

Dr. G.B. Kuykendall

(Agency Physician 1872-82)

Coming of the Piute Indians to the Fort.

During the winter of 1878-9 we had quite stirring times on account of the coming of the Piute Indians to the agency. These Piutes were a branch of the Shoshone or Snake tribe of Indians and had been active in the disturbances of the Bannock war, that cost so much trouble, loss of life and expense to the government. In the dead of winter, when the snow was at least a foot deep, the weather cold, these miserable Indians were brought to the agency. There were among them many old, decrepit, blind and sick with scrofula, tuberculosis, rheumatism and various other ailments. They were without exception the most miserable looking lot of human beings I ever saw. They were brought in under the military in command of Captain Winters and Lieut. Westendorf, with other officers and 1000 Lieutenants Sparrow and Pickering. These last two were young men who had just graduated at West Point, and had come out to the far west. The weather was cold and bad, and the Indians were ill prepared for such a journey and were a squalid, poverty stricken lot that made a most striking appearance as they came to the fort and camped below and around the agency. There had been for generations ~~between the~~ a feud between the Shoshone and the Yakimas, and the latter regarded the Shoshones as "dogs and snakes" so that it may be readily understood they met no very cordial reception. They a hospital tribe, a despised people, were forced upon the Yakimas without consultation, and without their consent. It must be said however that the Yakimas under the circumstances exhibited a disposition and spirit that was a credit to them. Under the good management of the agent Rev. Wilbur there had grown up quite a herd of cattle that belonged to the Indians, but as soon as these Piutes came, food had to be provided for them, for they had nothing whatever ~~and~~ in the way of food, and little in the way of clothing.

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cattle and issuing food to ~~these~~ these starving wretches. They had not only to have beef, but flour, salt and other provisions. The sick old and decrepit ones had to have blankets, for they were actually suffering

from the cold and exposure. The exigency was great and the want was immediate. No provision having been made for the situation, the agent found it, with the means at hand, impossible to supply their wants, and as a result there was much suffering. The Yakimas seeing the beef cattle being driven up and killed and fed to hostile strangers naturally felt aggrieved. The agent appealed to their generosity and Christian spirit and asked them to remember that they too were once poor and had nothing, were ignorant and had been at war with the whites. He asked them to be charitable to their red brothers and sisters. It was very creditable in the Indians of the ~~the~~ reservation, to bear as patiently as they did this thrusting of a strange tribe upon them. White people would scarcely have been as tolerant and patient. Their conduct on this occasion spoke much for the good effect of Christian teaching upon them.

The Plutes really had to suffer badly. They had to make camp in the deep snow, having no tents and but very little bedding, they had a ~~pinching~~ pinching time of it. Many were ~~so~~ hopelessly sick with tuberculosis and many others, especially the older ones, had a painful form of chronic rheumatism, while many others still had bronchitis and nearly all had severe colds. It was very ~~hard~~ hard on their little children.

It was utterly ~~impossible~~ impossible to give them proper attention, and even if they had been given the best of medical treatment, their superstition and ignorance would have prevented the use of it. The result was these poor wretched people began to die off, and it was pitiful to witness their deplorable condition. All Indians are superstitious and when the Yakimas saw the Plutes dying off, they became afraid they had a contagion of some kind that would be communicated to them.

The result was that the poor Plutes did not receive much ~~sympathy~~ sympathy from their Yakima friends.

I never saw any people at any time or anywhere so desperately homesick. Any one having any humanity could not help being sorry for them when listening to their lamentations and stories of woe, and of their longing for their homes and native land. I thought of the lamentations of the Israelites in Babylon when they were captive as recorded in the Psalms. It seemed to be their uppermost thought of how they could get back, and quite a number ran away, soon after they came, knowing that they would have to cross the mountains, travel hundreds of miles and go through almost incredible hardships, hiding like wild beasts and then run many chances of never reaching their haunts and old homes, for they were outcasts, feared and hated of the whites and not wanted anywhere.

Perhaps the ones who were best off among them were those who, hopelessly diseased, curled up in their cheerless and wretched camps, chilled and hungry, dozed off into the sleep of death dreaming of their homes and native haunts, and perchance of the happy hunting grounds in the Indian heaven.

The prevalence of so much sickness among the Piutes caused them to resort to "Indian doctoring." The sound of drumming and of the savage medicine songs were heard of nights and their wailing melancholy incantations were wailed out on the night air, and reminded all who heard not only of sickness, but of that horrid oppressive superstition and dread of ghosts and spirits that made life a miserable nightmare and gloom. There seemed to be a feeling of some dreadful impending evil.

Sarah Winnemucca

With the Piute Indians there came to the Yakima Agency an Indian woman commonly called Sarah Winnemucca. She came with the military escort that brought the Piutes, and was acting as interpreter for Captain Winters. She was frequently spoken of about that time and a little later as Princess Sarah Winnemucca. She was intelligent, of medium size, well formed and as an Indian woman, would be called good looking-some

said she was handsome.

She was a native Piute, born in Nevada near the Humboldt lake in 1844, and at that time was about 34 years of age. Her father was or had been a chief of a band or sub tribe of Indians that had for many years lived about Humboldt and Pyramid Lakes. Her grandfather was a chief also and had been with Gen. Fremont when he went to California. He was called by Fremont and his command, Capt. Treckee. It would seem therefore that Sarah Winnemucca had some claim to the title of princess among the Indians.

She was quick to learn, and when about 15 years of age had been sent to San Jose, Calif. with her sister to a school of the Catholic sisters, for a brief period, but owing to her father being held upon the land about Pyramid lake she went back home. The place where her people had been held was later formed into the Pyramid Lake Reservation.

Being intelligent and easy to learn, and of good address, and having natural ability to communicate her ideas to others, she secured a position as interpreter for the Indian agent of Shoshone Indians.

When the Pancho war broke out, Gen. O.O. Howard had her to act as interpreter and scout when on his campaign against the Indians.

This position was attended with so many dangers that it was refused by several Indian men. She assumed the risk and was fearless in danger and a good interpreter. So far as her influence among the Indians of her own people was concerned she was a princess and they listened to her as if she were a sort of prophetess or Joan of Arc, and to a large extent her word was law. I have no doubt but that at times she had the welfare of her people at heart, and she ruled by kindness. Sarah, while neither saint nor angel was superior to any of the her people that came to the Fort in almost every respect, and considering her birth and environments was a rather remarkable woman.

She did not stay at Fort Simcoe long. In 1880 she was employed as interpreter at the Malheur Indian Agency and next year taught a little Indian school at the Barracks in Fort Vancouver, Wash. She was a friend of her people, and according as she saw what was best for them, sought to promote their interests. She went back to Washington with her father to plead the cause of her people at Fort Simcoe, and to ask permission for their return to their home. She presented her case so effectively that the Secretary of the Interior granted her request and gave a permit to have the Plutes returned to their own country. When Mr. Wilbur, the agent learned of this, he entered a vigorous protest and caused the order to be rescinded. This I think was a bad move for the Indians all ran away anyhow, and it would have been better to have them go feeling that they had the backing of the government than to sneak back as refugees and violators of law.

It no doubt seemed to Mr. Wilbur that they were gaining some, making some improvement, and he was taking great pains to have them learn to do farm work and become industrious. He presented the matter in such light that the work of Sarah and Sarah Winnemucca was undone. But human nature is stronger than human law and their inveterate longing for their native land caused them to run away in little squads, so that in a few years they were all gone. No doubt

Sarah Winnemucca sent them word that the authorities in Washington were willing for them to return, and told them to leave the reservation in a clandestine manner.

Before leaving this rather remarkable Indian woman, I might say that her career had yet many changes. Finding that she had failed in the accomplishment of her mission, she went back east again in 1881-82 and made public talks in several cities, telling of the trials and tribulations of her people, and the wrongs done to them by the Washington authorities, she directed her complaints particularly against

Indian agents, hoping in this way to awaken sympathy with her movements.

She wrote a little book, assisted no doubt by the man who afterwards married her, Lieut. Hopkins. The title of the book was "Life Among the Piutes, their Songs and Claims." When on one of her visits to Boston she received some aid from a sympathizer who procured land for her to found an Indian school near Lovelock Nevada. She ran the school for about three years, but here her husband died of tuberculosis and she gave up the school and seems to have lost her grip morally and otherwise and went down, losing standing. She went to Morongo Montana to visit her sister and died there in 1891. Like many other partly educated and intelligent Indians she yielded at last to the tug of her inherent tendencies and went down and out, a dimmed star, set in darkness more or less of a degenerate. The removal of the Piutes to the Yakima Indian Agency in the middle of winter, without any adequate preparation for caring for them, the suffering, the wretchedness following, the permit for the removal of the Indians to their own native land, then its revocation, the running away of the Piutes to their own homes, after all the cost, trouble and suffering, all caused by their coming to the Yakima Reservation, forms another chapter in the long line of our wretched damnable management of the Indians. If nations as well as individuals are as responsible for conduct as individuals and the justice of God is meted out surely and with impartial hand, there must be a black account standing against us as a nation for settlement.

The intention of our government has always been good, but the reprehensible management of our Indian affairs and the carrying out of those intentions has been most unfortunate both for whites and the Indians. It would have been more merciful and the cause of less suffering in the end, if our authorities had proclaimed a war of utter extinction sparing neither old nor young. We sometimes talk as if it were a strange thing that the Indians were so revengeful and cruel. I have sometimes thought

I have sometimes thought suppose some people as much superior to us in knowledge and power were to come among us, to debauch our women, take possession of our lands and homes, rob us, drive us out, disease our children, fill our youngmen with poison, disregard treaties and law and all promise made; if we should see our children fading away, dying almost rotting with loathsome disease brought by the usurpers, what would we do? Would we not fight? Would we not do worse than the Indians? Every drop of blood in our veins, every fiber and nerve of our bodies would vibrate with hatred and thirst for revenge, and we would be transformed into demons bent on murder and destruction.

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She wrote a little book, a sister no doubt by the man who afterwards married her, Lieut. Hopkins. The title of the book was "Life Among the Piutes, their Songs and Customs." When on one of her visits to Boston she received some aid from a sympathizer who procured land for her to found an Indian school near Lovelock Nevada. She ran the school for about three years, but here her life ended and died of tuberculosis and she gave up the school and seems to have lost her grip morally and otherwise and went down, losing standing. She went to Montana to visit her

sister and died there in 1891. Like many other partly educated and intelligent Indians she yielded at last to the tug of her inherent tendencies and went down and out, a dimmed star, set in darkness more or less of a degenerate. The removal of the Piutes to the Yakima Indian Agency in the middle of winter, without any adequate preparation for caring for them, the suffering, the wretchedness following, the permit for the removal of the Indians to their own native land, then its revocation, the running away of the Piutes to their own homes, after all the cost, trouble and suffering, due caused by their coming to the Yakima Reservation, forms another chapter in the long line of our wretched damnable management of the Indians. If nations are as responsible for conduct as individuals and the justice of God is meted out surely and with impartial hand, there must be a black account standing against us as a nation for settlement.

The intention of our government has always been good, but the reprehensible and management of our Indian affairs and the carrying out of these intentions has been most unfortunate both for whites and the Indians. It would have been more merciful and the cause of less suffering in the end, if our authorities had proclaimed a war of utter extinction sparing neither old nor young. We sometimes talk as if it were a strange thing that the Indians were so revengeful and cruel. I have sometimes thought