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The Grand Council

An Amphitheater in a Grove—The Council Personages—Senator Henderson's Speech to the Indians—Replies of the Chiefs Gray Head, Satanta, Ten Bears, Toosh-A-Way and Poor Bear—A Present for A.J.—Adjournment

Medicine Lodge Creek, Oct. 19, 1867

The Council Scene

A vast amphitheater had been cleared in the center of a grove of tall elms as the place where the grand council should be held. Logs had been arranged so as to seat the principal chiefs of the Southern Nations. Tables were erected for the accommodation of the various correspondents. Before these tables were the seats ranged in a semi-circle for the commissioners. Facing the commissioners were a few of the most select chiefs of the different tribes. Beyond all were the ponies of the chiefs, forming a splendid background to a picture. Above the space allotted to the commissioners and the press were placed boughs to shelter them from the sun.

The Council Opens

At ten A.M. the council was opened by Fishermore, the lusty crier of the Kiowa nation, exclaiming loudly and counseling the tribes to do right above all things. Satanta, their chief, sits proudly on a camp chair, and behind him are his band of principal warriors. Little Raven aspires to be next in importance. He is seated on a stool, a fat, short, asthmatic fellow, but possessing features stamped with native dignity. Near him sits Mrs. Virginia Adams, dressed in a new crimson gown, specially worn for this important occasion. She is the interpretest for the Arapahoes—a pleasant faced, intelligent woman enough, bearing about her face indications of her origin and descent.

The commissioners look amiable and are dressed in their best—Sanborn especially. He sports a suit of purple cloth, and laughs immoderately; whether at his jokes or appearances it is impossible to state. He looks around for applause—none greets him; but a certain air of scorn is visible upon the taciturn face of Satanta. Harney is dressed in full uniform, and looks the warrior chief. Taylor is quiet, and dignified. Augur and Terry appear gentlemanly.

Commissioner Taylor

Looking around, Commissioner Taylor found that all was ready. Telling the interpreter that he was going to speak, he rose and thus addressed the assemblage of chiefs:

We have selected a great peace man—a member of the peace council of Washington—to tell you what we have to say. Listen to him. [Cries of “ow-how-ugh.”]

Senator John B. Henderson then rose and addressed the chiefs in the following manner:

Senator Henderson’s Speech

Our friends of the Cheyenne, Camanche, Apoache, Kiowa and Arapahoe nations, the government of the United States and the Great Father has sent us seven commissioners to come here and have a talk with you. Two years ago the government entered into a treaty with you at the mouth of the little Arkansas, and we hoped them that there would be no war between us. We are sorry to be disappointed. During the last year we heard several times that persons belonging to your tribes were committing war against us. We heard that they were attacking peaceable persons engaged in building our railroads, that they were scalping women and children. These reports made the hearts of our people very sad. Some of our people said that you commenced the war. Some of them denied that you commenced it. Some of our people said that you and other Indians were going to wage a general war against the whites; others denied the charge. In this conflict of opinion we could not find the truth, and therefore the Great Father has sent us here to hear from your own lips what were those wrongs that prompted you to commit those deeds, if you had committed those acts of violence. We do not like war, because it brings bloodshed to both sides; but we do like brave men, and they should speak the truth, for it is an evidence of their courage. We now again ask you to state to us, if you have at any time since the treaty committed violence.

What has the government done of which you complain? If soldiers have done wrong to you, tell us when and where, and who are the guilty parties. If these agents whom we have put here to protect you have cheated and defrauded you, be not afraid to tell us. We have come to hear all your complaints and to correct all your wrongs. We have full power to do these things, and we pledge you our sacred honor to do so. For anything that you may say in this council you shall not be harmed. Before we proceed to inform you what we are authorized to do for you, we desire to hear fully from your own lips what you have done, what you have suffered and what you want. We say, however, that we intend to do justice to the red man. If we have harmed him, we will correct it; if the red man has harmed us, we believe he is brave and generous enough to acknowledge it, and to cease from doing any more wrong. At present we have only to say that we are greatly rejoiced to see our red brethren so well disposed towards peace. We are especially glad because we as individuals would give them all the comforts of civilization, religion and wealth, and now we are authorized by the Great Father to provide for them comfortable homes upon our rich agricultural lands. We are authorized to build for the Indian schoolhouses and churches, and provide teachers to educate his children. We can furnish him with agricultural implements to work, and domestic cattle, sheep and hogs to stock his farm. We now cease and shall wait to hear what you have to say, and after we have heard it, we will tell you the road to go. We are now anxious to hear from you.

Grayhead

Got up and said that as there were only two of the Cheyennes present they could not speak until the rest were present.

Satanta

Became uneasy, buried his hands in the ground, and rubbed sand over them, after which he went round shaking hands with all, and then stood in the circle dignified and ready with his speech.

Satanta's Speech

The commissioners have come from afar to listen to our grievances. My heart is glad, and I shall hide nothing from you. I understood that you were coming down here to see us. I moved away from those disposed to war, and I also came from afar to see you. The Kiowas and Camanches have not been fighting. We were away down South when we heard that you were coming to see us.

The Cheyennes are those who have been fighting with you. They did it in broad daylight, so that all could see them. If I had been fighting I would have done so also. Two years ago I made peace with General Harney, Sanborn and Colonel Leavenworth at the mouth of the Little Arkansas, That peace I have never broken. When the grass was growing this spring, a large body of soldiers came along on the Santa Fe road. I had not done anything, and therefore was not afraid.

All the chiefs of the Kiowas, Camanches and Arapahoes are here today. They have come to listen to the good word. We have been waiting here a long time to see you, and we are getting tired. All the land south of the Arkansas belongs to the Kiowas and Comanches, and I don't want to give away any of it. I love the land and the buffalo, and will not part with any. I want you to understand also that Kiowas don't want to fight, and have not been fighting since we made the treaty. I hear a good deal of fine talk from these gentlemen, but they never do what they say. I don't want any of these medicine homes built in the country; I want the papooses brought up just exactly as I am. When I make peace, it is a long and lasting one; there is no end to it. We thank you for your presents.

All these chiefs and head men feel happy. They will do what you want. They know that you are doing the best you can. I and they will do so also. There is one chief lately died—Jim Pockmark, of the Caddoes—he was a great peace-maker, and we are sorry he is dead.

When I look upon you I know you are all big chiefs. While you are in the country we go to sleep happy and are not afraid. I have heard that you intend to settle us on a reservation near the mountains. I don't want to settle there. I love to roam over the wide prairie and when I do it, I feel free and happy, but when we settle down, we grow pale and die.

Hearken well to what I say. I have laid aside my lance, my bow, and my shield, and yet I feel safe in your presence. I have told you the truth. I have no little lies hid about me, but I don't know how it is with the commissioners; are they as clear as I am? A long time ago, this land belonged to our fathers, but when I go up to the river I see a camp of soldiers, and they are cutting my wood down, or killing my buffalo. I don't like that, and when I see it my heart feels like bursting with sorrow. I have spoken.

Satanta's speech produced a rather blank look upon the faces of the peace commissioners. Satanta has a knack of saying boldly what he needs, regardless of what anybody thinks. On the close of his speech he sat down, and wrapped a crimson blanket around his form.

Little Raven

said that he had nothing to say, as his young men had been dispatched after the Pawnee horse thieves. “G-d d-n them mean squaws!” said he. After Little Raven delivered himself of his wrathful speech.

Old Parry-Wah-Suh-Mer, or Ten Bears

Chief of the Camanches, after putting on his spectacles, commenced in a shrill voice, as follows:

Of myself I have no wisdom, but I expect to get some from you—it will go right down my throat. I am willing to do what you say.

After saying which the old chief hobbled around the circle and shook hands with the commissioners with as much gravity and unimpressibility as a Turk.

Toosh-A-Way

Another Camanche chief, stood up, and in a calm, argumentative voice, said:

I have come from away down South to see and hear you. A long time ago the band of Penekdahty Camanches were the strongest band in the nation. The Great Father sent a big chief down to us, and promised medicines, home and many other things. A great, great many years have gone by, but those things have never come. My band is dwindling away fast. My young men are a scoff and a byword among the other nations. I shall wait till next spring to see if these things shall be given us; if they are not, I and my young men will return with our wild brothers to live on the prairie. I have tried the life the Great father told me to follow. He told me my young men would become strong, but every spring their numbers are less. I am tired of it. Do what you have promised us and all will be well. I have said it.

Poor Bear

Chief of the Apaches, a poor looking, superannuated warrior, next got up, and in a hurried manner said “Some time ago the President sent for me. I went to see him, and heard what he had to say. I remember it well. What he told me I repeated to the Apache braves. What I promised to him I and my young men have kept, even until this hour. Many whites travel the Santa Fe road but no Apaches have troubled them, for I am chief among the warriors and I know what I say. My young men recognize me alone as chief, and they listen and obey. At my bidding they came with their squaws and papooses to listen to your good words. We will listen attentively to them and will follow the straight road. I am very tired of staying here. I wish you would get through as soon as possible, and let me and my braves go to our homes south. As we have never broken any treaties I think we might get our annuity goods without delay. Since I was a child I loved the pale face, and until my departure to the happy lands I hope to follow in their footsteps. I have said it.”

A Gift for the Great Peace Chief

After delivering his speech in a very effective manner so far as regards delivery, he said he had some presents to give the “Great Peace Chief of Washington.” A shield was brought to him by a select warrior, which he presented to the commissioner with these words: “I have also slain many an enemy, this shield has saved me many a time from death. When my foe saw this shield he trembled, and I triumphed—go you and do the same.

Adjournment

This ended the first day's proceedings, after which the council adjourned to meet again at the same spot, at the same hour, next day. The Arapahoes and Cheyennes could give no definite answer, as their principal chiefs were not present.

The Camanche and Apaches will doubtless accede to the wishes of the commissioners.