

SIoux War Club



“Taoyateduta Is Not a Coward”

BETWEEN midnight and dawn on the fateful morning of August 18, 1862, a council of Sioux chiefs and warriors, meeting at the house of Chief Little Crow, or Taoyateduta, debated the issue of war or peace. The angry young braves demanded that Little Crow lead them in an uprising against the whites, but he refused, until one called him a coward. In answer he made this speech:¹

TAOYATEDUTA is not a coward, and he is not a fool! When did he run away from his enemies? When did he leave his braves behind him on the warpath and turn back to his tepee? When he ran away from your enemies, he walked behind on your trail with his face to the Ojibways and covered your backs as a she-bear covers her cubs! Is Taoyateduta without scalps? Look at his war feathers! Behold the scalp locks of your enemies hanging there on his lodgepoles! Do they call him a coward? Taoyateduta is not a coward, and he is not a fool. Braves, you are like little children: you know not what you are doing.

You are full of the white man's devil water. You are like dogs in the Hot Moon when they run mad and snap at their own shadows. We are only little herds of buffalo left scattered; the great herds that once covered the prairies are no more. See! — the white men are like the locusts when they fly so thick that the whole sky is a snowstorm.

¹ This version of the speech appeared in H. L. Gordon, *The Feast of the Virgins and Other Poems*, 343 (Chicago, 1891). Gordon claimed to have received it directly from Wowinapa, Little Crow's son. The sketch is by Frank Mayer.

You may kill one — two — ten; yes, as many as the leaves in the forest yonder, and their brothers will not miss them. Kill one — two — ten, and ten times ten will come to kill you. Count your fingers all day long and white men with guns in their hands will come faster than you can count.

Yes; they fight among themselves — away off. Do you hear the thunder of their big guns? No; it would take you two moons to run down to where they are fighting, and all the way your path would be among white soldiers as thick as tamaracks in the swamps of the Ojibways. Yes; they fight among themselves, but if you strike at them they will all turn on you and devour you and your women and little children just as the locusts in their time fall on the trees and devour all the leaves in one day.

You are fools. You cannot see the face of your chief; your eyes are full of smoke. You cannot hear his voice; your ears are full of roaring waters. Braves, you are little children — you are fools. You will die like the rabbits when the hungry wolves hunt them in the Hard Moon (January).

Taoyateduta is not a coward: he will die with you.



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