

CHAPTER VII

SMOHALLA AND HIS DOCTRINE

My young men shall never work. Men who work can not dream, and wisdom comes to us in dreams. . . . You ask me to plow the ground. Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? You ask me to dig for stone. Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it and be rich like white men. But how dare I cut off my mother's hair?—Smohalla.

We hear little of Smohalla for several years after the Nez Percé war until the opening of the Northern Pacific railroad in 1883 once more brought to a focus the land grievances of the Indians in that section. Along Yakima valley the railroad "was located through Indian fields and orchards, with little respect for individual rights," while the host of prospective settlers who at once swarmed into the country showed the usual white man's consideration for the native proprietors. Some of the Indians, breaking away from their old traditions in order to obtain permanent homes before everything should be taken up by the whites, had gone out and selected homesteads under the law, and the agent was now using the Indian police to compel them to return to the reservation, "and the singular anomaly was presented of the United States Indian agent on the one hand applying for troops to drive the Indians from their homestead settlements to the reservation a hundred miles away, and on the other the Indians telegraphing to the military authorities to send troops to protect them from the Indian police." (*MacMurray MS.*) In addition to their land troubles the Yakima and their confederated tribes, among whom were many progressive and even prosperous Indians, were restive under constant interference with their religious (Smohalla) ceremonies, to which a large proportion adhered.

In order to learn the nature of the dissatisfaction of the Indians, and if possible to remove the cause, General Miles, then commanding the military department of the Columbia, sent Major J. W. MacMurray to the scene of the disturbance in June, 1884. He spent about a year in the work, visiting the various villages of the upper Columbia, especially P nã at Priest rapids, where he met Smohalla, the high priest of the Dreamer theology, and his report on the subject is invaluable.

Smohalla is the chief of the Wa'napûm, a small tribe in Washington, numbering probably less than 200 souls, commonly known rather indefinitely as "Columbia River Indians," and roaming along both banks of the Columbia from the neighborhood of Priest rapids down to the entrance of Snake river. They are of Shahaptian stock and closely akin to the Yakima and Nez Percés, and have never made a treaty with