

THE INDIAN COUNCIL AT WALLA WALLA.*

Annually during the last quarter of a century a select band of American Indians, gathered from the plains of the Western and Eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains, and designated as the Wild West Show, have crossed the Atlantic to the cities of the Old World; and thousands of people there have viewed with wonder and awe their pageantry and horsemanship. But what would have been the feeling of anyone of this multitude of people had he been present in the Walla Walla Valley on May 24th, 1855, and stood with Governor Stevens and General Palmer and a few other white men upon a slight eminence, and witnessed the arrival of the Nez Perce braves, coming to attend the council that had been called, to consider their relations with the Great Father at Washington, and the permanent disposition of the lands they had a right to call their own. Lieutenant Lawrence Kip (afterward colonel) of the U. S. Army, was one of those present, and he kept a daily journal from which is drawn our description of the scene.

"Thursday, May 24th. This has been an exceedingly interesting day, as about 2,500 of the Nez Perce tribe have arrived. It was our first specimen of this prairie chivalry, and it certainly realized all our conceptions of these wild warriors of the plains. Their coming was announced about 10 o'clock, and going out on the plain to where a flagstaff had been erected, we saw them approaching on horseback in one long line. They were almost entirely naked, gaudily painted and decorated with their wild trappings. Their plumes fluttered about them, while below, skins and trinkets of all kinds of fantastic embellishments flaunted in the sunshine. Trained from early childhood almost to live upon horseback, they sat upon their fine animals as if they were centaurs. Their horses, too, were arrayed in the most glaring finery. They were painted with such colors as formed the greatest contrast; the white being smeared with crimson in fantastic figures, and the dark colored streaked with white clay. Beads and fringes of gaudy colors were hanging from the bridles, while the plumes

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of eagle feathers interwoven with the mane and tail, fluttered as the breeze swept over them, and completed their wild and fantastic appearance. When about a mile distant they halted, and a half dozen chiefs rode forward and were introduced to Governor Stevens and General Palmer, in the order of their rank. Then on came the rest of the wild horsemen in single file, clashing their shields, singing and beating their drums as they marched past us. Then they formed a circle and dashed around us, while our little group stood there, the center of their wild evolutions. They would gallop up as if about to make a charge, then wheel round and round, sounding their loud whoops until they had apparently worked themselves up into an intense excitement. Then some score or two dismounted, and forming a ring danced for about twenty minutes, while those surrounding them beat time on their drums. After these performances more than twenty of the chiefs went over to the tent of Governor Stevens, where they sat for some time, smoking the 'pipe of peace' in token of good fellowship, and then returned to their camping ground."

And this was the first tribe to arrive; in the days following came the Walla Wallas, the Umatillas, the Cayuses, the Yakimas and other tribes of lesser note. Chief Garry of the Spokanes was present as a visitor or spectator, but not as a participant.

The Walla Walla Valley was chosen for the council ground at the instance of Kam-i-ah-kan, the head chief of the Yakimas, who said, "There is the place where in ancient times we held our councils with the neighboring tribes, and we will hold it there now" (Life of Gov. Stevens, vol. 2, page 27); and the spot was that later selected as the site of the city of Walla Walla. The Indians present, including women and children, according to Mr. Kip, numbered over five thousand, and included more than eight tribes; fifty-eight chiefs and under-chiefs joined in signing the treaties there agreed to, but so soon broken. Of the whites there was one small company of the regular soldiers from the fort at The Dalles, numbering less than fifty; and in the parties of Governor Stevens and General Palmer, about fifty more, which included secretaries and interpreters, and packers. A considerable amount of food and presents had been brought to distribute among the Indians.

There was a pathetic side to this gathering, for these Indians were not ignorant of the previous history of their race, or of what must be in the future for them. Some of them had been

to the Red River settlements and received some education, and with others had mingled and intermarried small bands of Iroquois and Delawares and others, who had been driven from their own homes and hunting grounds by the westward sweep of civilization. Lieutenant Kip transcribed some of their speeches. Chief Hal-Hal-Tlos-Sot (otherwise known as Chief Lawyer) of the Nez Percés, said: "The red man traveled farther and from that time they kept traveling away farther, as the white people came up with them. * * * They have come on from the Great Lake where the sun rises, until they are now near us, at the setting sun." Owhi, the Umatilla chief, said: "We are together and the Great Spirit hears all that we say today. The Great Spirit gave us the land and measured the land to us, this is the reason I am afraid to say anything about the land. I am afraid of the laws of the Great Spirit. This is the reason of my heart being sad. This is the reason I cannot give you an answer. I am afraid of the Great Spirit. Shall I steal this land and sell it? or, what shall I do? * * * The Great Spirit made our friends; but the Great Spirit made our bodies from the earth as if they were different from the whites. Shall I give the land which is a part of my body and leave myself poor and destitute? Shall I say I will give you my land? I cannot say so."

There was also the heroic side. Late on the evening of June 2d, "the Lawyer came unattended to see Governor Stevens. He disclosed a conspiracy on the part of the Cayuses to suddenly rise up and massacre all the whites on the council ground—that this measure, deliberated in nightly conferences for some time, had at length been determined upon in full council of the tribe the day before; * * * they were now only waiting the assent of the Yakimas and Walla Wallas to strike the blow and that these latter had actually joined, or were on the point of joining, the Cayuses in a war of extermination against the whites, for which the massacre of the governor and his party was to be the signal." * * * The Lawyer concluded by saying: "I will come with my family and pitch my lodge in the midst of your camp, that those Cayuses may see that you and your party are under the protection of the head chief of the Nez Percés." He did so immediately, although it was now after midnight. * * * Governor Stevens on his part imparted his knowledge of the conspiracy to Secretary Doty and Packmaster Higgins, and to them alone, for he feared that, should the party generally learn of it, a stampede would ensue. Having through these efficient

officers quietly caused the men to put their arms in readiness, and posting night guards, he determined to continue the council at usual. (Life of Gov. Stevens, vol. 2, page 47.) For his brave and skillful conduct in danger and difficulty upon this and other occasions, Governor Stevens will some time be honored with a statue in the Hall of Fame at our national capital.

The limits of this paper have permitted of only an illusion. The formal meetings of the Walla Walla council, as it has come to be termed, extended over a period of two weeks, from Tuesday, May 29th, to Monday, June 11th, inclusive, but the participants were on the ground for a week longer, before and after. It was a remarkable gathering, not so much in what was directly as was indirectly accomplished, and in leaving to us a beautiful and authentic picture of Indian life, and a correct insight into Indian character and into their view of their own problem of existence. It makes one of the strongest chapters in the story of the survival of the fittest.

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