

*The* SHIRLEY LETTERS *from*  
CALIFORNIA *Mines*  
*In* 1851-52

*Being a* SERIES of TWENTY-THREE LETTERS *from*

DAME SHIRLEY

(MRS. LOUISE AMELIA KNAPP SMITH CLAPPE)

*To her* SISTER *in* MASSACHUSETTS

*And now* REPRINTED *from the*

PIONEER MAGAZINE

*of* 1854-55

WITH

SYNOPSIS *of the* LETTERS, a FOREWORD, *and* MANY

TYPOGRAPHICAL *and other* CORRECTIONS

*and* EMENDATIONS, *by*

THOMAS C. RUSSELL

*Together with* "An APPRECIATION" *by*

MRS. M. V. T. LAWRENCE

ILLUSTRATED

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You will hear in the same day, almost at the same time, the lofty melody of the Spanish language, the piquant polish of the French (which, though not a *musical* tongue, is the most *useful* of them all), the silver, changing clearness of the Italian, the harsh gangle of the German, the hissing precision of the English, the liquid sweetness of the Kanaka, and the sleep-inspiring languor of the East Indian. To complete the catalogue, there is the *native* Indian, with his guttural vocabulary of twenty words! When I hear these sounds, so strangely different, and look at the speakers, I fancy them a living polyglot of the languages, a perambulating picture-gallery illustrative of national variety in form and feature.

By the way, speaking of languages, nothing is more amusing than to observe the different styles in which the generality of Americans talk *at* the unfortunate Spaniard. In the first place, many of them really believe that when they have learned *sabe* and *vamos* (two words which they seldom use in the right place), *poco tiempo*, *si*, and *bueno* (the last they *will* persist in pronouncing *whayno*), they have the whole of the glorious Castilian at their tongue's end. Some, however, eschew the above words entirely, and innocently fancy that by split-

with which he had conveyed his burden across the brook. In a few moments we alighted at the store, which is owned by some friends of F., whom we found looking like so many great daisies in their new shirts of pink calico, which had been donned in honor of our expected arrival.

The Junction is the most beautiful of all the bars. From the store one can walk nearly a mile down the river quite easily. The path is bordered by a row of mingled oaks and firs, the former garlanded with mistletoe, and the latter embroidered with that exquisitely beautiful moss which I tried to describe in one of my first letters.

The little Kanaka woman lives here. I went to see her. She is quite pretty, with large lustrous eyes, and two great braids of hair which made me think of black satin cables, they were so heavy and massive. She has good teeth, a sweet smile, and a skin not much darker than that of a French brunette. I never saw any creature so proud as she, almost a child herself, was of her baby. In jest, I asked her to give it to me, and really was almost alarmed at the vehement burst of tears with which she responded to my request. Her husband explained the cause of her distress. It is a superstition among her people that he who refuses to give

another anything, no matter what, – there are no exceptions which that other may ask for, – will be overwhelmed with the most dreadful misfortunes. Her own parents had parted with her for the same reason. Her pretty girlish face soon resumed its smiles when I told her that I was in jest, and, to console me for the disappointment which she thought I must feel at not obtaining her little brown treasure, she promised to give me the *next* one! It is a Kanaka custom to make a present to the person calling upon them for the first time, in accordance with which habit I received a pair of dove-colored boots three sizes too large for me.

I should have liked to visit the Indian encampment which lies a few miles from The Junction, but was too much fatigued to attempt it. The Indians often visit us, and as they seldom wear anything but a *very* tight and *very* short shirt, they have an appearance of being, as Charles Dickens would say, all legs. They usually sport some kind of a head-dress, if it is nothing more than a leather string, which they bind across their dusky brows in the style of the wreaths in Norma, or the gay ribbons garlanding the hair of the Roman youth in the play of Brutus. A friend of ours, who has visited their camp several times, has just given me a de-

scription of their mode of life. Their huts, ten or twelve in number, are formed of the bark of the pine, conically shaped, plastered with mud, and with a hole in the top, whence emerges the smoke, which rises from a fire built in the center of the apartment. These places are so low that it is quite impossible to stand upright in them, and are entered from a small hole in one side, on all fours. A large stone, sunk to its surface in the ground, which contains three or four pan-like hollows for the purpose of grinding acorns and nuts, is the only furniture which these huts contain. The women, with another stone, about a foot and a half in length and a little larger than a man's wrist, pulverize the acorns to the finest possible powder, which they prepare for the table (?) in the following manner. Their cooking utensils consist of a kind of basket, woven of some particular species of reed, I should fancy, from the descriptions which I have had of them, and are so plaited as to be impervious to fluids. These they fill half full of water, which is made to boil by placing in it hot stones. The latter they drag from the fire with two sticks. When the water boils, they stir into it, until it is about as thick as hasty-pudding, the powdered acorns, delicately flavored with dried grasshoppers, and lo! dinner is ready.

Would you like to know how they eat? They place the thumb and little finger together across the palm of the hand, and make of the other three fingers a spoon, with which they shovel into their capacious mouths this delicious compound.

There are about eighty Indians in all at this encampment, a very small portion of which number are women. A hostile tribe in the valley made a Sabine-like invasion upon the settlement a few months since, and stole away all the young and fair muchachas, leaving them but a few old squaws. These poor withered creatures, who are seldom seen far from the encampment, do all the drudgery. Their entire wardrobe consists of a fringe about two feet in length, which is formed of the branch or root – I cannot ascertain exactly which – of a peculiar species of shrub shredded into threads. This scanty costume they festoon several times about the person, fastening it just above the hips, and they generally appear in a startlingly unsophisticated state of almost entire nudity. They are very filthy in their habits, and my informant said that if one of them should venture out into the rain, grass would grow on her neck and arms. The men, unhappy martyrs! are compelled to be a little more cleanly, from their custom of hunting and fishing,