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The Peace Commission

*Scenes at the Arapaho Village—The Correspondents in the Arapaho Village—
Grand War Dance—The Press Tent—Broadway—Satanta's Papoose—Julia Bent—Pawnees
on the Rampage—Testimony of Major Douglass—
His Conduct and Its Results*

Schow-As-Och, or Medicine Lodge Creek
October 18, 1867

Bohemian Enterprise

Last night, the part of correspondents connected with this expedition resolved to go in a body to the camp of the Arapahoes, to witness a grand war-dance. Through the camps of the infantry, cavalry and the mule-whackers we plunged, and out into the Egyptian darkness, without one friendly light to guide us on our way. Through the crackling ferns and dry stalks. Down ravines and unceremoniously into slimy marshes, over a long blackened ridge of scorched prairie, and plump against an Indian vidette.

An Arapaho Village

We thus found ourselves in the Arapahoe village, a fearful din of tom-toms, beating of gongs, tin kettles, howlings of the watchful Indian dogs, shrill singing of children, of squaws, the guttural voices of braves and the energetic jingling of brass bells. Directing our steps, over the offal and refuse of the village, towards the lodge from which the sounds proceeded, we found ourselves before a chief's wigwam.

Lodge Scene

Peeping in, without so much as asking permission, we saw seated around a fire, built in the center of the lodge, a double circle of Indians. The first was composed of warriors, mostly young, chanting lustily, while a few were beating tom-toms with all their might, one especially endeavoring to outrival the rest by his ferocity of countenance, the ludicrous interest in the ceremony which beamed in his features, the pomposity of his bearing, and the exhilarating beat of his drum. Next to those engaged in gong beatings were three youngsters holding a string of brass bells, and jingling them in harmony with the voices of the squaws, that rose high and clear on the night air. The squaws occupied the rear circle, joining in the chorus with all their might, their flashing, dark eyes lit with excitement. A louder beat of the gong, a shriller cry, a fiercer

jingling of bells, and four warriors leaped up with the animated tones and commenced dancing, each one adding his voice to the swelling chorus, singing his “eya-eya-oo-eya-ohh-eya-woo-woo—o-oo-ah,” which closed the first performance.

Joining in the Dance

On the commencement of the second tune, four correspondents, Willis the phonographer, Hall of the Chicago *Tribune*, Smoot of the surveying party, and Fayel of the *Republican*, partaking of the intense excitement, joined in the war dance, and flung their heels after the manner of dancing dervishes until the perspiration rolled down their bodies in living streams. This extravagant show of excitement on the part of Bohemians, quite melted the hearts of the dusky warriors. They embraced each other, and tears rolled down the cheeks of the spectators who were tenderly affected by the scene.

This war-dance lasted until midnight, and when we parted there were eternal protestations of love and friendship on both sides.

The Lost Arapaho Child

In Little Raven’s lodge I encountered the young brave, the lost Arapaho child, Wilson Graham, whom Sherman found dressed as a gymnast in a circus—the boy who accompanied Hancock on his expedition, and who was left by the General at Fort Larned, to be delivered over to his kindred. Two months ago his friends applied for him, when he was given up with great regret, having made many friends during his sojourn among the whites. This boy is rapidly forgetting the English language. He is efficient in the use of the bow and arrow, and has acquired prominence among his many playmates on account of his varied accomplishments. His feats of leaping and wrestling command the respect of the Arapaho elders. His knowledge of the English language is a source of constant admiration, and his many-bladed jack-knife is an object of envy to his brother braves.

Our Special Artist

To illustrate how peaceably inclined the much abused Indians. I will relate an incident which occurred during our visit to the village. “Our Special Artist” had buckled to a strange waist a very fine navy revolver. While our artist was engaged in trading beads and paint for a bow and arrow, an Indian *gamin*, a reckless urchin, having not the fear of a pale face in his bosom, and utterly regardless of the result of his indiscretion, put forth his digits in a very sly manner and abstracted “Our Special Artist’s” fine navy revolver, and sneaked away with his plunder under his blanket. When the artist recovered himself and stood up he found too late that his “peace-maker” was gone. Great was his dismay, unutterable his anger, indescribable his woe. He scratched his head for light on the most *dark* subject, but no light came. He looked to the right, to the left, to the front and rear, he saw nothing but profound darkness, and the outlines of a lodge with a few human forms near it. He inquired of his confrerees about what was the best thing to do in the premises. A legal fledgling, who for the nonce belonged to our fraternity, remembering his legal education, uttered a few Latin quotations, which translated into English, meant “Go and inform the chief, Little Raven.” Acting upon this sententious advice, the artist forthwith proceeded to the chief’s lodge, and made him acquainted with his loss. Little Raven

was very sorry, and offered one of his own in its place. He also promised to have a thorough search instituted for the weapon, and, if recovered, returned to its rightful owner. “Our Special Artist” returned to his camp loaded with compliments and Indian curiosities.

The Press Tent

is the Bourse, the exchange, which every one disposed for argument enters. Commissioners, officers, soldiers, bull-whackers, mule-drivers, Indian chiefs, squaws and papooses pass in and out the whole day long. Itinerant pretenders, interested Indian agents, political aspirants, reliable interpreters, and *soi-disant* correspondents love its cool shade and merry, jovial inmates. Those who have the entrée to the “press tent” consider themselves highly honored with such aristocratic acquaintances, and forthwith reckon up how many papers they will buy which mentions their names that they may preserve them and hand them down to their posterity. Colored scavatores also darken the entrance with their presence now and then, listening to the elegant debates carried on with animation, upon the topics of the day.

The scholastic portion of the “press-gang” dive deeply into the classics frequently, and then, all the little world stands back astonished at the learning displayed, the romantic members giving full rein to their vivid imaginations, soar away on eagle’s pinions beyond the ethereal dome above, and come down again gently gliding, sailing over regions unknown to the dull few till they alight on mother earth, and find themselves only in the press-tent, but still admired by the wondering crowd around.

Our matter-of-fact reporters delight in ridiculing both, but still, between themselves, discuss the merits of the Indian question. One has for his standard, “my policy,” which he is consistently defending with facts. The others have no policy whatever, but content themselves with reporting facts, leaving the public to draw their own conclusions. There is also one who talks “in whisper.” (?) His whispers are louder than a clown’s, his laugh can be heard a mile off, but all declare him the best fellow in existence. The commissioners make much of him, the redskins laugh at him, while he remains a target for all their shafts. .

The Arapaho Broadway

Outside our tent is the promenade, the Broadway of the camp. The most mostley set of people saunter up and down. Unbaptised redskins with unpronounceable names—self-betitled chiefs who will swear to you that they are the biggest chiefs in America, air their feathers, war paint and gaudily dressed carcasses. Unchristened “woa-woa chiefs” (whites) in their enormous felt hats, heavy top-boots and plaid shirts. Bewhiskered long haired hangers on, with knife and pistol slung to their waists, follow copper colored squaws clad in dingy, gray blankets. Naked boys and girls of aboriginal parentage greedily look on at the delicious viands in course of preparation by our *chef-de-cuisine*, with watery eyes and greedy stare. On the other side of our Broadway are piles of annuity goods in plethoric bales and capacious boxes, slaughtered beeves, around which congregate the cooks of the different messes, waiting for their portion of the meat.

Satanta’s Child

Forming a group by themselves, chatting incessantly, are a lot of young officers, their attention divided between Satanta’s favorite papoose Saliaso, and Miss Julia Bent, daughter of

Colonel Bent. Saliaso is mounted on a magnificent pony, dressed in the most elegant manner, with blue jacket decorated with a cavalry captain's epaulettes, rows of bright buttons, armlets of beaten silver, and a gold ring or two. From his neck hang necklaces of pearl like shell, a grizzly bear's claw, and a long silver cross. Leggings of the most fancy style encase his legs, while his feet are covered with the most exquisite moccasins. Waving masses of raven black hair are confined behind the ears, exposing a tall forehead of clear olive complexion. His features indicate intelligence. An aquiline nose, with finely arched nostrils, a well cut mouth, not too large, and an oval chin, make up the picture of Saliaso, or "Flying Eagle," the pride of the Kiowa nation, and their future chief. He is about twelve years old and is a perfect young Adonis.

The Council

There is very little news afloat. The grand council comes off tomorrow, and we are all bracing ourselves for the task.

Ponies Stolen

Last night the Arapahoes lost a hundred head of ponies. It is presumed that they were stolen by the Pawnees. Testimony was taken this morning, but nothing was elicited further than the supposition given.

Major Douglas' Testimony

Yesterday Major Henry Douglass, former commandant of Fort Dodge, was examined relative to what he knew of the origin of the Kiowa troubles. Being sworn, he testified as follows:

The information which I sent to the War Department concerning Indian raids and their dissatisfaction with Colonel Leavenworth, I received from traders and interpreters. All the leading chiefs were dissatisfied with him. They have affixed their names to a letter sent to me, containing a list of their grievances.

I held several councils with Satanta, the great Chiefs of the Kiowas and Tonamko, the second in importance, in which they stated over and over that their agent did not treat them well; that he refused to give them annuity goods when due, as per treaty.

Colonel David Butterfield and Charley Rath, a trader at Zarah, have issued guns, pistols and ammunition, the consequence of which was that before Hancock appeared with his army, Satanta openly boasted that they had plenty of arms and ammunition, and were not afraid of the whites.

The accounts of the depredations committed by the Kiowas, before Hancock came along, were based upon affidavits, and I believed them to be true, and therefor transmitted them to General Hancock. The Kiowas brought three women—the Misses Box, daughters of farmer John Box, of Texas—to me at Fort Dodge, and upon payment of money and provisions, they were given up.

Question by Sanborn. Do you not think that these Indians made that boast of cleaning out the whites in a joke?

Before an answer could be given General Harney said I never knew the Indians to jest. In their boasts there is always a meaning.

According to information received by me, the Kiowas scalped seventeen colored soldiers and stole two hundred head of horses early in February, 1867. They also abused Major Page, an officer of the United States regular army, in the month of March.

Comments

It seems that these statements of Major Douglass, which he sent to General Hancock, were the main causes of the expedition being sent to the West; and yet, in a cross-examination which he underwent, he deliberately said that he would not believe Jones, his interpreter, unless some person was there to check him; that he did not believe those statements when he sent them, but would not contradict them though he received contradictory proofs strong as Holy Writ. Major Page denied his being abused by the Kiowas twenty-four hours before Douglass sent his dispatches to Hancock stating that Page was abused. Douglass never saw the scalps of these colored soldiers, but still he sent the account of the deed to Hancock.