

from FIVE YEARS A DRAGOON by Percival G. Lowe

The grand old Sioux Nation with its numerous branches and bands furnished the greatest number; then the handsome, the dignified, the wiry, agile, intelligent and brave Cheyennes in large numbers, and rich in equipment. The Arapahoes were interesting but less numerous. These three tribes were friends and allies, and ruled the country from Minnesota to the Arkansas River and from the Rocky Mountains to a line drawn north and south some forty miles west of Fort Kearney at their own sweet will. They did not want peace with other tribes. Why should they? Their pastures were well stocked with game, the supply of buffalo was unlimited, the way they hunted inexhaustible. They were rich in everything that people of nomadic habits needed, and as to peace, why, what would life be to them without war? Nature supplied all their needs. They did not hunt for the sake of wantonly destroying the lives of animals as did the white man, and how could they amuse themselves? Of what use to live? And how could they hope to raise young men without war? And of what use were men if not warriors? But the Indian Department had become a great branch of the political machine, large amounts of money were appropriated, growing larger annually, and it must be spent. There were many beneficiaries interested - manufacturers of Indian goods, merchants, freighters, officials and hangers-on in large numbers. Whether it led to tragedy or ended in a farce, here was a well laid plan for the largest assemblage of Indians ever gathered at one council or on one treaty ground. The Pawnees and some others were invited but none of them came, presumably because they were afraid to risk it. But the Snakes came. Their headquarters was about Fort Bridger. The Sioux and Cheyenne had promised to make peace with them, and to take no advantage of them while the treaty was going on.

About noon one bright day, a long line of dust was seen from our camp, looking west, towards Laramie Peak. Soon a long line of Indians came moving slowly down in battle array, arms ready for use and every man apparently expectant, the women and children and baggage bringing up the rear well guarded. It turned out that Major Bridger, the interpreter, had reported to headquarters the approach of the Snakes, and he had been directed to lead them down near to our camp. All the head men of the Sioux and Cheyennes had given assurance that they should not be molested, so down they came, moving very slowly and cautiously the chief alone a short distance in advance. They were dressed in their best, riding fine war horses, and made a grandly savage appearance. In the absence of Major Chilton down at the post, seeing all this caution on the part of the Snakes, Lieutenant Hastings had "boots and saddles" sounded so as to be ready whatever happened. Just below us was a large Sioux camp, and the people were showing great interest and some excitement at the approach of their hereditary enemies, and a few squaws howled in anguish for lost friends who had died in battle with these same cautiously moving warriors. When the Snakes reached the brow of the hill overlooking the beautiful Laramie, less than a mile away, and the chief commenced the descent, a Sioux sprang upon his horse, bow and arrows in hand, and rushed towards him. A Frenchman, an interpreter, had been watching this Sioux, expecting trouble, and he, too mounted his horse and was instantly in pursuit. The Snake column stopped and sent up a wild shout of defiance, the chief moved a few steps farther and raised his gun ready to fire just as the intrepid Frenchman reached the reckless Sioux, pulled him from his horse, disarmed and stood over him. Then ensued a harangue between interpreters and chiefs. The wild Sioux, who sought to revenge himself on the Snake chief who had killed his father some time before, was led back to camp while the Snakes held their ground. Their position was a good one; every man had a good gun, plenty of ammunition, besides bows and arrows. Not one out of a hundred Sioux had guns, and