

AMPUTATION OF THE LEG OF A FULL-BLOODED SIOUX INDIAN.

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THE following operation is not so interesting *per se* as the circumstances which made it possible to be performed. Viewed in the latter light, it has some points of interest, and I will therefore attempt a brief account of it. On the occasion of the visit of the Sioux Commission, consisting of General Crook, Gov. Foster and General Warner, to the Cheyenne River Indian Agency, So. Dak., for the purpose of treating with the Sioux in behalf of the Government, for a cession of a part of the Great Sioux Reservation to the United States, all the Indians of the Agency were summoned to be present at the "Great Council," and participate in its proceedings, as well as to attach their signatures to the agreement.

The Indians, numbering some three thousand souls, were encamped around or near the agency, and when not busy in my office, I was going through their camps looking for cases. In one tepee I found a sad, emaciated, wan-looking young Indian, whose anxious expression and debilitated condition attracted my attention; on asking him his name (in Sioux) he replied it was *Ceca Yamni*, the translation of which is "Three Thighs." I observed that one of his feet was wrapped in a dirty cotton cloth, stiff from dessicated pus, and emitting a dreadful odor. I asked him to show me his foot, as I knew that the trouble was located there. He slowly removed the cloth, and exposed a greatly swollen left foot and ankle. I took a pocket case probe and inserted it into five large sinuses, and at the bottom of each I detected dead bone. The sinuses were located on each side of the foot opposite the bones of the tarsus. A diagnosis of necrosis of the tarsus was made.

Owing to the absence of hospital facilities, an operation for removal of the necrosed bones was only to be considered. He said he had not walked for three years, and had made up his mind to die. With no idea that he would ever consent, I said: "There is no use of your dying, as I can take off that foot, and you will live out your days." "No," said he, "I would rather die than be cut like that." I explained to him the feasibility of the operation, its daily occurrence among the whites, etc., but all to no purpose.

Some days subsequently I met a gentleman from Pierre, President of the Board of Trade, who had visited the Agency to see how the Commission was progressing in its work of opening up the Reser-

vation, as that city was vitally interested in the success of the enterprise. I noticed that this gentleman walked with a cane and had a very perceptible limp in his gait, and questioned him as to the cause of his lameness. He said that he wore "an artificial leg, having had his limb amputated in its lower third for a diseased foot some years ago." From the ease and agility with which he moved, no one would have supposed him *minus* a foot, and it occurred to me to take this gentleman out to Three Thigh's *tepee* and give him an ocular demonstration of the results of an amputation of the foot. The gentleman consented, and we went forthwith. I had him walk, run and jump in the *tepee*, and then asked Three Thighs if he saw anything wrong about that man's movements? He said "No, he gets about all right." "Well," said I, "his leg has been taken off exactly where I proposed to remove yours; after the amputation you will be just as well off as he." Knowing the Sioux to be expert horsemen, I added that he would also be able to ride horseback, to plough, cut hay and climb ladders. I requested the gentleman to show my patient his stump and the mechanism of the artificial apparatus; he did so, and if I live one hundred years, I do not expect to see a more thoroughly astonished human being, than was that poor ignorant savage. After he had fully taken in the situation he said, "you may do it."

His *tepee* was placed near my residence at the Agency, and I at once began a preparatory treatment. His foot and ankle joint were in the condition represented by the illustration below.



Fig. 1.

REPORT TO THE INDIAN BUREAU AT WASHINGTON,
SEPTEMBER, 1889.

"HE was a full-blooded Santee Sioux, 22 years old, unmarried, of scrofulous constitution, suffering from necrosis of the left tarsus. I amputated by the circular method at junction of middle and lower



thirds of leg, Sept. 18, 1889, at 12 M., assisted by Dr. J. B. Ferguson, A. S., U. S. A.; Chas. E. McChesney, U. S. Indian Agent; W. G. Waters, Supt. Indian School, and Mr. Shoemaker, Hospital Steward, U. S. A. The disease for which the amputation was advised and performed, is one of common occurrence among the Sioux, and, in nearly every instance, destroys the victim. In this case it was of three years' duration, and had greatly impaired the sufferer's general health; he was confined to his *tepee* and unable to walk or even assume the upright posture with the aid of crutches, as the foot was so swollen and painful that even slight pressure, caused the most exquisite pain. He moved about on his hands and knees, and only to obey the calls of nature. He was practically helpless, morose, sad, gloomy and most of the time in tears. I explained to him that the only chance of saving his life, was to remove the dead foot; and, after a brief hesitation, and witnessing a gentleman from Pierre walk around with an artificial leg of exactly the same character as he would have, he consented to the operation. I then placed him upon a preparatory treatment for some weeks, superintending his food, etc., etc., and on Sept. 16, took him into my private house, where the operation was performed as stated above. On Sept. 22, I observed he was lonesome from the lack of associates of his race, and at his request, removed him to his sister's quarters at the Agency. I have been his sole nurse and attendant, supervising his diet and sanitation, and dressing his limb whenever required. At this writing, October 4, he is in fine spirits, free from all pain, and the wound is doing nicely. I could not expect his condition to be better. This is the first amputation at this Agency, and there is every indication that it will be a complete success."

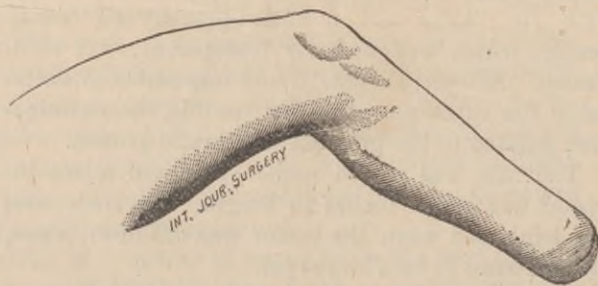


Fig. 2.

During the operation the arteries were secured by silk sutures which were left in the stump. The flap was adjusted by interrupted silk sutures, a roller bandage applied over the end of stump, surmounted by antiseptic gauze and cotton batting; the patient

placed in bed with the stump elevated on a pillow. Considerable pain was felt for three or four days, but was easily controlled by morphia. The wound healed by granulation, without occurrence of secondary hemorrhage. When the stump had assumed the appearance presented in the preceding illustration, I made measurements as directed by the firm of A. A. Marks, New York, taking great care to have them precise, and forwarded the same to them, with authority from General J. F. Morgan, Hon. Commissioner Indian Affairs, to make a leg for the patient. It arrived promptly and was applied. Three Thighs walked off with it, a happy Indian, and goes about, any and everywhere, on foot or horseback, with the greatest ease. The operation and its results is a



Fig. 3.

great wonder to these people, many of whom said that he would certainly die if the "White Medicine Man should cut him." Incidents like this, do much toward civilizing the Indian, because they are ocular demonstrations of the superiority of the white man's skill, over that of their native medicine man.

Surgery among Indians should never be attempted unless the operator is almost certain of success, for one failure, ending in death, will never be forgotten nor understood by them. After Three Thighs had worn his leg some days, he desired a photograph of himself, and the accompanying illustration shows him in full Sioux costume, with his leg *in situ*.