

C.R. COOPER, Annia Oakley, cont.

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Preparations now were made for making the show even greater; the addition of more crack shots, the augmenting of the Indian contingent until it included more than a hundred representatives of the Sioux, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Pawnee and Ogalalla tribes, while among the chieftains was Red Shirt, a redoubtable warrior on his own home grounds, and second only in power to Sitting Bull himself. There were more cowboys.....

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Indian affairs had not been good at home. There had been ill-treatment of the Sioux on the Pine Ridge reservation, with the accompanying objections of the various tribes to what they termed starvation. Sitting Bull had been making his demands at Washington for better treatment of his people. The "Indian Question" had arisen again, to occupy the front pages of the newspapers and accordingly to be the subject of the conversation at many gatherings. Then, a mistaken zealot--who he was never has been determined--sent forth word to the various tribes that he was Christ come to earth again, and that if the various tribes would send their representatives to a meeting place at Pyramid Lake, Nevada, he would outline a plan by which all could be peace again.

How those representatives made the long journey is almost beyond comprehension. Short Bull, for instance, the representative of the Ogalalla Sioux, traveled from a spot near Manderson, South Dakota, across what was then a country with but few roads and no rail transportation, making a part of the distance on horseback and part of it on foot. Other representatives accomplished the journey in the same fashion. Christ had come back to earth to aid the Indian. And the Indian, suffering and destitute, was willing to believe almost anything.

"Christ," as he existed at Pyramid Lake, Nevada, was different indeed from the Being described in the Scriptures. This Messiah was much older and possessed a son which he presented to the chiefs without explanation. A demented white man with a knowledge of magic and evidently a store of electric batteries, he performed various feats for the Indians and appeared and disappeared by the simple routine of jumping from behind a large rock and retiring the same way. His message was that the Indian should adopt religion, and to this end, he passed forth a queerly marked white shirt which he called the Ghost Shirt and which was to be worn at religious ceremonial dances. Then, having adopted religion, the Indian was to intermingle with the whites, marry and bring pale-face husbands and wives into the tribes. If this were done, he said, the grass of the prairie once more would grow green and the buffalo would again roam the plains. Of course, he was speaking figuratively, with the meaning that if his idea were followed, prosperity would come to the Indian. But while the red man has a habit of talking in figures of speech, he also has an intense literal inclination. The representatives went back and reported what had been told them by the Messiah. What followed afterwards was a little piece of Indian politics.