

TWENTY-FOURTH YEAR

PHOENIX, ARIZONA, SATURDAY MORNING, APRIL 4, 1914

VOL. XXIV. NO. 320

INDIANS TELL THE STORY OF CUSTER'S LAST STAND IN "THE VANISHING RACE"

For the first time, the Indians who participated in it, tell their own story of the Custer fight in 1876, which resulted in the utter annihilation of Custer and his troops.

Standing on the Custer field, in the Little Big Horn valley, Montana, facing the monuments in honor of Custer and his men, the Indians recount the tragedy with the simplicity and pathos of their race in words having the genuine ring of truth.

The story is told in the latest book on the North American Indian, "The Vanishing Race," written and illustrated by Dr. Joseph Kossuth Dixon, published by Doubleday Page and Company.

The book is a large, artistically printed volume of several hundred pages, illuminated with eighty superb photographs, selected from the thousands of photographs made by the Rodman Wanamaker Expedition sent out under the leadership of Dr. Dixon, to perpetuate the life-story of the first Americans and to strengthen in their hearts the feeling of allegiance and friendship to their country.

The dedication is "to my brother, the Indian—to the man of mystery—the earth his mother—the sun his father—a child of the mountains and the plains—a faithful worshiper in the great world cathedral—now a tragic soul haunting the shores of the western ocean."

The title of the book, "The Vanishing Race," is justified, as the author reports, by the records of the bureau of ethnology at Washington, which show that the North American Indian, north of Mexico, has decreased 55 per cent in population since the coming of the white man.

The Indians' Own Story of the Custer Fight

Custer's surviving scouts—Crow Indians—and a number of Sioux, who fought Custer, first tell the story. White-Man-Runs-Him, a Custer scout, says in part:

The Great White Father at Washington sent representatives out to our country. The Indians met them and held a council. The Sioux were hereditary enemies of the Crows. The head man sent by the Great Father said to the Crows: "We must get together and fight, and get this land from the Sioux. We must win it by conquest."

I stood faithfully by the soldiers. They did not know the country. I did. They wanted me for their eye, they could not see. The soldiers and I were fighting in friendship. What they said, I did. What I said, they did. So I helped the white man.

We heard that General Custer was coming and I and thirty soldiers went down the river in boats. I was the first one of the Crows to shake hands with Custer. He gripped me tight and said: "You are the one I want to see, and I am glad that you are first." I directed Custer up to No-Hip-Bone. We always traveled at night, climbing the mountains, and wading the rivers. During the day we made a concealed camp. When we reached the top of the Wolf mountains we saw the enemy's camp, near where the Custer field is at the present time. Custer was rejoiced and anxious to go ahead and make the battle. Custer sent me to a high knoll. "Go and look for me," he said, "and see where I can make a success."

He left it to me. When I was up there I looked around and the troops were very close upon me. I motioned to them to come on and we passed up the ridge.

The Indian scouts stood in front of Custer and led his men. The Sioux fired at us. We looked over the river and saw Reno in his engagement with the Sioux.

Finally they wiped out Reno and he retreated to the hills. Custer and all of us got off our horses. The enemy was surrounding us. They were mingling away at us. Custer then came up and said: "You have done your duty. You have led me to the enemy's camp. And now the thing for you to do is to obey orders and get away. You go; I am now going with my boys."

Had Custer not ordered me to go, the people who visit Custer Field today would see my name on the monument.

I made my way further up the river to the past train escorted by 300 soldiers. I directed them back to where the old trenches are today and where you may still see a pile of bones. The fight lasted through the whole of a long hot summer day. My friends, the soldiers, who were with Custer, were all wiped out. We scouts went down the river to meet No-Hip-Bone. There was a terrific rain storm all night long. I had no clothes on and I stuck to my wet horse. Custer and the soldiers were my friends and companions and I cried all night long as I rode through the rain to tell No-Hip-Bone the news. General Custer was a brave and good man, a straight-forward and honest man. If General Custer was living today I would get better treatment than I now receive."

Story of Curly, Another Scout

Curly, another Custer scout, is quoted in part as follows: "We heard that General Custer wanted to see us. We went to him. The first words that he uttered were:

"I have some scouts here, but they are worthless. I have heard that the Crows are good scouts, and I have sent for you to come to my command. I have called you Indians here not to fight but to trace the enemy,—you find the Indians and I will do the fighting."

Within two days we started on our journey, and followed the Sioux trail. When we got to the camp we found that a battle had been fought, for we found the scalps and the beads of white men. These we took to Custer. He then said: "This is the main point—these Sioux have been killing white people, and I have been sent here by the Great Father to conquer them and bring them back to their reservation. I am a great chief, but I do not know whether I will get through this summer alive or dead. If they massacre me they will still suffer for they have disobeyed orders."

We started just before daybreak. The next day we saw the Sioux camp. Custer said: "We will charge upon them now—that settles their journey." Custer split up his command as far as the creek. Then he gave me a message to take to Reno. I did not know the import of this message. I brought the answer back from Reno to Custer. While I was delivering the message Reno was fighting his battle, but it was not very fierce, and when I got to Custer with his message he was fighting at the mouth of the creek.

Then Custer told me to go and save my life. I rode a circle around and found my ammunition was getting low. I found a dead Sioux. I took his ammunition and gun and horse and got out. When I got on the high hill I looked back and saw that Custer was the last man to stand.

Custer's Preparation for Death

Goes Ahead, another Custer scout, says of the fight:

General Custer dismounted and said prayers to the Heavenly Father. Then he arose and shook hands with me and said: "My scout, if we win the battle you will be one of the noted men of the Crow nation." In a moment or two he turned and said to me: "I have forgotten to tell you that you are not to fight in this battle, but to go back and save your life."

Although Custer had given us command to do no fighting, it was impossible to stand there on the bluff and see the soldiers fight and not do something, so we had to fire.

Reno took the battle. There was so much smoke and dust that I could hardly tell, but Reno was driven back by the Indians toward the bluff. In all the valley and woods there was nothing but Indians. Soon after Reno opened fire, Custer began his fire. From there I cannot tell you.

About 4 or 5 o'clock the pack train came up and the fighting was down there. I went back to pack train and helped fight awhile and then I took to the hills away over to the east. When I heard that Custer had been killed I said: "He is a man to fight the enemy. He loved to fight, but if he fights and is killed he will have to be killed."

Story of Those Who Fought Custer

Even more realistic is the story of the Sioux Indians who fought Custer on that memorable day. Their own justification of their conduct is most interesting.

Cloud, a Sioux chief, says:

Suddenly we heard firing, and we found out that the soldiers were on us. The women and children were all frightened, and started to run across the hills, and we men mounted our horses and started toward the enemy. I remember that we pushed Reno back until he had to cross the river and get up against the bluffs, and then some of our Sioux rode around the hill to head him off, and we had him in a pocket.

After we had killed many of Reno's men, Custer came along the ridge, and we were called off to fight Custer. We kept circling around Custer, and as his men came down the ridge we shot them down. And then the rest dismounted and gathered in a bunch, kneeling down and shooting from behind their horses. We circled round and round, firing into Custer's men until the last man was killed.

I did not see Custer fall, for all the Indians did not know which was Custer. One reason why we did not scalp Custer was because the Indians and the white soldiers were so mixed up that it was hard to distinguish one man from another; and another reason was because Custer was the bravest man of all and we did not want to touch him as he made the last stand. This is also the opinion of Rain-in-the-Face.

Regarding the cause of the Custer fight I must say, we were pursued by the soldiers, we were on the war-path, and we were on the war-path with the Crows and other tribes. We were trying to drive them back from the hunting grounds, and the soldiers came upon us and we had to defend ourselves. We were driven out of the Black Hills by the men seeking gold, and our game was driven off, and we started on our journey in search of game. Our children were starving and we had to have something to eat. There was buffalo in that region and we were moving, simply camping here and there and fighting our Indian enemies as we advanced.



Where Custer Fell: The Ground Where Custer's Regiment was Annihilated by the Indians in 1876

in order to get the game that was in this country. We fought this battle from daylight up until three o'clock in the afternoon, and all of the white men were killed. I think that Custer was a very brave man to fight all these Indians with his few men from daylight until the sun was almost going down.

The Fight Justified by the Indians

Runs-the-Enemy, another Sioux chief, says in part:

When we had killed all the soldiers we felt that we had done our duty, and felt that it was a great battle and not a massacre. With reference to the real reason for this fight I may say the talk among the Indians was that they were going to compel us to stay on the reservation and take away from us our country. Our purpose was to move north and go as far north as possible away from the tribes. Our object was not to fight the Crows or any other tribe, but we learned that the soldiers were getting after us to try to compel us to go back on the reservation, and we were trying to get away from them.

During the Custer fight our tents were not attacked, but after the battle the women gathered up their dead husbands and brothers, and laid them out nicely in the tepee, and left them. I understand that after we had left the tepees standing, holding our dead, the soldiers came and burned the tepees. According to my estimate there were about 2000 able-bodied warriors engaged in this fight; they were all in good fighting order. The guns and ammunition that we gathered up the night after the Custer's command put us in better fighting condition than ever before, but the sentiment ran around among the Indians that we had killed enough, and we did not want to fight any more.

There has been a good deal of dispute about the number of Indians killed. About the closest estimate that we can give is that fifty Sioux were killed in the fight, and others died a short time afterward from their wounds.

"We Had to Fight," They Say

Chief Two-Moons says:

The whole valley was filled with smoke and the bullets flew all about us, making a noise like bees. We could hardly hear anything for the noise of guns. When the guns were firing, the Sioux and Cheyenne and soldiers, one falling one way and one falling another, together with the noise of the guns, I shall never forget. At last we saw that Custer and his men were grouped on the side of the hill, and we commenced to circle round and round, the Sioux and the Cheyenne, and we all poured in on Custer and his men firing into them until the last man was shot. We then jumped off our horses, took their guns and scalped them.

Before the Custer fight we went over on the Tongue river and found a camp of soldiers. We rushed upon them and took all their horses away, and the soldiers ran into the brush. We knew there would be other soldiers after us; we knew about where they were, and we felt they would pursue us.

At Powder river the soldiers attacked our camp and destroyed everything, and that made us mad. When the soldiers came after us, on the day of the Custer fight, we were ready to kill them all. The soldiers were after us all the time, and we had to fight.

The Fault Was Reno's

The author's conclusions on the Custer fight, are as follows:

Fair play is an all compelling creed. Justice to the dead is one of the commandments in that creed. Let the controversy rage. Let the sword be unsheathed in the face of misrepresentation and wrong. General Custer was a daring and chivalrous officer. He had won laurels on many a hard fought field under southern skies—he was a strategist, brave and successful. He served in western campaigns with distinction and success. He knew how to deal with the masterful generalship of his wily Indian foes. Hitherto his tactics had been victorious. The orders under which he now marched to battle were definite up to a certain point—then, so the record in the war department reads—he was to use his own discretion and initiative. He was compelled to follow this course—for he marched over a wild and trackless waste, far distant from his base of supplies, and absolutely without means of communication with headquarters, and without ability to ascertain the movements of any military force in the field.

It is fair to state that the ranking general in charge of this campaign

against the Indians reposed this confidence in General Custer, otherwise, knowing the Indian as a fighter, knowing the character of desolated wastes of country to traverse—the difficulties to be encountered in the simple movement of troops—the annihilation of any body of troops, when once they reached the untrapped plains cut in twain by gorges and piled high with impassable barriers, he would have stultified himself had not orders been given allowing discretion at the moment of emergency.

Custer was strong enough, brave enough, and sufficiently masterful to see and seize the situation. His tactics he had previously and many times employed, and always with brilliant success. On this June day he would have led the daring "Seventh" to victory and routed, if not conquered, the great Indian camp. He was defeated and slain with entire command. They fell at their posts in battle formation.

Why?

The entire group of Indian warriors participating in this grim battle all testify that had Reno pushed his charge when first he attacked the Indian camp they would have fled in confusion, for the attack was unexpected. The Indian always expects a night attack. They further testify that after Reno made his attack with a portion of his men, thus depleting his effective fighting force by one half and in desperation made his bungling retreat, had he later come to the aid of Custer with the added reinforcements of Benetec, French, and Weir, who begged him to hear the appeal of Custer's rapid volleys, Custer would have broken the Indian camp. Reno remained on the hill until every gun was silent. Reno failed. Custer was slain. This conclusion is the voice of the Indian.

A Wonderful Book

The Custer fight, so graphically depicted, occupies only a small part of this book.

Throughout all the pages we glimpse the vision of a race that stands apart from all mankind. A race of men with lofty ideals, heroic in temperament, ineffably tragic in thought. Men whose minds rose and traveled in the upper planes of spirituality. Creatures of the forest, yet masters of the forest. Supreme in their environment, welcoming the white man as equal, opposing him only in defense of their conscious mastery. One of the five great races of people who watched their lands disappear, their buffalo exterminated, yielding their homes, shrinking back before advancing civilization, realizing that their pristine glories may never be recovered, yet never yielding their claim of equality. Today the sublime thought in the Indian mind still seems to be that although he is doomed to extermination, and die he must, yet will he die undaunted.

Indian Imprints

The first part of the book is devoted to Indian imprints—a glimpse backward into the original life and country of the Indian. Here he is shown to have been a man of "majestic mien, of stolid dignity, of trimphant courage, with inscrutable self-poise." A race of real religious impulse and faith, of moral homes, of hospitality (this savage character the author says, came upon him through contact with the white man)—whose going is "the imposing triumph of solitary grandeur sweeping beyond the reach of militant crimes, their muffled footsteps reaching beyond the margin of an echo."

The Last Great Indian Council

These impressions form the background for the "Stories of the Chiefs," as told in "The Last Great Indian Council," organized by the expedition, with the assistance of the United States government, in the valley of the Little Big Horn, Montana. Wrestling with the Indian superstition that to be photographed will result in the shortening of their lives, it was no small task to assemble these chiefs for the express purpose of making photographic records, to be preserved in the Indian Memorial to be erected by the nation in New York harbor. But the chiefs came. They met in council for the last time (some of them have since died) and they delivered real orations, as may be seen from some of the reports here given. The speeches were made in the Indian tongue, of course, translated by interpreters and then transcribed by the leader of the expedition, Dr. Dixon.

Welcome to the Chiefs

Chief Plenty Cows, chief of all the Crow nation, in summoning the other chiefs to the council said:

The ground on which we stand is sacred ground. It is the dust and blood of our ancestors. On these plains the Great White Father at Washington sent his soldiers armed with long knives and rifles to slay the Indians. Many of them sleep on yonder hill where Pahaska—White Chief of the

Long Hair—so bravely fought and fell. A few more passing suns will see us here no more, and our dust and bones will mingle with these same prairies.

I see as in a vision the dying spark of our council fires, the ashes cold and white. I see no more the curling smoke rising from our lodge poles. I hear no longer the songs of the women as they prepare the meal. The antelope have gone; the buffalo wallows are empty. Only the wail of the-coyote is heard.

The white man's medicine is stronger than ours; his iron horse rushes over the buffalo trail. He talks to us through his "whispering spirit." (The Indian's name for the telegraph and telephone.) We are like birds with a broken wing. My heart is cold within me. My eyes are growing dim—I am old.

Before our red brothers pass on to the happy hunting ground let us bury the tomahawk. Let us break our arrows. Let us wash off our war paint in the river. And I will instruct our medicine men to tell the women to prepare a great council lodge. I will send our hunters into the hills and pines for deer. I will send my runners to the lodges of the Blackfeet, where in that far north flowers border the snow on the hills. I will send them across the fiery desert to the lodges of the Apaches in the south. I will send them east to the lodges of the Sioux, warriors who have met us in many a hard battle. I will send them to the west, where among the mountains dwell the Cayuse and the Umatilla.

I will have the outriders build smoke signals on all the high hills, calling the chiefs of all the tribes together, that we may meet here as brothers and friends in one great last council, that we may eat our bread and meat together, and smoke the council pipe, and say farewell as brothers, never to meet again.

When the chiefs had assembled after the lapse of weeks he welcomed them thus.

I am glad at heart to stand here today on this Indian ground and give a hearty welcome to all the chiefs as-

sembled from the various tribes from all over the United States.

It is a day of beauty, and bright sunshine; it is a glad day for me. I rejoice that on this happy day we can all meet here as friends, eat our bread and meat in communion, smoke the council pipe of peace.

I am rejoiced to give you all a great heart of welcome. And then we must say farewell. But we go away as friends, never to meet again. I am glad to have you here."

Replies of the Chiefs

Chief Two Moons, leader of the Cheyennes in the Custer fight, said: "This is a glad day for me, and I am glad at heart that we can all meet as chiefs from the various tribes all over the land. It is a great day for all of us, because there are no more wars between us, and we meet in peace to hold this last great council of the chiefs and smoke the

pipe of peace. I am glad at heart that this great picture is to be made of us, as we are assembled here, because our old chiefs are fast dying away, and our old Indian customs soon will pass out of sight, and the coming generations will not know anything about us, but this picture will cause us to live all through the years. And our children and their children will reap the benefit. I am glad we are here.

The Hope of the Future

One cannot read this book, "The Vanishing Race," without a feeling of sadness, and yet with the hope that some day, somehow, the Indian will find his true destiny.

Excited often on arid lands, where life is merely a hand-to-hand struggle for existence; huddled in wooden, poorly ventilated houses, where tuberculosis thrives (instead of healthful wigwams, with lost ambi-

tion and a cowed nature—the Indian, as shown in his own greeting to the expedition, still gives welcome and hospitality to the white man and displays a willingness and a capacity (for their children, at least) to become a part of this age and this civilization, and to assume citizenship in the nation.

Candidates to succeed Isaac Stephenson in the United States senate will be nominated at the Wisconsin state primaries early in September. Among those who are expected to get into the race are Governor McGovern and Lieutenant-Governor Mor-

ris, both of whom aspire to the republican nomination, and John A. Aylward, who seeks the democratic nomination. Senator Stephenson has not announced whether he intends to become a candidate for re-election.

Styles And Quality

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