play upon Indian credulity in order to secure food, wives, and immunity from attack.

The Kato manufactured such articles of stone, bone, horn, wood, and skin as were commonly made in northern California. Their baskets were of the usual shape and for the usual purposes, but included some made by the process of coiling, which appears in the work of no other tribe this far north, except the neighboring Wailaki. This is probably the result of Pomo influence.

The primitive costume for men and women was a tanned deerskin wrapped about the waist, and a close-fitting knitted cap, which kept in place the knot of hair at the back of the head. Moccasins were unknown. At a later period the Kato garment was a shirt made of two deerskins, laced down the front and reaching to the knees; and deerskin moccasins were sometimes used. Women, and sometimes men, had ear-pendants made of Xerophyllum grass woven into a ring and painted, and ceremonial belts were made by stringing very large pinecones. Both men and women quite generally had tattooed on the face and the chest designs consisting largely of upright lines, both broken and straight. The needle was a sharp splinter of deer-bone, and the pigment was spruce pitch blackened by heating in the smoke of tan-bark.

In constructing a Kato house a circular excavation about two feet deep was prepared, and in it at the corners of a square were erected four forked posts, the front pair being a little higher than the other, so that the roof would have a slight pitch to the rear. House timbers were generally obtained among the drift brought down by freshets, and were used without preparation by cutting or shaping. Sometimes they were necessarily carried long distances. One plate timber extended across the rear, another across the front, and these two beams supported rafters, across which were laid rough slabs split with elk-horn wedge and

stone hammer from pine or spruce logs. Then several layers of pine- or spruce-bark were applied, and sometimes a final covering of earth. In erecting the very sloping walls, poles were leaned against the edge of the roof with their base inside the excavation, an arrangement that resulted in a structure approaching the frustrum of a cone, in spite of the square roof. The roof was in fact so small that it was of much less importance in determining the final shape of the house than was the circularity of the base. The apertures between the poles were stuffed with bunches of long grass, and slabs of wood and bark were set up. Finally the excavated earth was thrown up against the walls. An opening in the roof served to carry off smoke, and the doorway was a narrow opening in front from ground to roof. As many as three families occupied one of these exceedingly rude little hovels, all cooking at the same fire; and on occasion twenty people could assemble in one of them.

The conical ceremonial house, or sweat-house, was built over an excavation three or four feet deep, in the centre of which was set a single forked post of green oak about eighteen inches in diameter. Six heavy beams were leaned from the crotch to the edge of the pit, other smaller rafters were leaned against these main timbers, and a layer of slabs was succeeded by a thatch of long mountain grass and finally a thick coat of earth. A smoke-vent was left in the top, and a low door in one side. This structure was used for dances or any public meeting, as well as for communal sweating by men. It was cared for by the family that occupied it.

For summer camps brush leantos were hastily set up.

The Kato Indians used for food almost every living creature found in their country, the principal exceptions being the predaceous birds, serpents, and most of the carnivorous beasts, such as grizzly bear, coyote, wolf, weasel, mink, and otter. On the other hand, black bears, foxes, wildcats, and cougars were eaten. The staple foods, however, were dried salmon and the natural products of the soil, particularly the seeds of tarweed and other plants, and acorns.

The number of plants that yielded food was very large, including five species of oak and eight other trees bearing nuts or fruit, besides twelve or more root-bearing and at least seventeen seed-bearing species.

The dog was the only domesticated animal. A legend declares that the first dogs were obtained somewhere in the north by men who had

spread snares in front of a rocky cave and scattered partially decayed meat about the place. In those early times dogs were very valuable, and not many possessed them. Sometimes young coyotes were caught and at maturity were bred with female dogs.

Like other Athapascans of the Pacific area the Kato were not professional warriors fighting for pleasure and glory, but when their rights were invaded they could make war with ferocity. Before going to war members of the expedition made incantations against the enemy. Some man who understood this magic held up a piece of coyote sinew and uttered certain formulas, which the others, standing behind him, repeated after him; and then in unison all expelled their breath forcibly toward the enemy's country.

When the Kato killed an enemy, whether man or woman, they cut off the head and tore off with it as much skin from the shoulders and the back as possible. After their victorious return, an old man whose business this was prepared the trophy by removing from the skull all the skin except that of the face, reversing it over his knee and so scraping out the fleshy bits that still adhered to it, and stuffing it with dry grass. He placed skewers in the skin to keep it stretched while drying, and finally tied it to a stake which he set up in the ground.

The war-dance always occurred at the same place, and inside a brush enclosure. When all the inhabitants of the neighboring villages had assembled, there was a feast in which the custodian of the scalp had no part until all the others had eaten, after which a portion of food was thrown to him. He sat there all greasy and filthy, laid the food in the dirt, and devoured it like a beast. Then he danced, and uttered threats and insults directed toward the enemy. The ensuing performance of the warriors was of the usual kind, and during its progress the scalp was turned toward the enemy's country, while its custodian spoke insultingly to it and to the enemy as a whole.

Throughout central California there is found a very definite, and at times defiant, belief in the former existence, even within the memory of persons now living, of men who personated grizzly-bears for the purpose of more easily taking human life. Among the Yokuts and the Miwok these bear-shamans lived for a time with the bears, were instructed by them, and so acquired the power to transform themselves into bears. The Yuki shaman first dreamed of bears, and then was instructed by them. The Pomo bear-men possessed the strength,

cunning, and swiftness of bears merely by wearing bear-skin suits; and they killed, principally among their own people, for mere pleasure. Among the Kato these personators of bears are said to have confined their depredations to hostile tribes, and like the Pomo they claimed no relations with the bear spirits. How much truth there is in these statements can no longer be proved. However, considering the frequency of the known use of bear-skin costumes by tribes outside this area, it is entirely possible that these bear personators actually existed, and only their fabulous instruction and exploits are imagined.

Certain active men, say the Kato, were trained to personate bears, and those who proved the swiftest runners were provided with bear-skins cut to fit the body and stitched together. The skin was stiffened with a lining of slats of yew, so that arrows could not pierce it. The tongue was a piece of abalone-shell on a deerskin thong; for a grizzly-bear's lolling tongue is said to be noticeably shiny. Sometimes two long pieces of obsidian or flint were stuck into the eye-sockets, for the avowed purpose of piercing an enemy if the bear-man happened to dash into him. The bear-shamans carried long knives, and sharply crooked yew staffs with which to catch the ankles of enemies fleeing in the brush. Sometimes, but not always, several of these men would accompany a war-party. They would send scouts to an enemy village, to listen outside the houses at night and learn where the people were going on the following day; and at that place they would lie in wait. Or if they found a place where deer-snares had been set, they would conceal themselves there.

In the summer succeeding the training of new bear-men, a war-party including the bears and two young women would invade the enemy's country and remain there for a long time. When they started out, or perhaps before that, a certain old man would rub bear's dung vigorously across the abdomen of these women, and they would quickly conceive and produce cubs. It is quite possible that a pair of cubs was actually captured and passed off as the progeny of the women. When it proved very difficult to find the enemy in a situation favorable for attack, they would tie these young bears in the undergrowth, and the enemy, hearing them cry, and coming to capture them, would fall an easy prey to the marauders. It is said that these bear-men could approach quite closely without detection. They were greatly feared, and men always tried to elude rather than to resist them, perhaps because

it was impossible to pierce their armor. They were called *nónihlsai* ("bear dry," perhaps in allusion to the drying of the rawhide suit), and like bears they ate roots of the plant *nónich-paghécho,* which was supposed to make them overwhelmingly strong.

As the games of the Kato were exactly like those of the Wailaki, to be described later, it is unnecessary to enumerate them here.

A favorite pastime for the females of a village was to assemble early in the evening for singing in chorus. One of the best singers would lead, and two others kept time by striking one bone with another. They all sat on the ground in the open, and sang one song after another, far into the night. The men took no part, but stood or sat about and listened.

Here, as generally throughout California, there was no true tribal organization. The term Kato is merely a convenience for the ethnologist, and the people whom it includes, though they spoke one language and were aware of their own common ethnic origin, had no feeling of political solidarity. It is true that here and there are the rudiments, or perhaps the vestiges, of tribal organization. Thus, the people of the six villages in Long valley had a collective name for themselves. Whether this was the beginning or the end of a closer association, whether the prehistoric development was in the direction of concentration or dispersion, is a matter of theory. If the Kato exhibited any trace of a clanship system, this would be a fairly good indication of the former existence of closer tribal relations; for it is difficult to conceive of true clans without a true tribe. But the total absence of any such trace must be held to be purely negative testimony, since true tribal organization is by no means invariably accompanied by the development of a system of clans or gentes.

Each village had its chief, and some villages a second chief. Generally the chief's son succeeded to the office, but if a head-man died without sons, the people by common consent and without formal voting selected from the membership of the whole band the man whom they regarded as best fitted for the place. The duty of a chief was to be the adviser of his people. At frequent intervals he would stand in front of his house and harangue the people, who at once would cease their activities and listen to the speech, but without assembling.

When anything of great importance was to be decided, the village chief summoned the council, which consisted of all the elder men. Each expressed his opinion, and if there was a strong consensus unfa-

vorable to the plan of the chief, he yielded.

Many of the social practices of the Kato show how strongly they were influenced by the culture of north-central California. In this category are the societies of magicians, the ceremonial instruction and initiation of young boys, and the mourning ceremony.

The society of magicians gave each summer a public exhibition called Chustínpuhlpeategh (*chustín,* lounging about). A small number of young men, usually about ten, were initiated each year, and the best of each group became the instructors of future initiates. The new members and their instructors remained in the ceremonial house six days, at the end of which time the people assembled for the public performance for which the initiates had been practising. Meantime the centre-post had been carefully smoothed and rubbed with soap-plant (*Chlorogalum pomeridianum*), so that it was very slippery. A hollow half-log about ten feet long was turned with the convex surface uppermost, on which one of the initiates danced, causing it to resound under the blows of his feet, while another sang. A third initiate went to the centre-post and climbed it, feet foremost, drawn upward by an unseen rope. At the top he swung in air, head downward, and then suddenly dropped, turned in mid-air, and landed on his feet.

A few old men constituted the membership of another society, which performed the ceremony called Tsunighúlsin. They met in the winter, and their initiates are said to have remained in the ceremonial house four months, while the old men themselves went in and out as they pleased. Their exhibition consisted of various tricks, such as causing a man to materialize out of the smoke of the fire, throwing one of their number out through the smoke-hole, dragging a man into the embers of a fire. Women were not admitted to the performance, and some of the men were required to pay for the privilege of observing it.

At an early age children were nicknamed from some peculiarity of action, disposition, or physique; and such names sometimes became permanent. Children of both sexes were required to observe certain rites at the age of puberty.

Annually in midsummer a group of boys, ranging from twelve to perhaps sixteen years of age, were led out to a solitary place by two men, one of whom was the teacher, the other of whom merely looked on to make certain that the instructor did not err. The teacher was called *kashghúni,* the initiates were *tiyínun.* The instructor smeared

charcoal paste over the entire bodies of his pupils, and they remained away from the village three days, during which time they received instruction in mythology and the supposed origin of customs, such as the mortuary rites, shamanistic practices, puberty observances. After three days they returned to the village and in single-file marched into the ceremonial house, turned to the right inside the door, and sat down. All the people assembled, and the *kashghúni* gave his pupils a final exhortation, after which they washed off the charcoal at the river. They returned to the house, and a feast was held.

In the winter these boys assembled in the ceremonial house and remained there during the four winter months for instruction in tribal lore. At the end of that time the people, previously informed on what day the boys would be released, assembled in the ceremonial house, and each boy in his turn arose and repeated something of what he had learned. A feast of course concluded the rites.

At puberty a girl began to live for five months a very quiet and abstemious life, remaining always in or near the house, abstaining from meat, and drinking little water. She was not permitted to work, lest she catch cold. At the end of five months all the people of the neighborhood were invited to a feast, and the afternoon and evening were devoted to dancing by all the women and girls, including the principal herself. Late at night there was a final feast.

Marriage was arranged between the two persons concerned without consulting anybody else. Having secured a girl's consent her lover went clandestinely that night to sleep with her, and at dawn he stole away. The secret was preserved as long as possible, perhaps for several days, and the news of the match transpired without formal announcement, even the girl's parents learning of their daughter's marriage in this indirect fashion. His marriage no longer a secret, the young man might then erect a house of his own. The bond was no more easily tied than loosed, for either could leave the other for any reason whatever, the man retaining the male children and the woman the female. Children were not regarded as belonging any more to the paternal than to the maternal side. When adultery was discovered, the only result was a little bickering and perhaps an invitation to the offender to take up permanent relations with the new love.

In preparation for burial a corpse was washed, clothed in good garments, and wrapped in deerskins. Meantime several men, with sharp

dibbles and shallow baskets, excavated on a dry hillside a grave equal in depth to a man's height, and sometimes even deeper, so that the digger had to be lifted out by other men. In the bottom of the pit they laid a floor of poles covered with bark and several deerskins, and on this deposited the corpse, covering it with bark before throwing in the earth. Sometimes the dead person's trinkets or implements were buried with him, sometimes not; but food was never deposited at the grave. The entire population accompanied the bearers to the grave, and wailed loudly. Women, and occasionally men, cut the hair short as a symbol of grief.

For persons of prominence a mourning ceremony was held in the year following their death. On the appointed day several men gathered large quantities of wood at the grave and built a fire, into which people from all the surrounding country cast valued possessions, such as baskets and skins, as a token of their sorrow. This was regarded as a means of terminating the period of mourning, and those who had hitherto wept became immediately cheerful and smiling.

The religious conceptions of the Kato are grouped about two mythological characters, Chénesh, the creator, who is identified with thunder and lightning, and his companion Nághai-cho ("walker great"). The latter is a somewhat mischievous personage, who in the myth constantly urges Chénesh to acts of creation while pretending that he himself has the knowledge and power to perform them if only he desired to exercise his ability. He is quite plainly cast in the rôle so commonly played by Coyote, the semi-benevolent, semi-evil assistant of the creator; and the whole of Kato mythology as it applies to genesis is no less plainly derived from Yuki mythology (or at least from the same source as Yuki), with its Taikó-mol and Coyote. Curiously, the similarity in the names Taikó-mol ("solitude walker") and Nághai-cho ("walker great") is not accompanied by similarity in character; for Taikó-mol is the all-powerful, well-wishing creator, while Nághai-cho is the mischief-maker.

Nághai-cho was on occasion represented by a masked actor made up as a giant, whom certain men would call out of the woods for the mystification of the people and the instruction of children, as well as to cure those who had fallen ill through meeting him in the forest. He spun about like a top, and when he walked it was backward. His costume was a full suit and head-dress of buzzard-feathers, and a black

stick about four feet long extending upward at the back of his head.

A legend relates that on a certain occasion when followers of the Nághai-cho cult were being proselyted, a certain man said he did not believe in Nághai-cho; and on that very day, in spite of the order that no one should go forth from the village, lest Nághai-cho destroy him, this man took two boys and went hunting squirrels. He found a place where a squirrel came out from under a rock, and killed it with a stick. Others came out and were killed. Gradually the rock raised itself until he could walk under, which he did, still killing squirrels. Suddenly the rock fell and crushed him. Men tried to raise it, but could not, so they called Nághaicho, who with the end of his crest-stick pried it up. They gathered up the remains of the dead man and buried them.

Very reminiscent of a belief prevalent on the North Pacific coast from Oregon to southeastern Alaska is the Kato conception of a huge, woodland ogress with some of the physical characteristics of the bear, a notably simple mentality, and a fondness for the flesh of human beings, whom she carried home in a basket on her back. The Kato call this creature *chuntanástepats* (*chúnta,* in the forest), and imagine her as very broad and squat, with the feet of a bear and long, canine teeth. The following legend was related by an informant with full conviction of its truth.

Utsaíts, a young man known to my father, was the last in a line of hunters who were driving deer toward some snares. As he passed a tree, a *chuntanástepats* leaped upon him, threw him over her shoulder into a very large basket, and carried him off. She kept striking the edge of the basket with a heavy stick, so that he dared not attempt to escape lest the club crush his skull. Up the mountainside she went. He noticed that when she came to a nearly prostrate tree or log, she would never walk around it, but always crept under it. So he awaited his chance, and when she passed under a certain leaning live-oak of which he knew, he threw his arms about it and drew himself out of the basket. She went on. Utsaíts then came back as rapidly as he could, and reaching a double-trunked oak he climbed into it with the intention of crossing to the other bole if she pursued him. Soon she came running back, looking here and there, but she could not see him. She began to repeat the movements she had made in passing there before, saying, "Here I stepped this way, here I stepped so, here I stopped." And all the time she made grotesque motions with the purpose of making him

laugh if he were thereabouts, and so betray his hiding-place. At last, however, she went on, and the young man ran to the village. At first the people would not believe his story, but when he led them up the hill and showed them the tree in which he had concealed himself, and his bow and arrows thrown aside, then they believed.[1]

The conception of enormous birds of prey is also a feature of northwestern mythology, though by no means uncommon in other areas. The Kato call this monster *ténátul.*

Three young men were running down a large elk, as they used to do on hot summer days. At dusk they lost the trail and stopped where they were, and in the morning they tried to recover the trail, but after searching a long time they gave up. Then one of them, happening to look up, saw the elk in the top of a large tree, and beside it a tremendous bird asleep. It was so large that they feared to shoot it, and stole away without a sound.

The shamans of the Kato were of three classes: the *utiyín,* who removed, by sucking, the foreign object that caused, or rather was, the disease; the *náchuhlna,* who by the use of uncouth costumes and grotesque antics cured illness caused by fabulous woodland creatures; and the *chghályish,* who were not healers at all, but the restored victims of the diminutive" outside people," possessing the faculty of foreseeing the future in dreams. The *utiyín* became medicine-men by instruction, not by supposedly supernatural agencies; but the others acquired their power solely through dreams. When the old men of a village deemed it advisable to have a new "sucking doctor," either because of the death of some of the shamans or because of their waning power, the active and the retired shamans selected a promising young man, and with his consent took him away from the village to a solitary place in the hills. There he removed his clothing, and one who had been selected to be his instructor and "father" covered the body of the novice with charcoal paste and thrust the quill-end of a buzzard wing-feather down the initiate's throat until only the tip was visible. Then he prayed, and instructed the young man in the secrets of the medicine-men, while

1 The adventurous sailor who exhibited the tiger-skin as proof conclusive that he had throttled the ferocious animal with his bare hands would have been delighted with an audience half so credulous.

the others sat in a row and listened. After a while they began to say repeatedly: "It is growing hot in his stomach. You had better take it out." The initiator then grasped the tip of the feather and drew it out. Sometimes blood would follow, sometimes not. The appearance of blood was regarded as a very favorable sign, an augury that when the new medicine-man sucked disease from a patient's body the sickness would be unable to descend into his throat; but if no blood appeared with the feather, it might well be that sickness would be able to go down into his stomach. This completed the initiation of the new shaman, and the men returned home, where they let it become known that there was a new medicine-man. When someone fell ill, not too seriously ill, the new healer was called, and his instructor accompanied him to see that he followed the proper procedure.

When a medicine-man was summoned, any others of that profession who happened to be near could come and observe. Songs and the use of a rattle generally accompanied the sucking, one shaman using the rattle and singing while he who had been called by the patient sucked out the disease. Shamans' rattles were of two kinds: a split-elder baton, and four or five oak-galls containing pebbles and hanging on cords at the end of a wooden handle. If the singer made any mistake, he perforce stopped and promised to pay the head shaman for his error. When the sickness was withdrawn by the sucking, the medicine-man showed the people some small black object in his hand, declaring it to be the disease itself.

If the medicine-man first called upon could not effect a cure, he would ask the assistance of one more capable than himself. When the patient belonged to a family of means, the shaman was apt to make little effort to cure until they had hung up in the house a much larger quantity of shell money than they had at first offered. Then he called in another shaman to help him, and later divided the fee with him. Failure to cure, or even to save life, made no difference in the amount of the fee, which was always paid upon the conclusion of the medicine-man's treatment.

While engaged in his work a shaman would beseech the unnamed powers for help, naming the various mountains of the region and asking the spirits there resident to assist him. He would call also on Nághaicho, whom the shamans named Sh'tá'chun ("my father of all"), and occasionally on Chénesh.

If the frequency with which the Kato mention the subject is a valid indication, there must have been many cases of sickness that was assigned to fright resulting from a casual encounter with some fabulous creature. In fact any illness unaccountable in its origin and incurable by ordinary means was apt to be explained by this hypothesis. Sickness of that sort was treated by the *náchuhlna,* who acquired their power through dreams. When their services were required, several of them would go to the forest and dress themselves in grotesque costumes, with large baskets on their heads, strange objects hanging from their ears, slabs of wood tied about their bodies in lieu of clothing. Thus arrayed they would return to the place where the sick person lay, and the head shaman would point to each one in turn and ask if that were the one that had frightened him into sickness. The sufferer would indicate some one of them, and it was believed that looking at this one and beholding how harmless he really was would cause recovery.

If the shamans decided that Nághai-cho was the cause of the sickness, preparations were made to confront the patient with his personator. After they had performed their incantations for a time there was an answering call from the forest, and a confederate representing Nághai-cho would emerge, walking backward in order that his glance might not fall on the people and kill them. On such an occasion there were strict orders to remain in the village and not walk about in the woods, lest Nághai-cho be encountered with fatal results. Women and young people remained at some distance from the place where the sick person was exposed under a brush shelter at the edge of the forest. There many strings of beads and other articles of value were hung, professedly a reward for Nághai-cho. While all the medicine-men sang, one of their number, whose face was blackened, kept time with a split-elder baton. Nághai-cho went straight to the sick man and walked four times around him, each time feeling the patient's head; but suddenly the medicine-men grasped sticks and drove him back into the woods, where they were supposed to imprison him in a hollow tree and admonish him not to molest and frighten people. Thence they returned to the sick man's shelter and feasted. The head shaman took the reward.

Sometimes a person would have what apparently was a fit of insanity, which the Kato attributed to his having encountered in the night one of the *taí-kyáhan* ("outside people"). These beings were

quite black, and small in stature. To combat this affliction the *náchuhlna* sang, shook their rattles, and called on the "outside people." Suddenly several of these creatures appeared, or it was pretended that they appeared. A medicine-man shot, one of the *taí-kyáhan* fell, and the others disappeared. The shamans leaped upon the fallen one, covered it with brush, and in a short time carried it away to a secluded place.[2] The patient then recovered, but always remained subject to fits of insanity, in which he wandered about the village at night, shouting and singing; and he had dreams in which future events were foreseen. For instance, he might dream that on the morrow the men would go hunting and would kill four deer, no more. When this dream was made known, the chief would of course bid his hunters go forth, and they would kill just four deer. Surely not a remarkable instance of prophecy.

The tribal, or intertribal, ceremony of the Kato was called Nóchughukán, or Chagháyilchín. It was held either in the ceremonial house in winter or in a brush enclosure in summer. Any man who had the means to feed a large number of guests could initiate a performance, first having notified the chief, who at the proper time would send messengers to invite the various neighboring villagers. Dancing occurred in the afternoon and evening for nearly a week, men and woman performing at the same time. Both sexes wore a head-dress consisting of a band of yellowhammer tail-feathers extending across the forehead, and a bunch of crow-feathers at the back of the head. Men had also a feather coat and a breech-cloth of thick, soft deerskin, and an entire deerskin wrapped about the waist and hips. The women wore deerskin skirts. Men, and sometimes women, used whistles made of the leg-bones of jack-rabbits. During the course of the meeting there was a great deal of admonitory speech-making by the headmen, and this reached its culmination on the last day, when the head-man of each visiting band delivered a rather extended sermon. In conclusion the chief of the local village made a long harangue, recounting the story of the creation and the institution of various customs, and advising the people how they should live. He then announced that after a rest of

2 Whether the shamans left the appearance of the "outside people" entirely to the imagination, or employed sleight-of-hand, could not be learned from any informant.

two or three days there would be a great hunt, but in the meantime there would be without further delay an inter-village gambling contest at the grass game.

In mythology as in other phases of their culture the Kato show their susceptibility to the double influence to which they have been exposed. With a fairly logical story of an actual creation, of the type prevailing in central California, they precede it with an account of a race of animal-people who were swept from the earth by the deluge — a theme characteristic of North Pacific Coast mythology.

The creator Chénesh, who is identified with lightning, dwelt in the sky. Below was an expanse of water with a rim of land in the north. With his companion Nághai-cho ("walker great") he descended and turned a monstrous deer into land. He created people, but Nághai-Cho made the mountains and the streams. In everything the latter tried to outdo Chénesh, playing the role usually assigned to Coyote, the buffoon and trickster, in the mythology of central California.

"The Kato"

From

The North American Indian: Volume 14

by Edwards S. Curtis

All Rights Reserved. For Personal Usage Only

www.worldwisdom.com