

"BANEEMYISM."

SOME INCIDENTS IN THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF MONONA COUNTY.

BY A. R. FULTON.

THE first permanent white settler in Monona county was Isaac Ashton, who, in 1852, located about two miles north of the site of the present town of Onawa, where he laid out a town which he called Bloomfield. The name was subsequently changed to Ashton for the reason that there was another town in the State called Bloomfield. Other settlers came to the county in the summer of 1852, among whom were Josiah Sumner and Aaron Cook, the former locating in the vicinity of Onawa, and the later at a place which became known as "Cook's Landing," on the Missouri river, seven miles southwest of Onawa. Among others who settled in the county prior to 1855 were C. E. Whiting, Robert Lindley, Timothy Elliott, J. E. Morrison, J. B. P. Day, and B. D. Holbrook. Some of the early settlers were from the eastern part of Iowa, while others were from Illinois and the eastern States.

Among the early settlers of Monona county was one Charles B. Thompson, a Mormon leader, who, with a number of followers, located on Soldier river, about fifteen miles southeast of the present town of Onawa. They commenced their settlement in 1854. Thompson called the place "Preparation," as he designed here to *prepare* his disciples for the work which he expected to accomplish in the "good time coming."

To go back somewhat earlier in the career of Charles B. Thompson, it may be stated that he had been a disciple and follower of Joseph Smith at Nauvoo, but in 1852, he went to St. Louis and organized a society, or church, of his own. In the summer of 1853 he commissioned several of his followers

to come to Iowa and select a location for his people. After traveling somewhat extensively over the State, they finally made selection of the valley of Soldier river, in the south part of Monona county, all the land in that locality being then vacant, and but few settlers in the county. In 1854, Thompson brought some fifty or more families, and pre-empted several thousand acres of the best lands to be found in that region. Some of these lands Thompson subsequently entered. When the county was organized in 1854, Thompson, by appointment, became the first County Judge, while one of his followers, Hugh Lytle, was County Clerk, and another, Guy C. Barnum was Treasurer. Thompson regulated and controlled all the affairs of the colony, both temporal and spiritual, pretending that he had authority to do so under the direction of a spirit which he called *Baneemy*. Among other assumptions he pretended that he was the veritable Ephraim of the Scriptures, and taught his ignorant people to call him "Father Ephraim!" A strict compliance with his teachings divested his followers of all worldly care, and prepared them for the further essential doctrine of his religion—that, in order to obtain the Kingdom, they must sacrifice all their worldly possessions. They accordingly conveyed to him all their lands and other property, including even their wearing apparel and the right to their personal services.

Soon after locating his colony, Thompson commenced the publication of a paper at Preparation, called *Zion's Harbinger and Weekly Messenger*. The name was changed to *Weekly News and Messenger*, and then to *Democratic Messenger*. He also published for some time a monthly periodical. These publications were the authoritative exponents of the revelations of *Baneemy*.

"Father Ephraim" being the official head of the affairs of the county, the manager of its press, as well as the spiritual authority in his colony, the new religion of *Baneemyism* progressed swimmingly until the fall of 1855, when a little rebellion appeared, under the leadership of Elder Hugh Lytle. This man, and some twenty others of the disaffected, commenced a suit in the courts for the recovery of their property,

but they failed, and the matter was subsequently adjusted by a compromise, whereby the Lytle party received a portion of their property and withdrew from the society. The remainder adhered to Thompson without further serious difficulty until the fall of 1858. During the summer of that year most of the male adults of the society were absent in other States, preaching the doctrines of *Baneemyism* to the benighted gentiles. Thompson arrogating to himself the title of "Chief Steward of the Lord," took advantage of the absence of his friends, and conveyed all the realty to his wife, Catharine Thompson, and to his next man in authority, Guy C. Barnum, reserving only forty acres as a homestead for himself. His disciples learning of this transaction, returned from their missions abroad, and immediately called on "Father Ephraim," the "Chief Steward of the Lord," to render an account of his stewardship! Being unable to obtain a satisfactory adjustment of the matter, they notified him that on a stated day he would be expected to meet them in Preparation to make a settlement. In the meantime they had sent word to the "Lytleites" and all others who had from time to time withdrawn from the society, to appear on the day of settlement and present their claims. But the "Chief Steward of the Lord," and Barnum, whom he styled "Assistant Chief Steward of the Lord," had not the courage to meet the gathering of the tribes on that occasion, and so they found it convenient to be absent at Onawa, which by this time had become the county seat. On the next day, however, they started in a wagon for Preparation, hoping that the people had by that time dispersed. About a mile from the village they were met by a young woman, whose faith in "Father Ephraim" seems to have remained unshaken, who told them that they must not come in, as the people were all there and would surely *hang* them if they made their appearance! Just at that moment they saw the men coming from Preparation at full speed on horseback over the hill toward them. They sprang from the wagon, unhitched the horses, and mounting them bare-back, wheeled about for Onawa. After a lively race of nearly fifteen miles, not surpassed in thrilling interest by that of John Gilpin, across

prairies, and over creeks and ravines, the "Chief Steward" and his "Assistant" arrived at Onawa about a half-mile ahead of their *followers!*

Thompson remained at Onawa two or three days under the protection of the citizens, and then went to St. Louis. Barnum remained until the next spring, when he took up his abode in Nebraska. Thompson, while at St. Louis, again made conveyances of all the lands to his brother and to other parties. He then attempted to found another religious society, but the news of his Iowa crookedness having followed him, he failed to obtain followers. He wrote and published a book on the "Origin of the Black and Mixed Races," pretending to translate largely from the Hebrew and Greek, of which languages it is said, he was utterly ignorant. The last heard of him by his old Monona county friends he was in Philadelphia in quite destitute circumstances.

After Thompson's flight from Preparation, his former followers sent his family with a feather-bed and a few other household effects, after him to Onawa, and then divided all the remainder of the personal property among themselves, each taking what he could identify as his own. The same fall they commenced an action in chancery to set aside the conveyances of real estate. The suit was contested in all its stages by Thompson's grantees, and not finally settled until December, 1866, having been eight years in litigation. At that time the Supreme Court of the State of Iowa declared all the conveyances fraudulent, and set them aside, the Court holding that Thompson only held the property as trustee. The property was sold under the order of the Court, and the proceeds divided among the original contributors in proportion to the amount contributed by each. Of the fifty or sixty families that Charles B. Thompson brought to the settlement at Preparation in 1854, not more than three or four remain. Thus ended *Bancemysm* in Monona county.

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