

**A Reading from
The Crimson Arrow
“An Indian Romance of the Great Mojave Desert
Before the Coming of the White Man”**

**H. Arden Edwards
1935**

edited by Teri F. Brewer

This reading is based on a scene from a play written by Howard Arden Edwards, founder of Antelope Valley Indian Museum in Lancaster California. Today the museum forms part of Antelope Valley State Historic Park, but at the time Edwards was writing it, much of the area was undergoing dramatic environmental change as homesteaders tried to make the western Mojave desert into farmland, digging deep to find water, clearing the desert vegetation, plowing, and planting new crops on their 160 acre parcels.

Edwards was an itinerant artist who had finally settled in southern California after a wandering youth. He was entranced by the desert, interested in archaeology and had spent time in his travels painting scenes of daily life and landscape in Southwestern Indian communities. He and his wife Rose filed a claim for a homestead and travelled out to their land regularly from their rented home in Eagle Rock. Like many others they built a house, dug a well and planted crops. Their building project was unique though, taking shape in the embrace of an outcrop from the butte behind. They soon abandoned the idea of farming, but decided to develop the house as a little museum instead. The idea of a pageant probably developed from H.A.'s previous experience with theatrical set design and production work. It was certainly influenced by the famous Ramona pageant and the Mission plays which were popular at the time. Edwards finished his initial script in 1931 and staged his first outdoor pageant in 1932 behind the little museum in what he called the “The Theatre of the Standing Rocks”, a dramatic natural amphitheater with the butte rising around it. The audience came from around southern California, often bringing picnic baskets and even camping tents just to make a real occasion of it.

H.A. Edwards understood some of the problems that permanent settlement, plough agriculture and irrigation would bring to the Mojave from his personal experience and local observation. He encouraged incomers to the area to learn about the native peoples of the local area, of the Southwest and of the Great Basin through visits to his small museum.

Although the language of this pageant may seem stilted to us now, the romance a bit corny and the stereotypes grating, his intention was clearly to educate and inform new audiences as well as to create an entertaining spectacle. The whole play is worth reading through carefully, considering it as the piece of reflective critique on rapid cultural and environmental change that Edwards seems to have intended.

For four years, Edward's play was mounted each spring with enthusiastic effort from local volunteers, Hollywood guest stars and even assistance from the far away Hopi reservation in Arizona. It was carefully publicized by Edwards, proved popular and attracted respectful note and commentary in the regional press. Why Edwards stopped running it we do not know for certain, but his site was remote and there was plenty of competition in outdoor entertainments developing. The *Ramona* pageant still thrives in Hemet annually nearly 90 years after the first opening night if you want a taste of this kind of pageant. A number of versions of Edward's script exist for the four seasons of production. Early scripts are handwritten. This later text is taken from Edwards own typescript copy of 1935 when the play was mature in form. The original is held in the archives of AVIM.

This is an edited version of one act, and it was developed in 2003 specifically for use at a community workshop and discussion in Lancaster sponsored by the museum and FAVIM, the museum's volunteer support group. Student and faculty participants in the 2003 University of Glamorgan Anthropology field

school helped run the workshop and some community focus groups as well as filming the results for the museum's records. The reading was done with members of the community and visiting guests taking the roles. This mirrored the original practice in the pageant, which was to have invited guest appearances supplement a community theatre group's production.

For our reading that day the dialogue was slightly modernized, stage directions were simplified and an introduction and footnotes to explain some aspects of the play and references made within the dialogue were added. We were fortunate to have in the audience a lady who had actually been at one of the last performances of the original pageant as a little girl more than 65 years before!

Edited footage from the workshop appears in a film called ***A Matter of Interpretation***¹ which was made cooperatively by the students from two Welsh universities (Glamorgan and Swansea) who helped us to organize and film the occasion. The film's US premiere was to the FAVIM volunteer group one year later at the museum.

I have written a fuller introduction to the work of H. Arden Edwards and the background of the pageant which will appear as a separate PDF on this website.

For further information on the full script of the play or for questions regarding performance rights, please contact the museum directly.

Archival footage shot during the reading and discussions in 2003 is on deposit at the museum.

Further information on the film and a link to some clips will be found at <http://www.archaeoikon.com>.

-Teri Brewer
Bristol University 2010

T.F.Brewer@bristol.ac.uk

¹

Yato Kya

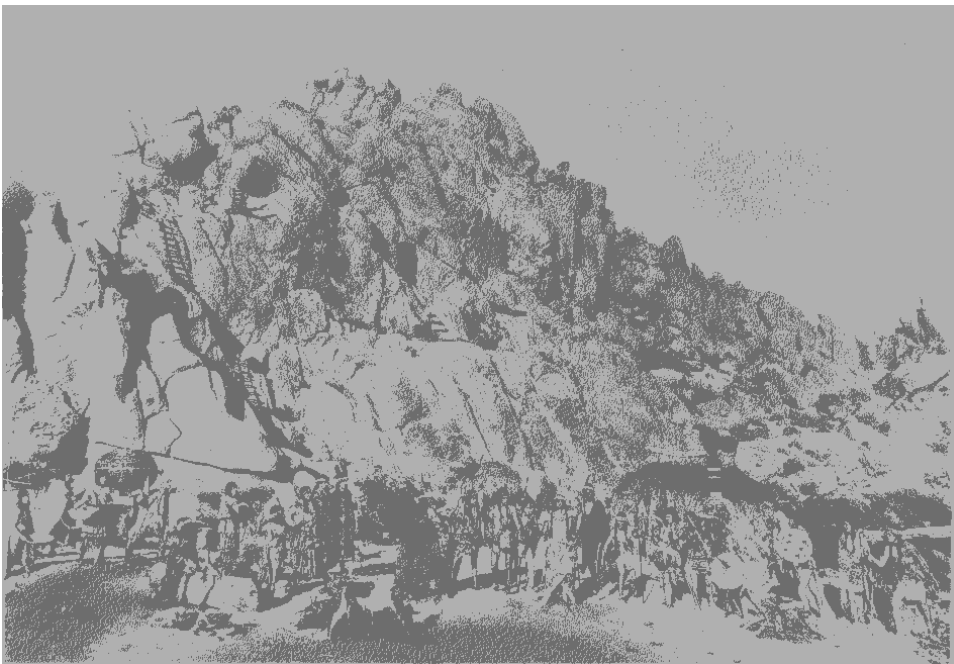
Just a house by a yucca tree,
and stretching away the desert waste;
Just a place to dream and be one with God,
And never a moment of haste.

Just the rocks and the sand 'neath a sky of blue
And sometimes a passing cloud,
The bark of a fox or the song of a bird
But never a sound too loud.

`the shadows that spread like a purple mask,
or the sky all aflame like a rose;
Then the rest and the peace of a desert night
No one but a desert rat knows.

Just a home by a yucca tree,
And three pals who will welcome you there—
The Mockingbird, Artist and Chief,
And their desert so wondrous and fair.

- H. Arden Edwards
(1884-1953)



Cast for Reading

Tanner of Hides	always busy with his work in the background- acts almost as a commentator within the play
Kama	character adopted from the novel Edwards had recently finished, Kama is a major character in the play as a whole providing the male romantic lead
Slim Fox	young warrior involved still proving himself
Yellow Reed	melodramatic villain of the village, ignoring events and an eye on the girls- none of whom return his interest.
Teko	village man
Red Eagle	Chief of the band
Cheepa	pretty young girl, sister of heroine
Riding Thunder	Leader, shaman a very troubled man who is watching events and incomers to the area carefully, hoping to help protect the band
Chula	villager
Maka	half mad but prophetic old wise woman
Nee-wa-ta	Female romantic lead
Morning Hawk	Hero
Messenger	
Na-wa-nee	villager

Act II

Tanner of Hides:

Hunters are heard coming in to the village, wind machines used. Soft violin, low Tom Toms. Yellow Reed comes in wiping his hands on some grass, which he throws in the fire.

Hunters come in on a trot from the desert, form a half circle in front of Red Eagle's house. Each one drops to one knee and plants his game markers in front of him.

Slim Fox enters last, takes ash from fire in his hand and sifts slowly over feathered prayer wands at shrines. No one moves or speaks until he kneels in front of the chief.

Kama

"So! The young men find no antelope: Their moccasins are not soft enough to hide the tread of their heavy feet. When I was a young man we caught the running antelope with our bare hands. Our footfalls were as light as the soft down of the cottonwoods fall to the earth"

The hunters murmur and whisper to one another as Kama is talking.

Slim Fox

(standing up) **"More like you slept (emphasize this word) beneath a cottonwood tree and had a dream."** *(hunters laugh a bit at this sally, but ease abruptly as Kama speaks again)*

Kama:

"Aye, I had a dream all right: I dreamed that the young men of my tribe would, one day lose their cunning and that Queepa the Rabbit would sit on the sand and mock at them, for they could not throw their spears far enough or straight enough. We will yet be diggers of roots, or eater of fish like the people who live beside the big waters."

Yellow Reed

(crowding forward and speaking arrogantly) **"Where there are men, there is no hunger."** *(the hunters murmur and show signs of anger)*

Teko

(To Red Eagle) **"Father we have hunted from the Big Rock Creek, to the Canyon of the Red Rocks, and there has not even been a rabbit to mock at us."**

Red Eagle

(to Slim Fox) **"I can find no blame in my heart for you Slim Fox. Thou art the son of my old friend, White Owl; and ever since our own hunter chief was slain, thou hast led our hunters as if thou wert one of our own men. There is no better man at finding game than thyself, so again there is no blame upon thee."**

Slim Fox pulls a squirrel or rabbit from his hunting pouch and holds it out to Cheepa, who has come near to him.

Slim Fox

"There is no game- but one rabbit did I get, and as is my right as a hunter I give it to thy youngest daughter." *(hands it to Cheepa, who takes it, and runs towards Kama, holding it up to for everyone to see.)*

Cheepa	"See what a hunter brings -- a <u>man</u> does not come empty handed." <i>(Here Yellow Reed laughs loudly and Cheepa turns to Kama)</i> "Now do I get the green pendant thou was't making yesterday?"
Kama	"Why should you have the pendant, saucy one?"
Cheepa	"Remember your promise; that when I had a man to hunt for me, the pendant would be mine."
Yellow Reed	<i>(Reaching over and rudely jerking the rabbit from Cheepa)</i> "Ha! Where is this man you speak of. I see no men near here--- and this animal is long since dead- in fact it looks like one I killed and threw away four moons ago, (Some laugh at this but most show anger)
Slim Fox	<i>(stepping close to Yellow Reed as though to strike him)</i> "You dare, you." <i>(He is cut short by Red Eagle who forces them apart)</i>
Red Eagle	<i>(loudly)</i> "Stay thy temper until a better time." (To Yellow Reed) Thou hast said this rabbit was killed four moons ago—you said yesterday that you came without stopping from the Red River of the Dawn, so how can this other thing be true?"²
Yellow Reed	It was only a figure of speech, Red Eagle, I just meant that it was an old rabbit, instead of a young one." <i>(he steps back , openly sneering at anyone who looks his way)</i>
Tanner of Hides	"Hush! Here comes Riding Thunder!" <i>(Riding Thunder comes to the front. He is folded in his medicine blanket and is gazing out over the desert ignoring the others)</i> "Has our Great Father no message for his people?"³
Riding Thunder	"I see a red cloud covering the earth. I hear death songs on the wind."<i>(turning to Slim Fox)</i> "Where is Leaning Pine?"
Slim Fox	"I thought he was here with us but now---"
Teko	"Maybe he turned aside when we came by the lower buttes, and hasn't re-joined us yet."
Slim Fox	"I had not missed him- I will call for him." <i>(Gives a long clan hunting call) No answer, but shouting is heard and Chula dashes in from the ravine pointing back and yelling "Evil Ones, Evil Ones!"</i> <i>A hunter staggers in and falls at the foot of his chief. There is blood streaming from a wound in his back.</i>

² The Colorado River

³ It was in similar circumstances that amongst a Paiute group further east in the Great Basin, the 19th C. prophet Wovoka had a vision that resulted in the development of the Ghost Dance Religion, a millenarian movement which rapidly spread through tribes in most of the United States)

Riding Thunder

"The Red Cloud draws closer. Now you will miss Leaning Pine. He is stepping away onto the Shadow Trail. Beware! Or many more will follow him!"

(Slim Fox runs to the fallen man and kneels beside him shaking his head. He rises slowly)

Red Eagle

"Carry him away and place many stones on his body so the coyotes don't defile him."

Maka

"Death, Red Death and the Evil Ones. Always dead men, dead dead, dead, dead—Ha —Ha " *(disappears cackling crazily in the distance)*

Cheepa

"Oh, I am afraid!" *(runs to sister)*

Nee-wa-ta

"Of what? Poor old Maka, she is only thinking of her brave who was also killed- the day they were to marry. Of this other thing it is evil even as she has said."

Red Eagle

"It is a bad omen when Maka, who is ancient cries of death." (turns to Riding Thunder) There is no cloud before your eyes oh wise one! You know the secrets of the winds, you understand what the birds and animals say- can't you show us how to escape the eveil that threatens us all?"

Riding Thunder

"There is nothing impossible to those who are unafraid."

Red Eagle

Evil days have fallen upon us. I will sharpen my hunting knife. Can everyone gather together some wood?

All depart to gather wood, and a romantic interlude between Ne wa ta and Morning Hawk (with appropriate musical accompaniment) occurs which we will pass over

Morning Hawk privately gives Neewata a fresh rabbit he has caught telling her that he is determined she won't go hungry despite events.

Nee wa tah

"I will give this rabbit to old Mako. She has no one to hunt for her. Oh Morning Hawk- why do the antelope no longer come to our lands, so that our people can meet together again and not hunt solely in small bands?"

Morning Hawk

"That I can't say. I scouted towards the sunrise today- and when I was the length of three shadow sticks beyond the black water springs I saw strange footprints" (He pauses)

Nee wa ta

"And they were?"

Morning Hawk "Apaches!!!!!" (*Nee wa ta shrinks closer to him*)⁴

Nee wa ta "Apaches! And so close to us- what mischief do they make now?"

Morning Hawk "No one knows. They come and go like shadows in the moonlight. Never before have I found their footprints. There must have been a young and careless warrior among their band. They will not dare come near here, but in the shadow of this same moon, I will go to find them if I can. Until they are driven from our land there will be no more game in Antelope Valley and no safety for our own hunters."

Nee wa ta "Oh Morning Hawk, don't go after them. It was just today that one of our one hunters was killed!"

Morning Hawk "A hunter killed? So close then! Now I really must go—but don't be afraid White Flower- they are just sneaking coyotes who howl in the night. Am I not the greatest warrior in all the tribes? See- I carry the great fetish of the Owl clan. It has been triple blessed and Lame Antelope the medicine man scattered sacred pollen over it. As long as I have it with me no harm can come to me, and besides that I have a great secret."⁵

Nee wa ta "What is your secret my warrior?"

Morning Hawk "Ha! If I told you it wouldn't be a secret any more!"

Nee wa ta " Well. I have a secret too, so if I tell you mine- you should tell me yours!"

Morning Hawk "Hey, little one, keep yours and I will tell you what I have learned that no one else knows. One day when I was out hunting my spear became entangled in the branches of a tree. I pulled it towards me quickly, trying to jerk it loose. Remember that little buckskin tassel that you made me to hang on my spear? It had caught in the twigs and when I pulled the polished handle of my spear towards me my hand slipped and as the branch swept back it caught the shaft and threw it clear- and suddenly I saw it hurtling through the air half way across the canyon- much further and faster than I could have thrown it myself. I have made a medicine- a small branch which throws spears. This is my secret and now yours."⁶

⁴ The dramatic device of attacking Apaches was historically inaccurate, but evocative. The real surprise here though is that after a series of generalised and vague threats in the opening, which the audience would read as being about Anglo incomers, the Apache turn out to be the immediate threat! Of course Edwards was at pains to make clear the environmental disturbances that were already occurring and their effect on the behaviour of game. This would have affected other Indian peoples too and in a time of stress and hunger with diminished bands competing for increasingly scarce resources potentially increased intertribal conflict could become a contributing problem which might distract from the bigger picture which is to do with vectors of disease, environmental pressures and a fast expanding immigrant population from the eastern seaboard! In the circumstances the use of an Apache attack should perhaps be seen as artistic license to make a point rather than simply inaccuracy or ignorance. They are being used as scapegoats by our band here, and most people are missing the larger picture.

⁵ Impervious to harm through the carrying of this fetish, Morning Hawk's speech reminds the audience both of the story of Achilles, the Greek warrior protected from harm, but with a small unprotected patch of skin- (Achilles heel) but also of the Ghost Dance practitioners belief that wearing of specially decorated and blessed "ghost shirts" would make them impervious to the bullets of white soldiers, a hypothesis that was tested at Wounded Knee in 1888 when the US cavalry attack and killed hundred of Sioux families gathered for a Ghost Dance ceremony.

⁶ Effectively inventing the "atlatl" or spear thrower.

Nee we ta	"What a strange thing you have told me. Your secret will be safe with me. My secret is smaller but also involves great medicine. It is my great love for you!" (throws her arms around him)
Morning Hawk	"Sometimes I feel as though this is all just a dream, Your eyes are like the night stars and your voice like a bird. In all the world there is no one else like you, not even the Turquoise Woman herself."
Nee wa tah	"Hush, she will hear you and become angry."
Morning Hawk	"No, Here is a necklace of Turquoise Woman's. I have made it for you. Fasten it on. Soon the Dawn Maker will be in the East and I must be far from here by then. Stay here and don't leave (<i>Walks rapidly away</i>)
Nee wa ta	(<i>Puts on necklace</i>) "This is a link to bind my heart to yours. I know I shouldn't worry, but fear is stealing across my heart like a winter wind across the desert. Surely you can take care of yourself like any warrior, and our people should feel safer while the Hawk is on the wing!" <i>Nee wa ta turns towards the jacale of her father, when near the door she turns and says "I will be waiting here when you return."</i> <i>A crazy laugh is heard ringing through the camp from Maka's location.</i> <i>Three nearly naked savages are seen rising in silhouette from behind the rocks, but they drop back out of sight when a young boy (the messenger) runs past. He carries a feather wand in his hand and runs to Nee wa ta.</i>
Messenger	"Quick, where is your father the chief? I have a message for him from White Owl."
Red Eagle	"Who calls in the quiet of the moon? This is a time for resting, and I don't like to have my people troubled in their sleep."
Nee wa ta	"It is a message for you, Father."
Messenger	(<i>hands his wand to Red Eagle</i>) "This comes from White Owl- he asks you to come quickly!" (<i>runs back the way he came</i>)
Red Eagle	"This is urgent! I'm going to their camp right now- tell Riding Thunder that I will be back as quick as I can, the gods permitting." (<i>takes his spear and shield and exits</i>)
Cheepa	(<i>comes to door of jacale</i>) "I heard voices, sister. Have the hunters returned?"
Nee we ta	"No, It was a messenger for our father."
Cheepa	"I was hoping it would be Slim Fox. I'm worried about him and I just can't sleep."

Nee we ta	"You are moon mad! Go back to your blankets-If you see Riding Thunder before I do, tell him that our father went to the camp of White Owl but should be back soon."
Cheepa	<i>Cheepa goes back into the hut. Nee we ta walks away behind the hut. The three savages slowly rise and steal after her. There is a shrill scream, quickly muffled, and then silence. A high thin whistle comes from across the ravine. The wind machine begins to blow.</i> <i>Yellow Reed appears, crouching low to the earth- when he sees that there is no one around he crosses to Red Eagle's hut. He disappears between two structures.</i>
Na wa nee	<i>(calls low but excitedly)</i> "Cheepa! Cheepa! Come here quickly."
Cheepa	"Who calls my name?"
Na wa nee	" It is Na wa nee. I just came down through the dunes and I heard a scream. I thought it sounded just like Nee we ta's voice, but I thought she wa with you, slleping rolled up in her mat?"
Cheepa	"She isn't here but she only left a few minutes ago."
Na wa nee	"Then it <u>was</u> her voice. Something terrible has happened. All night there have <u>been</u> strange noises and I thought I saw something moving in the rocks back there." <i>They call Riding Thunder who comes out and calls everyone to the Council Fire- the flames rise and steady Tom Toms begin to sound.</i> <i>Everyone gathers around Riding Thunder silently as he draws a circle in the sand and takes meal from his pouch sprinkling it solemnly east, south west and north, up and down...⁷ He then takes a white feather from his pouch and waves it slowly over the mortar sitting in the middle of the circle he has drawn. Green flares up- the people draw back in fear and surprise.</i>
Riding Thunder	" Our chief is not here, so I won't wait for the Earth Mother has just given me a dream and I must share it while it is fresh in my mind. In this dream I saw a great cloud and it was as black as the night itself. It was larger than the flocks of geese who fly south in the moon of falling leaves I saw many people running upon the face of the earth. They were fleeing before the cloud. As it came nearer I saw that it was a solid wall of sand, but now it was black no longer It was red like dripping blood, and it was hot like the flame of a fire. One by one the people fell before it, until there were finally only a few left. They came to a great wall of rock and could go no further. Suddenly an opening appeared in the rock and the remaining people dashed in. The opening closed behind them. The cloud passed away. There were no trees, no bushes, no growing things- only hot sand as far as the eye could see."
Tanner of Hides	"Was that all oh wise one?"

⁷ There are six cardinal directions in many Native American thought systems.

Riding Thunder	"No- there was more- a long time seemed to pass by and then I stood again before the great all of Rock and saw the opening slowly appear again. Soon an old man appeared and came forward into the light. He seemed to be blind. He stepped into a deep crack and disappeared from sight. Next came a hunter with his spear and club. He stepped out from the shelter of the rocks and a great lion leaped from the rock and crushed him to the earth. So it went on. One after another came forth from the cave and something happened to each one of them, so they all went upon the spirit trail. A voice said "One was foolish, one cheated, one cheated and one was stingy and kept all the food for himself. They were evil in their thoughts and so came to an evil end." I was about to turn away when a fine young warrior and a beautiful maiden dressed in white skins came to the cave entrance. The young man saw the crevice and jumped over it, when the lion jumped he caught it on the point of his spear. He called to the maid and they came down across the world together. The blood red cloud swept down on them. The warrior cast his spear at the cloud. It left his hand like a beam of light. There was a terrible groaning and the cloud split in two. The maid and warrior passed through unharmed. The cloud receded to the edge of the world and there was only the sound of the Thunderbird in the distance. The dream, if a dream it was passed away and I found myself back in my hut again."
Kama	"And the meaning of the dream my father?"
Riding Thunder	"Until an eagle has been killed in anger I may not say."
Yellow Reed	"Here is a bundle that one of your young men dropped."
Riding Thunder	<i>(takes the bundle, and as he unwraps it a dead eagle falls out, together with a game marker)</i> "This has your mark upon it Slim Fox! You have brought the dream to an end, but you have done a terrible thing I the eyes of the Gods." <i>(the crowd recoil in horror)</i>
Slim Fox	"But Father..."
Riding Thunder	"Silence, this is what I saw in my Medicine Sleep. The black cloud was the enemy stealing up on our villages. The winds were spears coming through the air. The lion was a chief who will kill many of our people, but will himself be killed by one who wears the eagle crest." <i>(another scream is heard off to the side)</i>
Cheepa	"It is Nee wa ta!"
Riding Thunder	"No it is an evil spirit- take the torches and frighten it away!"
Riding Thunder	<i>The people take oil soaked torches and search the camp. (to Slim Fox)</i> "You have brought a curse on us! Get back to your own camp now. <i>(to Cheepa)</i> Back to your blankets! Don't leave the jacale until I return." <i>Cheepa sneaks off to the spring when her father leaves and searches for Nee wa ta, calling out for her. " Oh Turquoise Woman- from your home in the west have pity on us."</i>

After some business with Maka, the lights suddenly go out. When they come back up Turquoise Woman is on stage and there is an interpretive dance with musical accompaniment. As the dance ends, the butte is lit in red and Tom Toms begin to beat.

In Act II Scene I there is an interlude for a dramatic dance exhibit with war chants taken from Hopi tradition. Lame Antelope, a powerful Shaman enters and Slim Fox is banished at the end of the dance. All this is enacted without dialogue and with lengthy dances. Chemicals such as magnesium and copper are thrown on the fire to create great flashes of white and green etc. Massed warriors run over the hill in ran to prepare for a battle .

Apaches attack the camp and all is in confusion as Riding Thunder realizes that his daughter has been kidnapped.

There is a scene in the Apache camp as Nee we ta challenges her captors and insults them. She is told that she will be the wife of one of them and she is terribly insulting to him personally saying that there will be two wives in the hut- him and her which causes his oen men to laugh at him.

Chepa and Slim Fox find the Apache group and tell the others who plan a rescue. Another great battle and Morning Hawk is victorious.

*A great victory dance takes place, then **Arden Edwards** come into spotlights and says:*

"This was but a dream out of the past, Again the fires grow cold below the rocks and the drums are stilled for another year. In the name of the Crimson Arrow we bid thee God Speed and Farewell!"

END OF FIRST ACT