

CHAPTER VI

THE SMOHALLA RELIGION OF THE COLUMBIA REGION

SMOHALLA

I have only one heart. Although you say, Go to another country, my heart is not that way. I do not want money for my land. I am here, and here is where I am going to be. I will not part with lands, and if you come again I will say the same thing. I will not part with my lands.—*Umatilla Chief*.

We have never made any trade. The earth is part of my body, and I never gave up the earth. So long as the earth keeps me I want to be let alone.—*Toohulhulsote*.

Their only troubles arise from the attempts of white men to encroach upon the reservations. I verily believe that were the snow-crowned summits of Mount Rainier set apart as an Indian reservation, white men would immediately commence jumping them.—*Superintendent Ross*.

About the time that the Paiute were preparing for the millennial dawn, we begin to hear of a "dreamer prophet" on the Columbia, called Smohalla, who was becoming a thorn in the flesh of the Indian agents in that quarter, and was reported to be organizing among the Indians a new religion which taught the destruction of the whites and resistance to the government, and made moral virtues of all the crimes in the catalog. One agent, in disregard of grammar if not of veracity, gravely reported that "the main object is to allow a plurality of wives, immunity from punishment for lawbreaking, and allowance of all the vices—especially drinking and gambling—are chief virtues in the believers of this religion." (*Comr.*, 8.)

This was bad enough, but worse was behind it. It appeared that Smohalla and his followers, numbering perhaps about 2,000 Indians of various tribes along the Columbia in eastern Washington and Oregon, had never made treaties giving up any of their lands, and consequently claimed the right to take salmon in the streams and dig kamas in the prairies of their ancestral country undisturbed and unmolested, and stoutly objected to going on any of the neighboring reservations at Yakima, Umatilla, or Warmspring. There is no doubt that justice and common sense were on the side of the Indians, for by the reports of the agents themselves it is shown that the dwellers on the reservations were generally neglected, poor, and miserable, and subjected to constant encroachments by the whites in spite of treaties and treaty lines, while at the same time that agents and superintendents were invoking the aid of the military to compel Smohalla's followers to go on a reservation these same men were moving heaven and earth to force the Indians already on a reservation to give up their treaty rights and remove to another and less valuable location—to begin life anew