

Tecumseh's Confederacy

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THE PROPHET'S TOWN

BEFORE entering upon the final details of the struggle between Harrison and Tecumseh, it may not be uninteresting to recur to a point of time just before the Treaty of Fort Wayne, when the two Indian leaders removed from the neighborhood of the white settlements at Greenville, Ohio, and established the Prophet's Town on the Wabash river in the month of June, 1808. This was to be the spot from whence should emanate all those brilliant schemes of the brothers to merge the broken tribes into a confederacy; to oppose the further advance of the white settlers, and with the aid of the British power in Canada, to drive them back beyond the waters of the Ohio. It was, as General DeHart has aptly remarked, "the seat of Indian diplomacy and strategy for many years."¹

In leading their followers to this new field, the brothers were guided by certain lines of policy which were both remarkable in their conception, and signal for their far-sightedness. The rendezvous at Greenville had been marked by intense enthusiasm, hundreds of red men flocking thither to imbibe the new faith and to commune with the Prophet; so many in fact, that Governor Harrison had ordered them to be supplied from the public stores at Fort Wayne in order to avert trouble. But it was evident to the new leaders that all this congregating did not turn aside starvation; that warriors could not be held together who were hungry and who lacked corn; that the proximity of white traders was conducive to drunkenness; that if back of outward appearances any war-like exercises were to be indulged, or the emissaries and arms of the British were to be received, that these things would re-

¹ *Report Tippecanoe Monument Commission, 1905, 33.*

quire secrecy and seclusion until the plot was ripe; that some strategic position must be secured on one of the great waterways of the interior, within quick striking distance of the settlements and easily accessible to the British posts.

Such a spot was the site of the Old French and Indian trading post on the right bank of the Wabash and about ten miles above the present city of Lafayette. To the west about one and one-quarter miles is the marble shaft of the Battleground, and going from thence east across the fields and open woodlands you come to the fringe of woods that still lines the river. You have walked over the old Indian cornfields and are now standing on the exact location of the old Prophet's Town. The scene is one of great beauty even at this day, when the forest has been despoiled and Nature ravished of her choicest charms. Here, the river extends in an almost unbroken line for three or four miles, bordered by sycamores and maples, and with a wealth of clinging vines, crab-apple blossoms and blooming flowers on either bank. The old trading post was located on one of a series of high cliffs, crowned with huge forest trees, and commanding the river through vistas of foliage. The face of these cliffs is frequently broken by sharp ravines, that extend on back among the hills with many devious windings. At the foot of the steep slopes, extends a long narrow tableland of forest bordering directly upon the river; this is interspersed with springs of fresh water that burst from the hillsides. On the cliffs stood the camps and cabins of the warriors and their followers; below, and on the tableland next to the water, the horses were tethered, and canoes were drawn up out of the river.

Thither the Prophet and his brother now turned their eyes. The whole upper valley, including the basins of the Tippecanoe and the Wild Cat, was the rightful possession of the Miamis and Weas, but the brothers now secured a pretended right or license from the Kickapoos and Pottawattamies to establish a camp. The Miamis of the north and the Delawares of the south, were alike alarmed. The Delawares in particular had been the friends of the white people and adherents of the governor. They divined, and divined truly, that the Prophet's plans ultimately involved mischief. To

avoid a possible war they sent a deputation of chiefs to the Prophet, who refused to see them, but deputed Tecumseh to answer their remonstrances. On this mission he was entirely successful. By threats and persuasion he turned them back, although they had received strict instructions from their tribe to oppose a new settlement. On a visit shortly afterwards by John Conner, interpreter for the Delawares, on a search for stolen horses, he found the Prophet safely ensconced in his chosen position, with a following of thirty or forty Shawnees, and about ninety others, consisting of Pottawattamies, Chippewas, Ottowas and Winnebagoes.²

The location selected was certainly ideal. "By a short portage the Indians could go by canoe to Lake Erie or Lake Michigan, or by the Wabash reach all the vast system of watercourses to the north and west. It was only twenty-four hours journey by canoe, at a favorable stage of water, down stream to Vincennes, the capital of the white man's territory;"³ the British post at Malden was only a few days distant. As to the Indian tribes, the Prophet's Town was almost centrally located in the Miami Confederacy; to the north as far as the post of Chicago and Lake Michigan extended the realm of the Pottawattamies; on the Vermilion below, and to the west of the main stream, lay the villages of the Kickapoos, whose hardy warriors, second only to the Wyandots, had accepted the new faith; the Sacs and Foxes, the Winnebagoes, Ottowas, Chippewas and Wyandots were all within easy reach, and secret embassies and negotiations might be carried on without much fear of detection.

The brothers now resolved to pursue the following course—to wean their followers entirely away from the use of whiskey, which was fast destroying their military efficiency; to teach them, if possible, the ways of labor, so that they might raise corn and other products of the earth and thus supply their magazines against a time of war; to dupe the governor into the belief that their mission was one of peace, and undertaken solely for the moral uplift and betterment of the tribes—in the meantime, by the constant practice of religious ceremonies and rites, to work on the superstition of

² Moses Dawson, *Life of Harrison*, 106-107.

³ Alfred Pirtle, *The Battle of Tippecanoe*, 3-4.

the warriors; win them, if need be, from the chieftains who might counsel peace, and by a series of war-like sports and exercises, hold together the young bucks and train them for the inevitable conflict between the races.

What strange mysticism did the Prophet practice to make the Indians of the Wabash "abandon whiskey, discard textile clothing, return to skins, throw away their witch-bags, kill their dogs, and abandon the white man's ways, even to giving up flint and steel for making fires?"⁴ That he had gained fame and ascendancy among the neighboring tribes since the episode of the eclipse in 1806, is testified to by the fact that when Richard McNemar, the Shaker, visited him in 1807 at Greenville, Ohio, he found a temple of worship one hundred fifty feet in length surrounded by wigwams and cottages, and the Indians then told McNemar that they all believed implicitly in the Prophet and that he could "dream to God."⁵ The Prophet had at that time also gone so far as to institute the confessional, and all sinful disclosures were made to himself and four accompanying chiefs. The question was asked: "Do they confess all the bad things they ever did?" Answer: "All from seven years old. And cry and tremble when they come to confess."⁶ A sort of nature or sun-worship had already been introduced. McNemar thus describes a salutation to the lord of the day:

Next morning, as soon as it was day, one of their speakers mounted a log, near the southeast corner of the village, and began the morning service with a loud voice, in thanksgiving to the Great Spirit. He continued his address for near an hour. The people were all in their tents, some at the distance of fifteen or twenty rods; yet they could all distinctly hear, and gave a solemn and loud assent, which sounded from tent to tent, at every pause. While we stood in his view, at the end of the meeting house, on rising ground, from which we had a prospect of the surrounding wigwams, and the vast open plain or prairie, to the south and east, and which looks over the big fort, toward the north, for the distance of two miles, we felt as if we were among the tribes of Israel, on their march to Canaan.⁷

By weird incantations, symbolic ceremonies, and practice of the black art, the Prophet had gone far. He was now re-

⁴ J. P. Dunn, *True Indian Stories*, 100-101.

⁵ Richard McNemar, *The Kentucky Revival-Shakerism*, 124-127.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

garded as invulnerable, and his person sacred.⁸ But that which gave point to his oracles, and authority to his imposture, was his Shawnee hatred of the pale face. To incite their growing jealousy and malice, he told his dupes, that the white man had poisoned all their land, and prevented it from producing such things as they found necessary to their subsistence.⁹ The growing scarcity of game, the disappearance of the deer and buffalo before the white settlements, was indisputable proof of his assertions. To drive back these invaders who polluted the soil and desecrated the graves of their fathers—what more was needed to incite the savage warriors to a crusade of blood and extermination? About this time it was noticed that the Pottawattamies of the prairie, who were under the influence of the Prophet, were frequently holding religious exercises, but that these exercises were always concluded with, “war-like sports, shooting with bows, throwing the tomahawk, and wielding the war-club.”¹⁰

In the meantime, the relation of these religious ceremonies at the Prophet's Town, and their seemingly good effect upon the red men, completely disarmed the governor for the time being. He now entertained the idea that the great Indian leader might be “made a useful instrument in effecting a radical and salutary change in the manners and habits of the Indians.”¹¹ To stop the use of ardent spirits and to encourage the cultivation of corn, were two important steps, as the governor thought. Events which succeeded but added to Harrison's deception. In June or July, 1808, messengers appeared at Vincennes, and one of them stated that he had listened to the Prophet for upwards of three years, and had never heard anything but good advice.

He tells us we must pray to the Great Spirit who made the world and everything in it for our use. He tells us that no man could make the plants, the trees, and the animals, but they must be made by the Great Spirit, to whom we ought to pray, and obey in all things. He tells us not to lie, to steal, nor to drink whiskey; not to go to war, but to live in peace with all mankind. He tells us also to work and to make corn.¹²

⁸ Dawson, *Harrison*, 105.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹² Eggleston, *Tecumseh*, 146.

In August of the same year, the crafty Prophet himself appeared and stayed at Vincennes for more than two weeks. The governor was surprised at the great address and ease with which he handled his followers, and had the pleasure of listening to a speech, in which the Prophet professed the most pacific intentions, constantly haranguing his retinue upon the evils of war and liquor, and holding out to them the advantages of temperance and peace. It seems that the governor even made a few personal experiments to determine whether the Indians were in earnest about their pretensions, but could induce none of them to touch fire-water. The interview closed to the entire satisfaction of the governor, the Prophet promising to keep him fully informed as to anything that might be inimical to the settlements, and receiving in return many presents from the governor in the way of implements of husbandry, arms, powder and other things which the Indians claimed that they were in sore need of.

How vain this trust! Scarcely had the Prophet returned to his town, before he was entertaining an emissary and spy of the British government, who urged war on the United States. In the following spring of 1809, the Chippewas, Ottawas and Pottawattamies were being urged by the Prophet to take up arms against the inhabitants of Vincennes, and to destroy the settlers along the Ohio, as far up as Cincinnati. Reports of these proceedings were confirmed by Michel Brouillette, an Indian trader, and by Toussaint Dubois, a confidential agent of the governor. Harrison probably averted an Indian attack, by promptly organizing two additional companies of militia and throwing them into Fort Knox, to guard the approaches to the capital by land and water. The Indians, seeing this prompt action, deserted the Prophet and returned to their homes. The governor was not fooled a second time. The Prophet again visited him in the summer or 1809, and made the same old pretensions of peace. But the governor forced him to admit that he had entertained the British the fall before, and that he had been invited, as he said, to join a league of the Sacs and Foxes against the whites in the early spring, and he could make no satisfactory explanation as to why he had not imparted these facts to the gov-

ernment, when he had been solemnly enjoined so to do. From this time on, the Prophet was regarded with a just suspicion, and Harrison diligently regarded every movement of the new faith.

HARRISON'S VIGILANCE

The spring of 1810 opened with peril to Vincennes. The eternal vigilance of Harrison alone saved the day. The fall before had witnessed the making of the Treaty of Fort Wayne and the acquisition of the new purchase; this had strengthened the claims of the Prophet and Tecumseh for a closer union of the tribes, and had given added force to their argument in favor of a communistic ownership of all the land. What right had the old village chiefs to dispose of the common domain without the consent of the warriors who had fought to maintain it? The Great Spirit gave the soil in common to all the tribes; what single tribe could alienate any particular portion of it?

Reliable word came to the governor in April that the Prophet had assembled one thousand souls at the Prophet's Town, with probably three hundred fifty or four hundred men among them; that the French traders along the Wabash had been warned by the Prophet's followers to separate themselves from the Americans at Vincennes for trouble was brewing; that the Indians at Tippecanoe had refused to buy ammunition of the traders, saying that they had a plenty and could get plenty more without paying for it; that Matthew Elliott, the British agent at Malden, was busy with plot and intrigue against the United States. But Harrison was surrounded by some of the best scouts and confidential agents that a frontier official ever commanded—among them Tous-saint Dubois, Joseph Barron and Michel Brouillette. He kept awake and on the alert.¹³

Tecumseh now assumed a more active leadership. The day had arrived for the statesman and warrior to sound the alarm, form an active league and confederacy of all the tribes, and with tomahawk in hand, resist any further advancement on the part of the whites. As Harrison has remarked, he appeared today on the Wabash, a short time later on the shores

¹³ Dawson, *Harrison*, 138.

of Lake Erie or Lake Michigan, and then upon the Mississippi.¹⁴ Everywhere he was masterful, eloquent, convincing, and "made an impression favorable to his purpose." At one time during the early summer it is known that he was at Detroit, and he was probably in close communication with his British allies, although he professed to hate them.

About May, 1810, a council of all the tribes of the Wabash and those to the north was called at the River St. Joseph of Lake Michigan. The whole situation was fraught with danger, for Harrison had reason to believe that many of the tribes had already received the tomahawk and were meditating a combined attack on the settlements. Subsequently events proved that his fears were well founded. He immediately despatched John Conner to the Delawares and

Pointed out to them the unavoidable destruction which awaited all the tribes which should dare to take up the hatchet against their fathers, and the great danger that the friendly tribes would incur, if war should be kindled, from the difficulty of discriminating friends from foes.¹⁵

A messenger was despatched in haste after the deputies of the tribe deputed to the council, with full instructions dictated by the governor, to urge these facts upon the assembled tribes. In addition, the governor in response to the demands of a company of officers, merchants and others at Vincennes, at once called two companies of militia into active service, established alarm posts upon the frontier, and used all available means at hand to put himself in readiness for war. Fortunately, the Delawares remained faithful. If Winamac is to be believed, the Prophet in person urged upon the council an immediate surprise of Detroit, Fort Wayne, the Post at Chicago, St. Louis and Vincennes, and a junction with the tribes of the Mississippi, but the "forcible representations" of the Delaware deputies, who were looked upon as "grandfathers," prevented the adoption of his plans. It seems that the younger men and some of the war lords of the smaller bands were ready to go to war, but the sachems and older village chieftains who had participated in the treaty of the year before held aloof. The Chippewas, Ottawas and Pottawattamies re-

¹⁴ Eggleston, *Tecumseh*, 207.

¹⁵ Dawson, *Harrison*, 139.

fused to take up arms, the council broke up without any concerted action, and Winamac and the Pottawattamies were sent to the governor to make report of the proceedings. When he arrived at Vincennes in the latter part of June, he reported that as he passed through the Prophet's Town an attempt was made to assassinate him—so enraged was the Prophet at his failure on the St. Joseph. Winamac further told the governor that about the time of the council the Prophet had proposed to the younger warriors that the principal chiefs of all the tribes should be murdered; that they were the ones who had brought about a sale of the Indian lands, and that their, the warrior's hands, would never be untied until they were rid of them.¹⁶ The brothers were baffled in another mission. Tecumseh urged the Shawnees at Wapakoneta, Ohio, to join the league. A letter of John Johnston, Indian agent at Fort Wayne, informed the governor that the Shawnees refused even to enter into council with him.

The ugly temper into which the Indians had now worked themselves is well illustrated by the episode of the salt. On the 15th of June a boat came up the Wabash to the Prophet's Town laden with salt for the use of the tribes, according to the terms of a former agreement. The man in charge of the boat reported that the Prophet and some Kickapoos with him at the time, refused to receive it and he was directed to leave the salt on the bank of the river until Tecumseh should return; Tecumseh being reported as at Detroit. On his return trip home the master of the boat was directed to re-load the salt; that the Indians would have nothing to do with it.

Whilst the hands were rolling in the barrels, the brother of the Prophet seized the master and several others by the hair, and, shaking them violently, asked them if they were Americans. They, however, were all young Frenchmen. They also insulted Mr. Brouillette, and called him an American dog, and a young Pottawattamie chief directed his men to plunder his house, which was immediately done, depriving him of all his provisions, tobacco, etc.¹⁷

Brouillette was the French trader heretofore referred to, and probably had a cabin for his trading supplies on the bank of the river.

¹⁶ Dawson, *Harrison*, 146.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

On one of their embassies, however, the brothers were successful. One of the most influential of the tribes in council was the Wyandots or Hurons, now greatly reduced in numbers, but still of great prestige and power among the red men. Harrison always ranked their warriors among the best, and General Wayne at Greenville had delivered to them the original duplicate of the treaty. In a speech by Massas, a Chippewa chief, to General Wayne, he referred to this tribe as "our uncles, the Wyandots," and this was the designation generally employed by all the tribes.¹⁸ It was plain that if the Wyandots could be won over to the new cause, a great diplomatic victory would be gained and the influence of the new movement greatly augmented. The Prophet accordingly sent a deputation to the Wyandots, "expressing his surprise that the Wyandots, who had directed the councils of the other tribes, as well as the treaty with the white people should sit still, and see the property of the Indians usurped by a part," and he expressed a desire to see the treaties and know what they contained. The Wyandots were greatly flattered by these attentions, and answered "that they had nothing nearer their hearts, than to see all the various tribes united again as one man—that they looked upon every thing that had been done since the Treaty of Greenville as good for nothing—and that they would unite their exertions with those of the Prophet, to bring together all the tribes, and get them to unite to put a stop to the encroachments of the white people."¹⁹ It seems that the Wyandots were also the keepers of a certain great belt, which had formerly been a symbol of the union of the tribes at the time of the war with Anthony Wayne. They now came in deputation to the Prophet's Town, carrying this great belt with them, and producing it among the clans of the Miamis at the villages of the Mississinewa, accusing them of deserting their Indian friends and allies. The tribes at Mississinewa sent for the Weas and accompanied the deputation to Tippecanoe.

Though thwarted on the St. Joseph and among the Shawnees, it was plain that a strict espionage would have to be

¹⁸ John B. Dillon, *History of Indiana*, 387.

¹⁹ Dawson, *Harrison*, 140.

maintained over the proceedings at the Prophet's Town, and especially over the Prophet himself. The heart of this priest was filled with plots of assassination and murder. Grosble, an old Indian friend of the governor, informed him that the Prophet had at one time planned a wholesale slaughter at Vincennes, and that it had been arranged that the Prophet should enter the governor's house with twelve or fifteen of his followers and slay him. To the Prophet may be attributed all the horse stealing expeditions, the insults to messengers and agents, and the plans for the murder of the older Indian chiefs. While Tecumseh either countenanced these transactions, or else was unable to control them, he seems, with strange sagacity for a savage, to have at all times realized that the assassination of Harrison, the stealing of a few horses, or the slaughter of a few white men on the border, would really never accomplish anything save to intensify the feeling between the races. While never comprehending the great forces of civilization and of the government which he was resisting, he steadily kept in mind that a handful of naked savages at the Prophet's Town would avail him nothing; that in order to effectively strike he must have back of him a substantial body of warriors recruited from all the confederated tribes, well victualled, armed and equipped, and equal in number to the armies of his adversary. He knew the Indian character well enough to know that they would never long resist a superior force. If he could keep his rash and impulsive brother in leash long enough to form a permanent and powerful league, then he had hopes of ultimate success. But there was the great danger, in fact, the very peril that finally engulfed him. The Prophet, with that fatal egotism of the fanatic, vainly imagined he was more than a match for the governor, and in the absence of his brother, let his vindictive hate and malice destroy the last dream of empire.

In the latter part of the month of June, Harrison sent Dubois and Brouillette to the Prophet's Town to take note of what was going on. They reported that while the tribes of the Mississinewa, the Weas and Kickapoos were living in expectation of trouble, that there was no immediate danger,

for the defection of the tribes at the St. Joseph had upset the plans of the brothers. On the 4th of July, however, four canoes, filled with the Prophet's followers, passed the Wea village at Terre Haute, and Harrison sent out the militia to discover what had become of them.²⁰ One of these canoes came down the river to a Shaker settlement sixteen miles above Vincennes. The Indians there attended meeting on Sunday, the Prophet professing to believe in the Shaker creed, and then finished the day's proceedings by stealing five horses. They made no attempts to conceal their tracks, but the governor stopped any pursuit, as he "had been informed some time before, that one of their plans to bring on the war, was to send out parties to steal horses, and, if they were pursued, to kill their pursuers." This was plainly the work of the Prophet. More alarming stories came in. It was said that the Sacs and Foxes were awaiting the signal from the Prophet to take up arms; that a party of them had visited the British superintendent, and that Elliott had said to a Miami at Malden: "My son, keep your eyes fixed on me—my tomahawk is now up—be you ready, but do not strike till I give the signal."²¹ Harrison in the light of all these events, determined to send Barron, his trusted interpreter, to the Prophet's Town. The reception of Barron is thus dramatically related:

He was first conducted ceremoniously to the place where the Prophet, surrounded by a number of Indians, was seated. Here he was left standing at a distance of about ten feet from the Indian prophet. "He looked at me," said Mr. Barron, "for several minutes, without speaking or making any sign of recognition, although he knew me well. At last he spoke, apparently in anger. "For what purpose do you come here?" said he, "Brouillette was here; he was a spy. Dubois was here; he was a spy. There is your grave; look on it!" The Prophet then pointed to the ground near the spot where I stood.²²

No harm was done him, however. Tecumseh interceded and the governor's messenger was finally received with respect. Barron delivered a speech of Harrison's to the Prophet in the presence of Tecumseh. The purport of this address

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

²¹ Eggleston, *Tecumseh*, 175.

²² *Ibid.*, 176.

was that while the governor said he believed that there had been an attempt to raise the tomahawk, that the old chain of friendship between the Indians and whites might still be renewed; that there were two roads open, one leading to peace and the other to misery and ruin; that it was useless to make war against the Seventeen Fires as their blue-coats were more numerous than the sands on the Wabash; that if complaint were made as to the purchase of the Indian lands, that the governor was willing to send the principal chiefs to Washington to make these complaints to the President in person; that everything necessary for the journey should be prepared and a safe return guaranteed.²³

On this visit Barron held much personal converse with Tecumseh and lodged with him in a cabin. He professed to be much pleased with Harrison's speech, observing that he had not seen him since he was a young man seated at the side of General Wayne. He disclaimed any intention of trying to make war, but said that it would be impossible to remain on friendly terms with the United States unless they abandoned the idea of trying to make settlements further to the north and west, and unless they acknowledged the principle that all the lands were held by the tribes in common. Said he:

The Great Spirit gave this great island to his red children; he placed the whites on the other side of the water; they were not contented with their own, but came to take ours from us. They have driven us from the sea to the lakes, we can go no further. They have taken upon them to say this tract belongs to the Miamis, this the Delawares, and so on, but the Great Spirit intended it as the common property of all. Our father tells us, that we have no business upon the Wabash; but the Great Spirit ordered us to come here and here we will stay.²⁴

Tecumseh now resolved on that famous meeting with the governor at Vincennes. Harrison had long known that there were those in his midst who were inimical to his purpose and who had opposed the purchase of the fall before, but he did not learn until afterward the full extent of their treachery. It seems that Tecumseh had been given to understand that about half of the population of Vincennes was friendly to his cause.

²³ *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁴ Dawson, *Harrison*, 153.

An American had visited him during the winter of 1809-10 who informed him that Harrison had no authority whatever from the government to make the purchase; that the governor had only two years more to remain in office, and that if Tecumseh could prevail upon the Indians to refuse their annuities under the treaty until the governor "was displaced, as he would be, and a good man appointed as his successor, he would restore to the Indians all the lands purchased from them."²⁵ How far these representations may have deceived Tecumseh into the belief that he was dealing with a man who was tottering to the fall, is not certainly known. He determined at any rate to make a show of force. If the governor was a weakling who sat insecurely in his seat, and was fearful of public clamor, here was an opportunity to display that fact. As he remarked to Barron he had not seen the governor since he was "a very young man" sitting at the side of General Wayne. The governor was younger in years than Tecumseh and no doubt the Shawnee was disposed to regard him with contempt. To appear suddenly at the capital of the white man with a band of armed warriors; to openly and haughtily declare his purpose of resisting the pretensions of the governor to pour out his insolence upon the heads of the chieftains who had dared to sell the lands—what a grand culmination of all his plans this would be, if it had the desired effect! There was nothing to lose, everything to gain. He resolved to try it. Accordingly, on the 12th of August, there swept the river to Fort Knox, eighty canoes, filled with naked savages painted in the most terrific manner. All of them were armed and ready for attack. At their head was the great war-chief, described by Major George R. Floyd, commandant at the fort, as "about six feet high, straight, with large, fine features, and altogether a daring, bold looking fellow."²⁶ The conference with the governor was appointed for the morrow.

THE COUNCIL AT VINCENNES

The great house of the governor at Vincennes is situated inland from the Wabash river about six hundred feet and

²⁵ John Law, *The History of Vincennes*, 90.

²⁶ Eggleston, *Tecumseh*, 181.

there formerly stood in front of this house and next to the river a grove of walnut trees which afforded a gracious shade. It was here, that on a bright sun-shiny day in August, the dramatic meeting occurred between the Shawnee chief and Governor Harrison. Local tradition has preserved a tale that the governor had secreted in the great parlor of his house a company of one hundred well-armed soldiers to provide against any treachery on the part of the red men, and computations have been made to show that the room would accommodate that number of infantry, but this story must be regarded with suspicion.²⁷

Tecumseh and his party seem to have arrived at the rendezvous in canoes and by way of the river; he appeared on the scene with a retinue of forty warriors accoutered in the elaborate costume of the ceremonial, with painted bodies and feathered head-dress, and fully armed with war clubs and tomahawks. The chief himself, invariably wore a simple dress of Indian tanned buckskin, with a mantle of the same material thrown over the left shoulder. In his belt he carried an elegant silver mounted tomahawk and a hunting knife in a leathern case. "Tall, athletic and manly, dignified, but graceful," he stood as the chosen exponent of his people's wrongs, ready to voice their plaints in the "musical and euphonious" accents of the Shawnee tongue.²⁸

A close observer of the savages of that day has stated that, "those who have been familiar with the Indians of the northwest, when they were Indians, and took sufficient interest in them as a race to study with care their customs, laws and usages, are aware that when attending councils with other nations or tribes, or with our agents, that they were always acting a part, a kind of diplomatic drama."²⁹ To Tecumseh the moment appeared propitious. The time had arrived to put the youthful governor of thirty-seven years to the test. Harrison was attended by the judges of the supreme court; Gen. Gibson, the secretary; Major G. R. Floyd, and other officers of the regular army, and a guard of twelve men from the garrison under the command of Lieutenant

²⁷ W. H. Smith, *History of Old Vincennes*, 265.

²⁸ Benjamin Drake, *Life of Tecumseh*, 130; Law, *History of Vincennes*, 85.

²⁹ Wm. Stanley Hatch, *War of 1812*, 104.

Jennings; there was also a large assemblage of citizens present, who had been invited thither to hear what Tecumseh had to present. The stage was well set, and the bold and insolent heart of the savage rose high.

As he came in front of the dais, an elevated portion of the place upon which the governor and the officers of the territory were seated, the governor invited him, through his interpreter, to come forward and take a seat with him and his counsellors, premising the invitation by saying: "That it was the wish of the Great Father, the President of the United States, that he should do so." The chief paused for a moment, as the words were uttered and the sentence finished, and raising his tall form to its greatest height, surveyed the troops and the crowd around him. Then with his keen eyes fixed on the governor for a single moment, and turning them to the sky above, with his sinewy arm pointed towards the heavens, and with a tone and manner indicative of supreme contempt, for the paternity assigned him, said in a voice whose clarion tones were heard throughout the whole assembly: "My Father?—The sun is my father—the earth is my mother—and on her bosom I will recline!"³⁰

Thus the council opened. The governor, with a short sword at his side, seated on the platform with his officers and advisers; the Indians in front of him seated on the grass; to the left, the Pottawattamie chief, Winamac, with one of his young men, extended on the green, and all about the eager and curious faces of the crowd, now wrought up to a high state of tension by the sarcastic retort of the Indian chieftain. The speech that followed, "was full of hostility from beginning to end."³¹ Tecumseh began in a low voice and spoke for about an hour. "As he warmed with his subject his clear tones might be heard, as if 'trumpet-tongued' to the utmost limits of the assembled crowd who gathered around him."³² He denounced with passion and bitterness the cruel murder of the Moravian Indians during the Revolutionary War, the assassination of the friendly chief Cornstalk, and other outrages, and said that he did not know how he could ever be friends with the white man again; that the tribes had been driven by the Americans 'toward the setting sun, like a galloping horse,' and that they would shortly push them into the lakes where they could neither stand nor walk; that the

³⁰ Law, *History of Vincennes*, 83.

³¹ *Western Sun* (Vincennes), Aug. 25, 1810.

³² Law, *History of Vincennes*, 85.

white people had allotted each separate tribe a certain tract of land so as to create strife between them, and so that they might be destroyed; that he and his brother had purposed from the beginning to form a confederation of all the tribes to resist any further encroachment of the whites; that the Great Spirit had given all the lands in common to the Indians, and that no single tribe had a right to alienate any particular portion of it. He declared that the Treaty of Fort Wayne had been made with the consent of only a few; that it was largely brought about by threats of Winamac, and that a reluctant consent had been wrung from the Weas because they were few in number. So fierce and vitriolic became his abuse of Winamac that that chieftain primed his pistols and seemed ready at any moment to take Tecumseh's life. The speaker went on to declare: "that if the government would not give up the lands that were purchased from the Miamis, Delawares, Pottawattamies, etc., that those who were united with him, were determined to fall upon those tribes and destroy them. That they were determined to have no more chiefs, but in the future to have everything under the direction of the warriors;"³³ that the governor would see what would be done to the village chiefs who had sold the land, and unless he restored it he would be a party to the killing of them.

The bold and defiant attitude of the speaker, and the tone of insolence that pervaded all his words, astonished even the governor. A weak or corrupt man would have trembled in his place and been at a loss how to answer. Not so with Harrison. All who knew him, says John Law, were willing to acknowledge his courage, both moral and physical. He knew that the Treaty of Fort Wayne had been concluded under the instructions of government; that his dealings with the tribes had been open-handed and fair, even with the insignificant Weas of the lower waters; that the "unwarranted and unwarrantable" pretensions of Tecumseh were made largely for their effect upon the audience, and after Tecumseh's remarks had been openly interpreted by Barron, he arose without tremor or hesitation to deny the chief's assertions. He

³³ *Western Sun* (Vincennes), August 25, 1810.

spoke no doubt with some degree of force, for he undoubtedly understood by now that Tecumseh would never have given utterance to many of his charges without entertaining a belief that they would meet the approval of some traitorous faction of the assembly. He answered:

That the charges of had faith made against our government, and the assertion that injustice had been done the Indians in any treaty ever made, or any council ever held with them by the United States, had no foundation in fact. That in all their dealings with the red men, they had ever been governed by the strictest rules of right and justice. That while other civilized nations had treated them with contumely and contempt, ours had always acted in good faith with them. That so far as he individually was concerned, he could say in the presence of the "Great Spirit," who was watching over their deliberations, that his conduct, even with the most insignificant tribe, had been marked with kindness, and all his acts governed by honor, integrity and fair dealing. That he had uniformly been the friend of the red men, and that it was the first time in his life that his motives had been questioned, or his actions impeached. It was the first time in his life that he had ever heard such unfounded claims put forth, as Tecumseh set up, by any chief, or any Indian, having the least regard for truth, or the slightest knowledge of the intercourse between the Indians and the white men, from the time this continent was first discovered. That as to the claim of Tecumseh that all the Indians were but one nation and owned the lands in common, that this could not be maintained; that at the time the white men arrived on the continent they had found the Miamis in possession of the Wabash that the Shawnees were then residents of Georgia, from which they had been driven by the Creeks; that the lands in question had been purchased from the Miamis who were the original owners of it; that if the Great Spirit had intended that the tribes should constitute but one nation, he would not have put different tongues in their heads, but taught them all to speak a language that all could understand, that the Miamis had been benefited by the annuities of the government and that the Seventeen Fires had always been punctual in the payment of them; that the Shawnees had no right to come from a distant country and control the Miamis in the disposal of their own property.³⁴

An event now took place, that but for the quick presence of mind and decisive action of the governor, might have terminated in bloodshed. Harrison had taken his seat and Barron had interpreted his reply to the Shawnees, and was turning to the Miamis and Pottawattamies, when Tecumseh excitedly sprang to his feet and told Barron to tell the governor that he lied. Barron, who as a subordinate in the

³⁴ Dawson, *Harrison*, 155-160.

Indian department, had great respect for his superiors, was seeking to mollify the harshness of this language, when he was again interrupted by Tecumseh, who said: "No! No! Tell him he lies!"³⁵ The governor noticed Tecumseh's angry manner, but thought he was seeking to make some explanation, when his attention was directed to Winamac who was cocking his pistol, and a moment later, General Gibson, who understood the Shawnee language, said to Lieutenant Jennings: "Those fellows intend mischief; you had better bring up the guard." In an instant all was confusion. The warriors on the grass sprang to their feet brandishing their war-clubs and tomahawks; Harrison extricated himself from his chair and drew his sword to defend himself; Major Floyd drew a dirk, and the Methodist minister Winans ran to the governor's house, got a gun, and stood by the door to protect the family. Such of the citizens as could armed themselves with brickbats. In the midst of this turmoil the guard came running up and were about to fire on the Indians, when Harrison quickly interposed and commanded them not to do so. He now demanded a full explanation, and when the intemperate words of Tecumseh were explained, told him he was a bad man and that he would hold no further communication with him; that as he had come there under the protection of the council fire, he might go in safety, but that he must immediately leave the neighborhood. The firm stand and commanding attitude of the governor at once quieted the storm, and Tecumseh and his followers leisurely withdrew and retired to their camp. That night two companies of militia were brought in from the country, but no trouble occurred, and the time passed quietly until the morning.

It was a part of the local tradition of later years, that when Tecumseh called the governor a liar, that quick as a flash, he arose to his feet, drew his sword and was about to resent the insult, when his friends interfered and prevented the blow.³⁶ This story seems improbable, from the fact that the governor was aware that there were many unarmed citizens present, and that any rash or inconsiderate

³⁵ Law, *History of Vincennes*, 87-89.

³⁶ Smith, *History of Old Vincennes*, 266.

action on his part would precipitate a conflict that could only end in blood and carnage. He knew, moreover, that Tecumseh, by all the rules of civilized intercourse, even among open belligerents, was entitled to protection while engaged in council, and it is not probable that as brave a man as Harrison would violate these rules by becoming the aggressor. Instead, by quick word of command, he recalled the excited chief to his senses, dismissed him at once, and averted a catastrophe.

In the solitude of his camp that evening Tecumseh was forced to acknowledge defeat. The young governor instead of quailing had remained firm—it was plain that he was chosen plenipotentiary of his government in all the treaties that had been effected. Moreover, in his reply, the governor had not only emphatically repudiated all insinuations of unfairness towards the red men, but had put the chief himself on the defensive by showing that he was an interloper who sought to control the rightful possessions of others. At the last, it was the stolid savage who lost his self-control, and the governor, who by his respect for the laws of the council fire, had brought the flush of shame to the chieftain's cheek. That night, as he afterwards admitted at Fort Meigs, he felt a rising respect in his breast for the first magistrate of the Territory. He was doomed in after years to associate with the cowardly and contemptible Proctor, whom he called a "miserable old squaw," but from the day of this council he paid the involuntary tribute that one brave man always pays to another, though ranged on a hostile side.³⁷

Thoroughly convinced that his conduct of the day previous had been highly impolitic, the chieftain, at the dawn of day, sent for Barron, and said that he desired a further interview, declaring that he had no intention of attacking the governor on the day before, and that he had been advised to pursue the course he did on the counsel of certain white men; disclosing to Barron the circumstances heretofore related as to the visit of certain persons at the Prophet's Town who had said that the governor had no right to make the purchase of the lands on the Wabash; that he was unpopular

³⁷ Hatch, *War of 1812*, 115-119.

and would be removed from office, and that then the lands would be restored. The governor would not receive Tecumseh, however, until due apology had been made through the interpreter; and ample provision was made for the protection of the citizens by ordering the local company of Captain Jones to parade morning and evening and hold themselves ready for instant action. The governor also took the precaution to be well armed, as did several of his friends.³⁸

At this second council, Tecumseh's whole demeanor was changed. While remaining "firm and intrepid, he said nothing that was in the least insolent." He now disclosed in open council what he had theretofore told Barron as to the visits of the white men, and again declared that he had no intention of harming the governor. Harrison now informed the chief that he was about to cause a survey to be made of the New Purchase, and desired to know whether this process would be attended with any danger. Tecumseh at once replied that he and those affiliated with him were determined "that the old boundary line should continue, and that the crossing it would be attended with bad consequences." His words were severally confirmed by a Wyandot, a Kickapoo, a Pottawattamie, an Ottawa and a Winnebago, who each openly avowed that their tribes had entered into the Shawnee confederacy, and that Tecumseh had been chosen as their leader and chief.

This second council does not seem to have been of great length. In it, Tecumseh entirely abandoned any attempt at bluster, but firmly and positively stated to the governor that he would not consent to the sale of the Indian lands, and that any attempt to survey them would be met with resistance. This frank and open statement, elicited a response equally frank from the governor. He told Tecumseh that his claims would be transmitted in full to the President of the United States, and the reply of the President at once communicated to him when received, but that he was convinced that the President would never admit "that the lands on the Wabash, were the property of any other tribes, than those who had occupied and lived upon them," and as these

³⁸Humphrey Marshall, *History of Kentucky*, II, 483,

lands had been fairly and openly purchased at Fort Wayne, that the right of the United States would be "supported by the sword." With these words the interview terminated.

That night the governor reflected. If the words of Tecumseh as uttered in council, were sincere and genuine, they amounted to an open declaration of war—the government must either entirely recede from the ground it had taken, and restore the lands, or prepare for the coming conflict. Concerning this issue there must be no doubt. The governor therefore resolved to repair to the headquarters of Tecumseh in person, and there, removed from the atmosphere of a council, hold private intercourse with the chieftain and read his intentions. He had hit upon this expedient once before in the proceedings at Fort Wayne and the experiment had proven successful. Accordingly, the following morning, throwing aside all considerations of personal danger, he suddenly appeared at the tent of Tecumseh, accompanied only by the interpreter Barron. He was most politely and respectfully received. Proceeding at once to the main point, he asked the chief if the declarations he had made in his two public interviews were his real sentiments. Tecumseh answered that they certainly were; that he had no grievance against the United States except the matter as to the purchase of the Indian lands, and that he would go to war with very great reluctance; that if Harrison would prevail upon the President to give back the lands, and promise never to consummate any more purchases without the consent of all the tribes, that he would be the faithful ally of the Americans and assist them in all their wars with the British. "He said he knew the latter were always urging the Indians to war for their own advantage, and not to benefit his countrymen; and here he clapped his hands, and imitated a person who halloos at a dog, to set him to fight with another, thereby insinuating that the British thus endeavored to set the Indians on the Americans." He said further that he had rather be a friend of the Seventeen Fires, but if they would not accede to his demands that he would be forced to join the English. The memory of Wayne, the commanding figure and dauntless courage of the present governor had had their

effect; compared to the vile and sneaking agents of the British government, who, in the security of their forts, were offering bounties for American scalps, and urging the Indians to a predatory warfare, the American leaders stood out in bold relief as both men and warriors. Tecumseh recognized this, but the die was cast and his purposes were unchangeable. Stripped of all its savage propensities, the heart of the Shawnee was really of heroic mold. Concerning that great principle of the survival of the fittest he knew nothing; of the onrushing forces of civilization and progress he had no just comprehension; but as the rising sun of the new republic appeared, he saw the light of his race fading into obscurity, and patriotically resolved to stand on his lands and resist to the last. Misinformed, misguided, he sought an alliance with the British, to stem the tide; instead of delaying, this but accelerated the decline of the tribes. Tecumseh, when it was too late, discovered that the promises of the British agents were false, and soon after his death the feeling engendered against the tribes, on account of their alliance with the English and the many atrocities they had committed, drove them beyond the Mississippi. But he who fights for his native land and from devotion to a principle, however wrong, must always be entitled to the respect of the brave.

If coolness and courage had had its effect on the one hand, the candor and honesty of his adversary, when met face to face, had also moved the governor. In after years, in an address before the Historical Society of Ohio, Harrison said: "I think it probable that Tecumseh possessed more integrity than any other of the chiefs who attained to much distinction."³⁰ He now repeated again that he would forward to the government all the propositions of the chief, but that there was little probability that they would be accepted. "Well," said Tecumseh, "as the great chief is to determine the matter, I hope the Great Spirit will put sense enough into his head, to induce him to direct you to give up this land. It is true, he is so far off, he will not be injured by the war; he may still sit in his town and drink

³⁰ H. Montgomery, *Life of Harrison*, 318.

his wine, whilst you and I will have to fight it out." The conference ended with an appeal by Harrison, that in the event of war, no outrages should be committed on women and children and those who were unable to resist. This, the chief manfully acceded to, and said he would adhere to his promise.

Thus ended this remarkable conference participated in by the two greatest figures then in the western world. The one representing the advancing tide of immigration that was to build the cities and plow the fields of a new empire; the other representing the forlorn hope of a fast decaying race that was soon to be removed from the pathways of civilization.

Those who have vainly sought to make it appear that Harrison afterwards wrongfully passed over the northern boundary line of the new purchase to provoke a fight and bring on a conflict, have certainly scanned the records of this council at Vincennes with but little care. The truth is, that the two principal figures in that affair, parted each other's company fully realizing that hostilities were at hand. To say that Harrison was bound to sit helplessly in his capital while his enemies gathered a force sufficient to overwhelm him, and all without a move on his part to avert a calamity, but illustrates the foolishness of the whole contention. Immediately on the breaking up of the council, Tecumseh departed with a portion of his braves to organize and cement a federation of the tribes; Harrison, in the meantime, ordering an additional body of troops under Captain Percy Cross at Newport, Kentucky, to come to the relief of the settlements, and redoubling his vigilance to avoid the surprise of a sudden attack. Without hesitation, however, he wrote the surveyor general to make a survey; the lines to be run under the protection of the military.

The governor was informed by the Weas, that during the progress of the proceedings, they had been urged by four persons at Vincennes, whose names they furnished, to join the Prophet and insist upon a return of the lands. False representations were also made to the chiefs of this tribe that the purchase at Fort Wayne was made without the con-

sent or knowledge of the President, and that a council of the Miamis had been called on the Mississinewa, to make a full inquiry. The treasonable designs of this coterie came to naught. Whether British agencies were actually at work within the town, or whether the actions of this clique were prompted by the jealousy of the governor's political enemies, will probably never be fully known. Be that as it may, like all cravens of their kind, when the danger became imminent, they slunk out of view, and Harrison found himself surrounded by the brave and valorous of every settlement, both in the vicinity of Vincennes and on the borders of Kentucky.

Much conjecture has been indulged in, as to whether Tecumseh actually meditated an attack at the time of the first council. That his impulsive action might well have led to disastrous consequences, but for the cool, quick command of the governor may well be conceded, but that he formed any premeditated design before coming to the council, must admit of some doubt. The reasoning of Drake possesses cogency. He states that Tecumseh's probable purpose in attending the meeting with a considerable force was to

Make a strong impression upon the whites as to the extent of his influence among the Indians, and the strength of his party. His movement in the council may have been concerted for the purpose of intimidating the governor; but the more probable suggestion is, that in the excitement of the moment, produced by the speech of the governor, he lost his self-possession, and involuntarily placed his hand upon his war-club, in which movement he was followed by the warriors around him, without any previous intention of proceeding to extremities. Whatever may have been the fact, the bold chieftain found in Governor Harrison a firmness of purpose and an intrepidity of manner which must have convinced him that nothing was to be gained by an effort at intimidation, however daring.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Drake, *Life of Tecumseh*, 130.