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KEOKUK, CHIEF OF THE SAC AND FOX INDIANS.

Keokuk is a native of the Sac nation of Indians and was born near or upon Rock River, in the north-western part of what now constitutes the state of Illinois, about the year 1780. He is not a hereditary chief, and consequently has risen to his present elevation by the force of talent and of enterprise. He began to manifest these qualities at a very early period of his life. While but a youth he performed an act, which placed him, as it were by *brève*, in the ranks of manhood. In the first battle in which he engaged, he encountered and killed a Sioux warrior, with his spear, while on horseback; and as the Sioux are distinguished for their horsemanship, this was looked upon as so great an achievement, that a public feast was made in commemoration of it, by his tribe; and the youthful Keokuk was forthwith admitted to all the rights and privileges of a brave. It was further allowed, that ever afterward, on all public occasions, he might appear on horseback, even if the rest of the chiefs and braves were not mounted.

During the late war between the United States and Great Britain, and before Keokuk was entitled to take his seat in the councils of his nation, an expedition was sent out by our government, to destroy the Indian village at Peoria, on the Illinois river. A rumour reached the Sac village in which he resided, that this expedition was also to attack the Sacs; and the whole tribe was thrown into consternation. The Indians were panic-stricken, and the council hastily determined to abandon their village. Keokuk happened to be standing near the council-lodge when this decision was made. It was no sooner announced than he boldly advanced to the door and requested admission. It was granted. He asked leave to speak, and permission was given him. He commenced by saying he had heard with deep regret the decision of the council—that he himself was wholly opposed to fight before an enemy still distant, and whose strength was entirely unknown. He called the attention of the council to the importance of meeting the enemy in their approach—of harassing their progress—cutting them off in detail—of driving them back, or of nobly dying in defence of their country and their homes.

"Make me your leader," he boldly exclaimed; "let our young men follow me, and the pale faces shall be driven back to their towns. Let the old men and the women, and all who are afraid to meet the white man, stay here, but let your braves go to battle." Such intrepid conduct could not fail to produce its effect upon a race so excitable as the Indians. The warriors with one voice declared they were ready to follow Keokuk; and he was at once chosen to lead them against the enemy. It turned out, however, that the alarm was false, but the eloquence of Keokuk in the council, and his energy in preparing for the expedition, placed him at once in the first rank of the braves.

His military reputation was on another occasion much increased by the skill and promptness with which he met a sudden emergency on the battle-field. With a party of his braves, Keokuk was hunting in the country which lies between the residence of the Sacs and that of the Sioux, betwixt whom, for many years, a deadly hatred had existed. Very unexpectedly, a party of the latter, well mounted, came upon them. The Sacs were also on horseback, but their enemies being superior horsemen and fully equipped for war, had a decided advantage. There was no covert from behind which the Sacs could fight, and flight was impossible. Keokuk's mode of defence was as novel as ingenious. He instantly formed his men into a circle, ordered them to dismount, and take shelter behind their horses, by which movement they were protected from the missiles of the Sioux, and at the time placed under circumstances in which they could avail themselves of their superiority as marksmen. The Sioux, raising the war-whoop, charged upon their entrenched foe with fury, but were received with a fire so destructive, that they were compelled to fall back. The attack was repeated, but with the same result. The horses could not be forced upon those whose guns were pouring forth volleys of fire and smoke, and after several unsuccessful attempts to break the lines, the Sioux retreated with considerable loss.

At a subsequent period, during a cessation of hostilities between these tribes, the Sacs had gone to the prairies to hunt buffalo, leaving their village but slightly protected by braves. During the hunt Keokuk and his band unexpectedly approached an encampment of a large number of Sioux, painted for war, and evidently on their way to attack his village. His own braves were widely scattered over the extensive plains, and could not be speedily gathered together. Possessing the spirit of a fearless and

generous mind, he instantly resolved upon the bold expedient of throwing himself between the impending danger and his people. Unattended, he deliberately rode into the camp of his enemy. In the midst of their lodges rose the war-pole, and around it the Sioux were dancing, and partaking of those fierce excitements, by means of which the Indians usually prepare themselves for battle. It happened that revenge upon the Sacs constituted the burden of their songs at the moment of Keokuk's approach. He dashed into the midst of them and boldly demanded to see their chief. "I have come," said he, "to let you know that there are traitors in your camp: they have told me that you are preparing to attack my village: I know they told me lies, for you could not, after smoking the pipe of peace, be so base as to murder my women and children in my absence. None but cowards would be guilty of such conduct." When the first feeling of amazement began to subside, the Sioux crowded around him in a manner evincing a determination to seize his person, and they had already laid hold of his legs, when he added in a loud voice, "I supposed they told me lies, but if what I have heard is true, then the Sacs are ready for you." With a sudden effort, he dashed aside those who had seized him, plunged his spurs into his gallant horse, and rode off at full speed. Several guns were discharged at him, but fortunately without effect: a number of the Sioux warriors, instantly sprung upon their horses and pursued him, but in vain. Keokuk, on horseback, was in his element; he made the woods resound with the war-whoop, and brandishing his tomahawk in defiance of his foes, soon left them far behind, and joined his little party of braves. His pursuers, fearful of some stratagem, gave up the pursuit, after having followed him for some distance, and retired to their camp. Keokuk took immediate steps to call in his braves and speedily returned to protect his village. His enemies, however, finding themselves discovered, abandoned the contemplated attack and retraced their steps to their own country.

The eloquence of Keokuk and his sagacity in the civil affairs of his nation, are, like his military talents, of a high order. One or two cases in which these have been exhibited, are worthy of being recorded. A few years since some of his warriors fell in with a party of unarmed Menomonees, at Prairie des Chiens, in sight of Fort Crawford, and murdered the whole of them. Justly incensed at this outrage the Menomonees prepared to take up arms against the Sacs, and prevailed upon the Winnebagoes to join them. For the purpose of allaying the rising storm, the United States' agent at Prairie des Chiens, General Street, invited the several parties to a council at that place for the purpose of adjusting the difficulty without a resort to arms. They accordingly, out of respect to the agent, assembled at Fort Crawford; but the Menomonees refused sternly to hold any conference with the Sacs on the subject. Keokuk told the agent not to be discouraged, for he would adjust the difficulty with them before they separated, in despite of their prejudices and positive refusal to treat. He only asked an opportunity of meeting them face to face in the council-lodge. The tribes were brought together, but the Menomonees persevered in their determination to hold no conference with the Sacs. The negotiation proceeded, and a friendly feeling was re-established between the Winnebagoes and the Sacs. Keokuk then rose, and with much deliberation began his address to the Menomonees. At first they averted their faces or listened with looks of defiance. He had commenced his speech without smoking the pipe or shaking hands, which was a breach of etiquette; and, above all, he was the chief of a tribe that had inflicted upon them an injury, for which blood alone could atone. Under these discouraging circumstances, Keokuk proceeded in his forcible, persuasive and impressive manner. Such was the touching character of his appeal, such the power of his eloquence, that the features of his enemies gradually relaxed; they listened; they assented; and when he concluded by remarking proudly, but in a conciliating tone, "I came here to say that I am sorry for the imprudence of my young men; I came to make peace; I now offer you the hand of Keokuk; who will refuse it?" they rose one by one and accepted the proffered grasp.

In the late contest between the United States and Black Hawk's band, Keokuk and a majority of the Sacs and Foxes took no part. Black Hawk made several efforts to induce them to unite against the whites, which they were strongly inclined to do, not only from their love of war and of plunder, but on account of the injustice with which very many of them believed they had been treated by the people of the United States. It required all of Keokuk's influence and moderation to prevent the whole nation from enlisting under the Black Hawk banner. He requested the

agent of the American government to send to his village, on the west side of the Mississippi, a white man who understood the Sac language, and who might bear witness to his, Keokuk's, sincerity and faithfulness to the whites. Such a person was sent. The excitement raised by Black Hawk and the war in which he was engaged, continued to increase among Keokuk's people. "He stood on a mine liable to be exploded by a single spark. He was in peril of being slain as the friend of the whites. He remained calm and unawed, ruling his turbulent little state with mildness and firmness, but at the constant risk of his life. One day a new emissary arrived from Black Hawk's party. Whiskey was introduced into the camp, and Keokuk saw that the crisis was at hand. He warned the white man who was his guest of the impending danger, and advised him to conceal himself. A scene of tumult ensued. The emissary spoke of blood that had been shed—of their relations being driven from their hunting-grounds—of recent insults—of injuries long inflicted by the whites—hinted at the ready vengeance that might be taken on an exposed frontier—of defenceless cabins—and of rich booty. The desired effect was produced. The braves began to dance around the war-pole, to paint, and to give other evidences of a warlike character. Keokuk watched the rising storm and appeared to mingle in it. He drank and listened and apparently assented to all that was said. At length his warriors called out to be led to battle, and he was asked to lead them. He arose and spoke with that power which had never failed him. He sympathized in their wrongs—their thirst for vengeance—he won their confidence by giving utterance to the passions by which they were moved, and echoing back their own thoughts with a master-spirit. He then considered the proposition to go to war—alluded to the power of the whites—the hopelessness of the contest. He told them he was their chief—that it was his duty to rule them as a father at home—to lead them to war if they determined to go. But in the proposed war there was no middle course. The power of the United States was such that unless they conquered that great nation, they must perish; that he would lead them instantly against the whites, on one condition, and that was, that they should first put all their women and children to death, and then resolve, that having crossed the Mississippi, they would never return, but perish among the graves of their fathers, rather than yield them to the white men. This proposal, desperate as it was, presented the true issue: it calmed the disturbed passions of his people; the turmoil subsided; order was restored; and the authority of Keokuk became for the time being firmly re-established."

Black Hawk and his band have always been opposed to Keokuk, and since the late war, which proved so disastrous to them, and into which they were plunged in opposition to his counsel, they have looked upon him with increased aversion.

They have made repeated efforts to destroy his influence with the remainder of the tribe, and owing to the monotony of his pacific rule, were, on one occasion, nearly successful. A spirit of discontent pervaded his people: they complained of the extent of the power which he wielded; they needed excitement, and as his measures were all of a peaceful character, they sought it in a change of rulers. The matter was at length openly and formally discussed. The voice of the nation was taken; Keokuk was removed from his post of head man, and a young chief placed in his stead. He made not the smallest opposition to this measure of his people, but calmly awaited the result. When his young successor was chosen, Keokuk was the first to salute him with the title of father. But the matter did not rest here. With great courtesy he begged to accompany the new chief to the agent of the United States, then at Rock Island; and with profound respect introduced him as his chief and his father—urged the agent to receive him as such, and solicited as a personal favour, that the same regard that had ever been paid to him by the whites, might be transferred to his worthy successor. The sequel may be readily inferred. The nation could not remain blind to the error they had committed. Keokuk as a private individual was still the first man among his people. His ready and noble acquiescence in their wishes, won both their sympathy and admiration. He rose rapidly but silently to his former elevated station, while the young chief sunk as rapidly to his former obscurity.

In the autumn of the year 1837, Keokuk and a party of his warriors made a visit to Washington city. Black Hawk was of the party, having been taken along, it is supposed, by the politic Keokuk, lest in his absence the restless spirit of the old man should create some new difficulties at home. We are indebted to a gentleman who happened to be at the capital at the time of this