

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, Dec 20, 1890 to May 30, 1891)

### Te-chouk-u-pee

Almost twenty years have passed since I foregathered with Te-chouk-u-pee in the upper Missouri River country, in Northern Montana. Our first introduction was on a bright, summer morning, as he stood near our tent, staring in "round-eyed wonder" at some of the mysteries of civilization as revealed in the, to him, superfluous details of the white man's toilet. I said, "How" to Te-chouk-u-pee; and Te-chouk-u-pee said, "How" to me, and we thus became acquainted.

By the way, Te-chouk-u-pee was a full-blood Sioux Indian of the Uncpapa band, and one of the myrmidons of Sitting Bull, then the bete noir, or, to be entirely accurate, the bete rouge, of that region. My morning visitor stood as if posing for a full length picture; and, the truth to say, never was a finer model.

A sojourn among people so primitive that they still adhere to the later Adamic, or past Edenic fashion in dress, while it may greatly increase one's respect for the artist tailor, can not fail materially to mitigate one's worship of "the human form divine," as it is not a truth of general application that "beauty unadorned is adorned the most." That rule, however, was applicable to Te-chouk-u-pee; for he was tall, perfect in trunk and limb, lithe, sinewy, and graceful, as perfect an animal as one might see in a month's travel

Plutarch was wont to illustrate and emphasize the peculiarities of his heroes by means of comparison and contrast. May not the same method be adopted in respect to the hero of this sketch?

It is said of the first Napoleon that he was "grand, gloomy, and peculiar." Te-chouk-u-pee lacked but one of these qualities: there were no shadows in his make-up. But he equalized the matter, in some measure, with "the Little Corporal" in another respect, in that, whereas it was said the latter "was wrapped in the solitude of his own originality," Te-chouk-u-pee, in addition, wore a breech-clout, "only this and nothing more."

His inseparable companion was a so-called war-club, from which he derived his name. This was a unique weapon, about two-thirds the length of a baseball bat, and nearly as thick; through the heavy end of which, and at right angles with it, were thrust the blades of three or four butcher-knives, the sharp points of which protruded some three or four inches, constituting an ugly looking weapon. But the blades were suspiciously untarnished, as if innocent of gore. That weapon he carried as constantly and as gracefully as did Mercury his winged caduceus.

On rare occasion Te-chouk-u-pee wore a blanket; but he carried it so jauntily that it seemed more an ornament than a useful garment. It was said that Te-chouk-u-pee was the

proprietor of a gun, yet I never saw him with that weapon but once, the circumstances of which shall more fully appear hereafter.

With the exceptions named, Te-chouk-u-pee was apparently without impedimenta, domestic or social, real or personal, He wore no "coup" feather, indicating that he had never taken the scalp of an enemy; and his dusky skin bore no scar, indicating that he had never taken part in the brutal ceremonies of the sun-dance, that cruel and bloody test and seal of Indian courage and endurance. But,

"A merrier man,  
Within the limit of becoming mirth,  
I never spent an hour's talk withal"

Yet, in some way or other, we received the impression that Te-chouk-u-pee was a coward: and we looked upon and treated him as such, though his uniform good spirits and amiable behavior made him an agreeable Indian to have around. His reputation among his people seemed to be that of a great, big, good natured, inoffensive boy, with none of that "martial phosphorus" in him of which "big Indians" are made; and yet he was at least thirty years of age, and the handsomest and manliest looking man in the entire band.

Te-chouk-u-pee was not a chief, probably never would be, nor was he even a soldier. He had no chums, and, though he was generally to be seen about our quarters, or where anything of interest was going on, he never seemed to be with anybody in particular, although evidently having as good a time as anybody. In short, he seemed disposed "to flock by himself." He was always ready to chat and joke with us, and his good temper was proof against frequent very practical jokes of which he was the victim.

We remained with the band of which Te-chouk-u-pee was a member for eighty-five days, during which time he was our unfailing source of amusement.

Many incidents of that period occur to me as I write, which might be of interest by way of illustrating Indian life and character at a time when the Red Man roamed those vast plains west of the Missouri, undisturbed by the proximity of white settlements. But it is especially of my friend, Te-chouk-u-pee, that I now have to do, in an effort, even at this late day, to vindicate his character from the imputation of cowardice.

On two occasions he went with us on the buffalo hunt, and invariably deported himself so gallantly, and so evidently without fear, that our faith in the correctness of the popular verdict as to his courage was much shaken.

An amusing incident occurred, however, a day or two after we returned from a hunt, which tended to confirm and strengthen our belief that Te-chouk-u-pee's liver was white. In the evening, about sunset, we were disturbed by a great chattering of female voices just outside the tent, and, going out, we saw, on one side, a group of a dozen or fifteen

Indian girls, from fourteen to eighteen years of age, and opposite them stood Te-chouk-u-pee, gracefully telling a story in the expressive sign-language of the plains, in the use of which he was very expert. He was without his blanket, and his war-club lay at his feet; but his breech-clout was in place. We watched his signs a few moments, and readily understood that he was narrating his connubial experience with Winona, one of the girls in the group before him, the details of which indicated that Te-chouk-u-pee, in addition to being a "dastard in war," was also a "laggard in love." It seemed that he had taken Winona to wife some time before, and that she had fled precipitately from his bead and board, before the marriage was fully consummated, and returned to the paternal teepee.

Te-chouk-u-pee's story will not, of course, bear repetition. because, as a rule, the North American Indian is not troubled with modesty, nor embarrassed by delicacy in thought or act and is by no means euphemistic in the choice of his parts of speech. In fact he is fully as realistic in his delineations, oral and manual, as were the celebrated wits of the Mermaid Club or the Falcon Inn, and as broad in his allusions as were Shakespeare, or Marlowe, or Beaumont and Fletcher. So that he may be regarded as the conservator-unconscious, it may be-but still the conservator of the purity, or rather the impurity, of our great seventeenth-century literary models. If such conservatism is desirable, the Indian should have credit therefor.

This digression which please pardon, is, of course, an after thought, and looking upon Te-chouk-u-pee's dramatic and salacious recitation from a purely nineteenth-century, high-official standpoint, we were becomingly disgusted, so that I shouted to the excited female group, "Go for the dog, and punish him!"

They needed no second bidding. With a scream Winona dashed at him, closely followed, pellmell, by all her dusky sisters. Te-chouk-u-pee sprang away like a frightened deer, in his haste leaving his war-club behind, and headed toward the Missouri River, probably intending to put it between him and his pursuers. But they headed him off, and he ran toward the high bluff, inland, all the girls close at his heels, screaming like furies. The chase was most exciting and amusing. There was no danger that he would inflict any bodily injury on his pursuers, as he was unarmed. If he had stopped, and tried the issue with fists or feet, the girls would probably have torn him to pieces in the frenzy of their excitement.

Before they had reached the top of the bluff, across the steep face of which Te-chouk-u-pee ran quartering, it was evident to those who were looking on from the plain below that it was the girls' race. As pursuers and pursued reached the summit of the bluff, we had a vivid picture of the final struggle, in silhouette, against the twilight glow of the darkening western sky. Te-chouk-u-pee was overtaken, and dexterously tripped up, while Winona tore off his only garment, fastened it to the end of a lodge-pole, and headed the triumphant march of her Amazons down the bluff, and past our quarters, waving her trophy, which she afterwards fastened at the peak of her teepee, where it remained for many days.

Poor Te-chouk-u-pee! He did what almost any other fellow, civilized or savage, would have done in like circumstances: he disappeared. So very practical a joke disturbed even his imperturbable soul, and it was some days before we saw him again. The incident was the talk and the laugh of the rude community for days, but had been almost forgotten by myself and comrades in the immediate presence of more serious business, and if Te-chouk-u-pee had returned to the band, he was careful to keep out of our sight.

The Indians among whom we were sojourning were of Sitting Bull's people, had been engaged in some of the raids with which that chief was charged, and he was not so far away but that he had visited us three or four times. It was the purpose of our visit to try to get those Indians into treaty relations with the Government, and establish them at a post to be erected near where we then were, or at least to amuse them and keep them quiet while the engineers of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company could make their reconnoissance through the country west of the Missouri, and up the valley of the Yellowstone. For more than two months we had been among them trying to get them into a proper mood to come to our terms, and the time was near at hand for our final grand council. The big chiefs and the little chiefs were evidently impressed with the magnitude of the issues involved in the approaching event, and for some days before went about looking as solemn and mysterious as a lawmaker during a legislative session, each one evidently feeling that he carried the tribal destiny on his own shoulders.

The hour of the council at last arrived, and some eighty or a hundred Indians of all ranks were squatted in concentric circles, while we sat in the center with the interpreter.

I have taken part in numerous Indian councils, some of which involved serious and important interests, but have never been able to get away from the ludicrous features of such affairs. It is utterly impossible for any human being in fair average health, with unimpaired digestion, to feel as solemn as an Indian looks at a council, and that solemnity has no gradations, being assumed on all occasions, momentous or trivial.

I once accidentally encountered a small band of Shoshone Indians in northern Idaho, two or three of whom had visited Washington some years before, and the in their minds lingered juicy memories of the flesh pots of the capital. These traveled chiefs had a grievance, like a good many other people who, having sojourned in Washington for a season, are forever mindful of its advantages and always desirous of their renewal and continuance. Understanding that I had official relations with the Great Father, these Indians wanted to tell me all about their grievance with a view of having me remedy it when I returned home.

An Indian never goes directly at any matter, if he can avoid it. He talks as he fights, from ambush. If it is a subject that can be talked about, he must have a Council and the smoke, and a big powwow, the objective point of which he withholds till the last moment in, to let it burst upon you like the well-concealed denouement of a dime novel.

On this occasion they assembled the Indians, sat me in their midst, passed the pipe, and then the chief spokesman began. He was a flatulent old fellow; told us pretty much everything he knew, and, not content with that, like your average political orator, he told us a good many things he thought he knew, before he came to the subject matter of this grievance. This may be stated in a few words. He said he had visited the Great Father at Washington, many years before; that he had been treated very kindly; have been given many nice things, all of which he remembered; that now he was growing old and weak, and his skin and become tender, and would not I please ask the Great Father to send them a few bunches of that nice soft paper (meaning toilet paper) with which they had been supplied while in Washington. To which all the Indians said "how" many times, in token of their approval of the request, while the solemnity of their visages would no doubt have deepened, if it had not already touched bottom. These eloquent chieftains had discussed the subject matter of their grievances so constantly and discussed so plausibly of the great advantages which must certainly accrue to the whole tribe if their prayers were granted, that it had become as it were a party issue, another council had elevated it to the importance of an international question. They seemed thoroughly convinced that they had achieved an easement in the coveted luxury. And why not? Wars have been fought and thrones emptied and dynasties changed over issues far less fundamental in their character.

The neglect of the paternal government to recognize even so rudimentary an aspiration civilization-wards, and to supply so essential and appliance of civilization to the uncivilized wards amounted to a stain upon its otherwise fair escutcheon, and with what gravity of demeanor I was able to assume. I assured my anxious and earnest petitioners that there was not a shadow of a doubt but that the Great Father would be swift to furnish the wherewithal to wipe that stain away. Again they all said "how" and white winged peace settled gently down upon the haunts of the ingenious savage.

In our present council, however, we had named the issues, which were more important than any question of personal comfort or luxury. After the usual solemn mummy of smoking the mutual pipe, I made the opening talk, the eloquent periods of which, being first percolated through the alleged mind of a very ordinary half-breed interpreter, were received with some ominous grunts of disapproval, but, for the most part, with a painful silence. This was an admonition that our terms were not acceptable, and caused us great uneasiness as to the outcome, for there was not a soldier within three hundred miles of us. Of course, we could not tell just when the explosion would come, nor how; but that it would come, and that with little delay, we felt sure, No motion was made to pass the pipe after my talk, and a dead silence prevailed for as long as We might count a hundred.

Then, to our unspeakable relief, of all men in the council, Te-chouk-u-pee came to the

front to our rescue, and that, too, in the role of a hero. He had been squatted ill the third circle from the center, hut so far to our right that we had not observed his presence. He rose to his feet at this juncture, stood for a moment, as if waiting to gather all eyes upon his imposing figure, then "Rose from the ground like feathered Mercury And vaulted with ease" into the circle in which we sat. As he lightly touched the ground, he dropped his blanket, and, with an incipient but very suggestive war-whoop, he flourished his war-club above our heads, and thundered out: "If you don't give us guns and ammunition you shall never get out of this council alive!"

I have heard it said that, in moments of extreme peril, men sometimes notice and remember the merest trifles. Somewhere I have read of a soldier of the Light Brigade at Balaklava, who, in the very crisis of that fatal charge, noticed a great spot of grease on the jacket of his file leader, and thought what a wiggling the fellow would get at the next morning's inspection. The trifle which I noticed was that Te-chouk-u-pee had on a new breech-clout. This gave me a pointer, so to speak. which materially relaxed the strain, and no doubt saved us serious trouble.

Still of the opinion that Te-chouk-u-pee was a coward, and, therefore, that his dramatic threat was a mere "bluff," I said to him: "You dog! if you don't go back and sit down while men are talking, I'll send for little Winona to come and strip off your breech-clout before the whole council." The effect was magical. Te-chouk-u-pee was humiliated, crushed. If his feathers did not fall, it was only because he had no feathers. His head dropped low, his war-club hung at his side as harmless as a rye-straw, and he weakly gathered up his blanket, gave us a glance, more of sorrow than of anger, turned about, walked out of the circle, and out of the council and off into some solitude to his people unknown, amid the derisive laughter of all the chiefs and onlookers, old and young.

The incident put the whole council in a better humor. Smiles and laughter rippled over those erstwhile grim and threatening faces, for all the world like a sudden burst of sunlight over a gray and darkening landscape. The council speedily accepted our terms, a post was established, and thirty of the most influential chiefs came with us to Washington.

It had been our intention to include Te-chouk-u-pee in the Washington delegation, not that he had the slightest influence, but because we thought his presence would lend a flavor to the society of the more prosy members of the party; but, to our sincere regret, when the day of our departure came, he had departed upon a long journey in another direction.

A few days before the time fixed for our leaving, one of my companions and myself were sauntering near the river, which at that point had a perpendicular bank some ten or twelve feet above the level of the water, when we saw Te-chouk-u-pee paddling a "bun-boat" toward us from the other side of the river. As we were admiring his graceful motions, the sharp crack of a rifle sounded from a small chump of choke-cherry bushes near us, and Te-chouk-u-pee threw up his head with a sort of a defiant air, and missed a single stroke with his paddle. That was all that was noticeable in his bearing. With his eye steadily fixed upon some object on the shore, invisible to us, he brought his boat rapidly to the land, picked up his gun, and seemed to fly up the steep bank. Reaching the top, he dropped upon one knee, brought his gun to his shoulder, and, firing at some object unseen by us, fell prone upon his face,

"taking the measure of an unmade grave."

We ran to the spot, turned him over, and found that he was dead, a scowl of hatred darkening his tawny face, and slowly fading from his staring eyes, and a bullet hole in his left breast over the heart.

Hastening in the direction in which Te-chouk-u-pee had fired, we found another Indian dying, a bright, red stream spurting from a hole in his breast where a bullet had entered, and giving his dusky skin a brighter tint.

At the council Te-chouk-u-pee narrowly escaped becoming a hero. His budding hope had, no doubt, often inspired him to say with Raleigh, though in his rude Indian way,

"Fain would I climb, yet I fear to fall;"

but his fears, like Raleigh's queen, whispered,

"If thy heart fails thee, climb not at all."

The poor Indian, at the council, had courage, as he thought, to do a deed so brave and desperate as to elevate him at once to the level of the great heroes of his race, and to a lofty niche in the Valhalla of his people, but his courage could not stand the great crucial test: Ridicule. But be not hasty in judgment. Did not Cervantes

"Laugh Spain's chivalry away,"

which had withstood all other assault for centuries? "Who can refute a sneer?" queried the gifted Paley, Not my Indian friend, certainly.

How many poor devils we meet in our journey who, like the Indian of whom I write, might have done great things but for the fact that

"Thae winks and finger ends they dread

Are notice takin'!"

How many human ships have thus been "wrecked upon a bubble," and gone down in life's mid-ocean, with all on board! Poor Te-chouk-u-pee! Like Cawdor,

"Nothing in life

became him like the leaving of it."

B. R. Cowen

Jan 3 1891