

DISARMING INDIANS

A MAN WHO HAS SEEN IT DONE TELLS WHAT SORT OF A JOB IT IS.

THE EXPERIENCE OF MAJOR MAUCK IN DISARMING A BAND OF
CHEYENNES ON THE NORTH FORK OF THE CANADIAN RIVER
IN 1878.

" 'The massacre at Wounded Knee ? ' Yes ! said Captain Martin, I have read about it. 'A massacre,' you call it. Well, it was a massacre, and a bloody, dreadful one, too. And you don't know whether the soldiers or the Indians were to blame? Neither of them, perhaps. May not the fault have been with whoever it was that produced the situation? Do you know what the situation was like? Do you know what sort of a job falls to soldiers when they have Indians to disarm? I think I can tell you a story that may make that clearer to you.

"It happened in the winter of 1878 ; I was a lieutenant then, in the Fourth cavalry. My captain was Mauck. He's dead now. Short, sturdy, erect in his carriage, a very brave man he was. Mauck had the job of taking a band of Northern Cheyennes from their homes in the north to the Indian Territory. There were some sixty bucks, with their women and children, about 250 in all. They were prisoners in a way, for though they had been peaceable for years and had distinguished themselves in two campaigns as scouts in the government service, they were leaving their old camping grounds, and what is dear to an Indian heart, the graves of their fathers. They had fought for Uncle Sam against the Sioux and the Nez Percés, but that availed nothing. When it came time to move them and seize their lands, it was 'Forward, march ! ' just the same. But their protests were very bitter, and their reluctance extreme, and nothing but the logic of a battalion of mounted soldiers got them under way.

"From Fort Sydney, Nebraska, where our battalion took charge of them, across the prairies of Western Kansas, was a weary march. Wood and water were sometimes thirty miles apart, which meant a two days' march from stream to stream for overloaded ponies worn down with previous marching and a halt at night without water or fuel, and this, mind you, in December with snow on the ground. Six weeks our journey lasted, and as we got to know the individual Indians of the band, every day our sympathy and interest increased. A scout that we had, who was our interpreter, knew the Indian charac-

ter well. His name was Amos Chapman. The Indians seemed to like him, and talked to him freely, so that with what we saw and with what we learned from him and through him, we were constantly getting new insight into Indian character, and developing new interest in this particular band. It was a favorable band to study, too, for the Cheyennes are the very flower of the plains Indians, and their men are brave and their women clean and chaste.

"We would have liked to part with those Indians upon terms of mutual esteem, but it was not fated to happen that way. One snowy evening as we lay in camp on the north fork of the Canadian river, between Fort Supply and Fort Reno, a courier overtook us with a dispatch. We were then about two days' march from the agency that we were bound for. The dispatch directed our commanding officer to stop whenever the order reached him and disarm the Indians, and take away their war ponies. It seems that the agent of the Cheyennes in Indian Territory had protested against this band being sent down armed from the North, and as a result, the order to disarm them had probably been issued by the War Department, at the request of the Department of the Interior. It was doubtless a matter of clerks and copying, and endorsements, and a functionary's nod, and a signature hastily scrawled in Washington, and that was all. But to us it was a different business, with a mighty serious difference. To disarm any Indian is like handcuffing him, for it leaves him helpless to defend himself, and deprives him of the only means of support that is natural to him, which is hunting. What made this case harder—ten times harder for us if not for them—was that we knew that both the guns and the ponies that belonged to these Cheyennes had been earned by them in the government service, and distinctly given to them on different occasions as the reward of courage and fidelity. So when Major Mauck got that message he understood that a serious thing had happened to him. Amos Chapman, the interpreter, had got leave to go over to Fort Supply to spend the night and join us again in the morning. Mauck sent for him to come back immediately.

"Now Chapman was a remarkable man. He had served under Sheridan, McKenzie, Custer and other Indian fighters, and had lost a leg in a battle with Indians. Through years of border warfare he had been distinguished for his courage, but when he got Mauck's message he refused to come. If those Cheyennes were going to be disarmed, he said for his part he wasn't in it. It would simply be a useless slaughter, and the man who acted as go between in such a business would be the first man killed. Fifty dollars a month and a ration, he said, afforded him a very inadequate inducement to mix himself up in any such piece of business. His mind was pellucid on that point, and it seemed fixed, and no interpreter came to camp that night.

"But Chapman's reputation for courage was well founded. Courage was in him which had entered into his conduct too long to let him shirk any hazardous job that seemed legitimately his. It was true that his life was worth more to him than \$50 and a ration a month, but there was that inside of him, that would not allow him to stay in a post when he knew there was fight in prospect fifteen miles off.

"Mauck and I slept together that night, and we took to bed with us the secret that no one else knew, that there would

28
M447
D611
1891

probably be a bloody fight next day. As we lay there and talked about it all, we felt as I suppose a man feels who has a duel arranged for the next morning. We were glad enough when the night was over and Amos Chapman with his wooden leg, gave the lie to his own message by riding into camp in the gray of the morning on his mule.

"The Indians were encamped a few rods off. Mauck sent word to them to stay in camp, and that he was coming over to talk with them. Presently he and Chapman went over to the largest teepee, where a dozen of the older bucks had assembled. They sat about in council. The proposition was laid before them; was received with true Indian imperturbability, and rejected with dignity and decision. Chapman argued and protested with them a few minutes, until seeing the wrath of the bucks getting hotter, he said to Mauck that if they were going to get away alive they must be about it. So Mauck got up and slowly and quietly moved toward the entrance, with Chapman after him. Not a moment too soon. He had scarcely risen from his place, when a knife slit down the canvass of the teepee from the outside, and a furious young buck sprang through the opening, crying: 'Let me kill the—— thief! Let me kill him!' And he would have killed him if Mauck had not moved when he did. But that instant peril passed, the other chiefs restrained the hot head and Mauck and Chapman got back to camp and the protection of the troops.

"Then came the execution of that injurious order. We moved up our four troops of dismounted cavalry and ranged them on two sides of a trapezoid, so that they should not fire into one another. The Indians came out of their camp and faced us. Grim looking warriors they were, with their carbines and Winchesters at full cock and the squaws and children behind them with knives and hatchets in their hands. The confronting lines were not thirty yards apart, and as we stood there looking into their eyes, flashing with resentment, not the less deep because it was reasonable, our officers at least felt that their time had come, for every lieutenant of us was as well known to every Indian as daily intercourse for six weeks could make him, and we all knew that if a shot was fired an officer would be the first victim.

"But though the Cheyennes were grim, they were not so grim as little Mauck. Straight he stood at the front of his line, the natural target of every Indian there. For Indians, you know, like all savages, are concrete in their feelings, and when they have been injured, or are threatened with an injury, they do not generalize about their misfortunes but form definite opinions as to who has done them harm. These Cheyennes were satisfied that Mauck intended to rob them of their arms and their ponies for his personal profit and use, and their feelings toward him were such as such a conviction would warrant. But it was all the same to Mauck. He had not made the situation, and he could not dodge it.

"A Cheyenne warrior named Iron Shirt was the most violent. He made a speech to the soldiers, in which he reminded them that the ponies it was proposed to take away from the Indians had formerly belonged to the Nez Perce, against whom the Cheyennes had fought as government scouts, and had received the captured ponies from the commanding general as a reward for their services. In the same way he

said the Cheyennes' arms had been given to them by Gen. Custer for similar services in another indian war, and they had had the assurance of General Sheridan that they would keep them. These features of the situation being adequately dwelt upon, the Indians pulled out from the little packages they wore around their necks their discharges as government scouts, showing how some had been discharged as corporals and sergeants, and all with good 'character.' These they tore to pieces, saying that they were 'lying papers,' and that all white men were liars; and declaring that although they were out-numbered four to one, that that was a good day to die, and that they would die right there. Some of the Indian boys got frightened and slipped away back to camp and scrambled up on their ponies with intent to make off, but the women howled to them and they jumped off, and came back with their knives in their hands, to take their stand with the rest.

"For three hours the Indians raged at bay, and Mauck and his command stood almost in silence and waited for whatever might come. At last a half-breed named George Bent, whose father was a white man, and in whom the Indian feelings took a modified force came boldly forward, his cheeks pale, expecting every moment to be shot in the back, and so agitated by the prospect that the perspiration, that cold day, rolled down his face. He laid his rifle in silence on the ground at Mauck's feet. His family followed him. That turned the scale. The old chief came forward next, and made a heart-broken protest against what he called the treachery and dishonesty of the whites. He was entrapped, he said, and could not help himself, so he laid down his gun. And so, one after another, they gave up their arms. Only three or four of their ponies were taken from them. The rest they absolutely needed and were allowed to keep. That was all there was of it. How long it took no one noticed at the time, but I was astonished when it was all over to find that it was 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The Indians never doubted for a moment that Mauck had robbed them for his individual gain. Full of hatred and distrust of white men and their promises, they were driven on to the reservation, where, of course they turned their energies to raising horses, selling skins, and earning money however they could, with which to buy more guns.

And so there was no fight; no report of the matter was ever made to the War Department, and of course Mauck never got credit for winning a hard battle without striking a blow. I doubt if half a dozen officers of the army, outside of the eight that were there, even so much as heard the story of those hours of suspense, far more trying than any fight."

"Well captain," asked the reporter, "if the fight that you looked for had come off, would the squaws and children have been killed?"

"I don't see what could have prevented it. Certainly those who were not disabled would have made themselves very active. If I had been shot through the legs I suppose some old squaw would have run in and ripped me up with a knife. In a fight in '67 a trumpeter was disabled and the squaws caught him and skinned him alive. Still soldiers dislike to kill squaws. I have known them to take care of Indian babies, whose mothers were killed, for days together, and keep them alive on sugar until they got into camp."