

Wooden Leg Serving as Judge

A policeman came to my place, one time, and told me that (Agent) Eddy wanted to see me at the agency office. He did not say what was wanted. I thought: "What have I done?" I went right away. I had never been much about the agency, and I did not know Eddy very well. But the people all the time were saying he was a good man, so I was not afraid. When I got there, a strange white man was at the office. The interpreter told me this man was from Washington. Eddy and the other man talked to me a little while, about nothing of importance. Then Eddy said:

"We want you to be judge."

The Indian Court was held at the agency. My home place was where it now is, over a divide from the agency and on the Tongue river side of the reservation. I accepted the appointment. I was paid ten dollars each month for going to the agency and attending to the court business one or two times each month. Not long after I had been serving as a judge, Eddy called me into his office. He said:

"A letter from Washington tells me that Indians having two or more wives must send away all but one. You, as judge, must do your part toward seeing that all the Cheyenne do this."

My heart jumped around in my breast when he told me this. He went on talking further about the matter, but I could not pay close attention to him. My thoughts were racing and whirling. When I could get them steady enough for speech, I said to him:

"I have two wives. You must get some other man to serve as judge."

He sat there and looked straight at me, saying nothing for a little while. Then he began talking again:

"Somebody else as judge would make you send away one of your wives. It would be better if you yourself managed it. All of the Indians in the United States are going to be compelled to put aside their extra wives. Washington has sent the order."

I decided to keep the office of judge. It appeared there was no getting around the order, so I made up my mind to be the first one to send away my extra wife, then I should talk to the other Cheyennes about the matter. I took plenty of time to think about how I should let my wives know about what was coming. Then I allowed the released one some further time to make arrangements as to where she should go. The first wife, the older one, had two daughters. The younger wife had no children. It seemed this younger one ought to leave me. I was in very low spirits. When a wagon came to get her and her personal packs I went out and sat on a knoll about a hundred yards away. I could not speak to her. It seemed I could not move. All I could do was just sit there and look down at the ground. She went back to her own people,

on another reservation. A few years later I heard that she was married to a good husband. Oh, how glad it made my heart to hear that!

I sent a policeman to tell all Cheyennes having more than one wife to come and see me. One of them came that same afternoon. After we had smoked together, I said:

"The agents tell me that I as the judge must order all Cheyennes to have only one wife. You must send away one of yours."

"I shall not obey that order," he answered me.

"Yes, it will have to be that way," I insisted.

"But who will be the father to the children?" he asked.

I do not know, but I suppose that will be arranged."

"Wooden Leg, you are crazy. Eddy is crazy."

"No. If anybody is crazy, it is somebody in Washington. All of the Indians in the United States have this order. If we resist it, our policemen will put us in jail. If much trouble is made about it, soldiers may come to fight us. Whatever man does not put aside his extra wife may be the cause of the whole tribe being killed."

Many of our men were angered by the order. My heart sympathized with them, so I never became offended at the strong words that they sometimes used. Finally, though, all of them sent away their extra wives. Afterward, from time to time, somebody would tell me about some man living a part of the time at one place with one wife and a part of the time at another place with another wife. I just listened, said nothing, and did nothing. These were old men, and I considered it enough of change for them that they be prevented from having two wives at the same place.

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