

CHIEF SLUSKIN'S TRUE NARRATIVE

In the correspondence and statements which went the rounds of some of the Coast papers during October, 1915, a great injustice was done Chief Sluskin, of the Yakimas. The interview of the chief by an over-zealous correspondent, reported that the aged Indian acted as guide for the Stevens-Van Trump expedition to the great mountain in 1870. Chinook jargon is, at best, a very unsatisfactory medium of conversation when questions of importance are at stake, and, unfortunately, the chief was credited with statements he did not make. Sluskin has never claimed to have acted as guide for the explorers of 1870. Inadvertently I was led to corroborate the published error, but when my attention was directed to it, I determined to sift the affair directly with the chief. This I did in November, 1915, in four different interviews, and with two interpreters. The narrative was given to a Tacoma paper, after which I had a fifth talk with the venerable tribesman, in which a few minor errors were corrected and some new data obtained. The result is here given in full. It is the clear, simple statement of the Sluskin of today, devoid of perversive injections. Those who are closely acquainted with Chief Sluskin believe him incapable of willful prevarication. Seemingly he had no knowledge of the 1870 expedition. To a direct query, he plainly stated that he knew nothing of this exploration of later years. That the chief did act as guide for two white men who visited the mountain just subsequent to the treaty at Walla Walla, should now be conceded. The facts are too obvious to be ignored.

Who were those mysterious strangers? While the chief may be in error a year or two, either way, it is not at all possible that the explorers were either Dr. Tolmie, who visited the mountain in 1833, or General Kautz, some twenty-four years later. The riddle is one for the student and historian to solve.

Chief Sluskin's narrative is as follows:

"I am thinking of my people—the old people who are no more—and of this country which once belonged to us. I was raised here since the sun was created, and I do not want to speak the lie. You white people, you big men, I know what you are thinking, but you ought to listen to me. You were lucky to come here, but I am sorry the way you have treated us. You now have all but a little of our land. I wanted everything straight. Governor Stevens was to settle all the troubles, and for this, he called the big Indians to Walla

Walla in council. I was there as a boy to care for the horses of Chief Owhi. After the treaty Governor Stevens finished the work [arrangements] and in about four years we were to go on the reservation.

"It was, I think, one or two years after this, our people were camping above the [now] Moxee bridge [about two miles east of North Yakima]. For a long time a big topis [pine] tree stood there.¹

"One day an old man, Ya-num-kun, came to me and said: 'Two King George men come.' I look and see them. Both were short [scarce] middle age. They came to us. One was a short man—black eyes like Indian. Fine looking man, clean face. Some old Indians said: 'He is Mexican.' His clothes looked like corduroy. He wore a hat, and had a big, banded, flint-lock pistol. It shot big bullets.

"The other man was tall, slender, not good looking, but about right. He had brown, not quite red, hair on upper lip. Had light hair and brown eyes. He looked some mixed blood with white, just little mixed. He had gray clothes and cap. Had long flint-lock gun with ilquis [wood] all along the barrel.² Barrel was round and shot big ball wrapped in blanket [patching]. I found the short man had strongest mind.

"They rode Indian horses, one blue [or roan]. Had two pack-horses, one buckskin. No big, or American horses, here then. All cayuses. No white men here. Old man Thorp had not come.³

"They wanted to know a man who could go to Tahoma, the 'White Mountain.' The old people were afraid and said: 'Do not show them

¹The Yakimas were camped on the Moxee side of the Yakima River, east of the present city of North Yakima. The large pine tree, still remembered by many of the older white settlers, was in later years cut down.

²Chief Sluskin's statement that these men were armed with flint-locks has been cited as reflecting on the truth of his entire narrative that such weapons were at that time obsolete. I brought this fact to his notice and he vehemently insisted that he was correct. He came to my house and I showed him both a flint-lock musket and rifle. He discarded the former and taking the rifle, pointed out wherein it was like the one carried by the taller of the strangers. The only difference was in the barrels. That owned by the explorer was round, while the one examined is octagon. Taking the powder horn, the aged Indian showed in pantomime how it was loaded. After the powder was measured and poured into the muzzle, the large bullet was put in a "blanket" and rammed home, after which priming placed in the "pan." The older Indians generally use the term "musket" in describing all guns used in an early day. The ground taken by the critics is not well founded. It is an historical fact that flint-locks were in use in many isolated localities long after the introduction of the percussion cap. Captain Bog-gess' company of militia called out in Lewis County (now), West Virginia, at the commencement of the Civil War, were armed with flint-lock muskets. Captain McNeill's company of Confederate Spartans, when surrendered at the close of the war, were to lay down their arms above Romney, on the Wappatomaka, Virginia. Nothing but antiquated guns, including many flint-locks, were found. It is said that the men concealed their better arms and the old guns were procured for the purpose of carrying out the terms of surrender. No more than a quarter of a century ago an old hunter in West Virginia killed a bear with his ancient flint-lock.

³F. M. Thorp was the first settler in the Yakima Valley. He came there in 1861 and his homestead was in the Moxee. He had come to Oregon in 1844.

the trail. They want to find money [mineral]. Then the Indians asked: 'Why do you go to the White Mountain?' The men said: 'We are Governor Stevens' boys [employes]. We came up the river from Walla Walla, and are looking for reservation line made at treaty. They had long glass to look through.

"Then the old people said: 'All right!' They told me to show the white men the trail. I am old man Sluskin now. I was young then. My father raised me here. I knew the trail. I asked my father if I must go. He said: 'Yes.' I was not afraid. It was about the middle of June, and patches of snow still in mountains.

"I started, leading the buckskin pack-horse and my extra saddle-horse. I took them to mouth of Tieton and camped. We got lots of trout—plenty of fish.

"Next day we traveled and camped in Tieton Basin. The white men catch plenty of fish again.

"Next day we went to Ai-yi [trout] and camped. [This was Fish Lake.] We camped at mouth of river at head of lake.

"We went on big ridge near head of Natches River and camped. Next morning the men looked with glass every way.

"Then we started and went to Tahoma, the big 'White Mountain.' The men look all around; south side is bad. They asked me about west side. Yes, I knew it. On sunny side [east] water comes out, called mook-mook. Dirty water from middle of mountain and ice. The tall man killed young yamis [deer] as we crossed the mook-mook. Shot it as it passed in front of us. This was all the game killed.

"We got to ridge-like place and found plenty green grass and nice lake, good sized, called Wah-tum. We camped there. The men looked everywhere with glass.

"The Sum-sum [sharp ridge] runs down from the mountain. It was covered with wou [mountain sheep].

"The men ask if I could catch sheep for them. I told them 'No! Only when they have young one.' They said, 'If you catch one we will buy it. Big one.' I never try to catch that sheep. Too wild. That night we roast yamis for supper.

"Next morning we went to a lake, not a big lake, only tenas [little] big, at foot of mountain. We got there about one hour after noon, camped and had dinner. This was north side of mountain.

"Next morning the men took glass up the mountain and looked. They asked if I could take them to top of mountain. I did not know the trail. Too many splits in ice. No! I was not afraid of bad spirits. Maybe that is all lie. We camped over night and roasted yamis. The men said, 'In morning we go somewhere.'

"Next morning I saw them put lunch in pockets and leave camp. I did not know where they go, but they start up the mountain. They put on shoes to walk on ice. No! not snow-shoes, but shoes with nails in two places like this [heel and toe]. They started early at daylight and came back after dark same day. I stayed in camp all day and thought they fell in ice split and died. At night I saw smoke go up from top of mountain, and I heard it like low thunder. [Here the chief gave an imitation of the noise he heard, in a deep, guttural throat sound, not unlike the distant rumble of thunder]. The men did not tell me if they heard this sound.

"The white men told me they went on top of mountain and looked with glass along Cascades toward Okanogan and British Columbia, Lake Chelan and everywhere. They said, 'We find lines.' They told me they set stick, or rock on top of mountain. I did not understand much Chinook, and could not tell if wood or stone. They said, 'Ice all over top, lake in center, and smoke [or steam] coming out all around like sweat-house.'

"Next day I started home and did not know where these men went. I left them there. I do not know if they got other Indians to guide. Before I left, each man gave me a double blanket and shirt. They gave me a cotton handkerchief, big and green striped. A finger ring [plain brass band] lots of pins and fish hooks. Too-nes [steel], and sow-kus [flint] to make fire, a file and [common] hatchet. They gave me a lunch of yamis. I was two days and a half getting home.

"On this trip," concluded the chief, "I tasted bread for first time. It was nice. We had no coffee, only some kind of tea made from berries I did not know.

When asked if he ever heard of any other strangers visiting the "White Mountain" in the early days, he answered:

"Soon, not many snows after, I guided these men; we heard that four white men were in the Cowlitz. All the big men [chiefs] held council and said, 'We will go see what these men want.' We started to Cowlitz about berry-time and went to Fish Lake. There came to our camp, Poniah, Kom-kane and Koo-ciash, whose hand, I forget which one, had been broken. It was crooked in the joints. We had council and these old men told us the white men had two horses and two mules.

"After council we went to see the white men. One of them was old man Longmire.⁴ We asked, 'Why are you here?' They said, 'Only to see the country. We are looking for a mine found by Poniah.'

⁴Mr. David Longmire, son of "old man Longmire," tells me that this description and location of the mining party tallies with the known facts in the case.

Then we would not bother them, because they only came to see the mine."

To a question:

"Yes, I was there. I saw those men. Most white men coming here came to see me. I was born here, grew up here and in the Cowlitz country. I knew all the trails. I am telling the truth. I am not fooling. Longmire at that time looked to be about thirty or thirty-five years old, not very tall, but near middle size, not very heavy."

In answer to further questions, the chief replied:

"I did not think either of the men I took to Tahoma were sons of Governor Stevens. They only worked for him, his boys. Most Indians thought they were King George men. I did not know their names. They did not tell me.

"There were no white people living here when I guided to the white mountain. We saw lots of deer, lots of sheep and plenty of yeet-tah [goats].

"The name of the white mountain is Tahoma. It was called that before the white people came. It was Tahoma, standing up to the skies. We sometimes called it the White Mountain.

"We met but two persons, Inlian boys, Charley Toom-kins [possibly Tompkins] was one of them. Met them this side of Tieton Basin.

"I am no relation to the Sluskin [note difference in the name] with the crippled hand [guide to the Stevens-Van Trump expedition]. He was half-brother to my wife on the father's side. He used to live at Thoppenish [corrupted to Toppenish] about six miles below Moolmool [Fort Simcoe]. He worked at the Agency. He went to Cowlitz and married two sisters, daughters of Poniu. He wore two sleigh-bells, suspended under each arm, and they thought him a big chief. His little finger on right hand was gone. He was drowned in the Yakima River several years ago. Never found his body. I never heard he took two men to the White Mountain. My crippled thumb [right hand] I broke in a fight with four Columbia River Indians. We were gambling. My thumb was caught in blanket.

"The Sluskin hanged at Old Town [Yakima City] for helping kill the Perkins' people, was a Columbia River Indian, and not a Yakima. I am a Yakima, and no kin to him. My father's mother was a Cowlitz woman. My mother was a Yakima named So-patkt. My father was a Yakima, named We-owkt. He was a chief.

"If you do not understand my talk—if not interpreted straight—then you will write it as a lie. It must be right. Chinook [jargon]

is not good for story. I am glad to have two interpreters. You must get this story as I tell it.

“White people are always making me stand up and talk. Why is this? I do not understand what they want. They get me tangled. Then the temis [paper] tells my talk different from my words. I do not want this. It is a lie. It is same as stealing. I did not show the White Mountain to Stevens and another man. I only guided the two strange men there. I have given you my true story. It is all that I have told to anyone. I never told it but once before this. I did not know what they wanted. You are the first man to tell me about the Stevens man going to the White Mountain. But you say that he went there long time after we had all gone on the reservation. I know nothing about this. It was before we went on the reservation that I took the white men over the trail to Tahoma.

LUCULLUS V. McWHORTER.

North Yakima, November, 1916.