

ORIGIN OF OUR MISSOURI WAR (1839) IN A LAND GRAB.

The Indians at their Old Village Grounds.

BY SUEL FOSTER.

CHAPTER I.

I CANNOT conveniently devote as much time to "what I know" of the Missouri war as the importance of the subject requires; but rather than have some of these historic facts and beautiful embellishments of that war die with the memory of man, pass away and be forgotten, I wish to record them in THE ANNALS OF IOWA. I am the more desirous of doing this, from the fact that I have often asked of my "old comrades in arms" what the cause of that difficulty was; but a correct answer is very seldom given. That the state of Missouri claimed a strip of the south part of Iowa, west of the Des Moines river, is a fact; not the triangle in the fork of the Mississippi and Des Moines, as is sometimes supposed. But how came Missouri to think of moving her northern boundary about ten miles north? This is one part of this history I wish to explain; and when a more convenient season offers I will try to give to the reader another chapter — the occupation of the army *and its embellishments* — real, not fiction — "Truth is more wonderful than fiction."

In September, 1836, I was boarding at Mr. Rinnah Wells's, whose house stood on the bank of Rock river, Illinois, about two miles from its mouth, on the identical ground where the great Indian village of the Sacs and Foxes was previous to the Black Hawk war of 1832-3. It was one of those warm, delightful days, early in September, 1836, that

early in the morning there were seen coming on horseback across the Rock river, on Van Ruff's Island, a company of fine looking Indian braves in half uniform. Approaching the river, they halted, and after a few moments viewing our shore of the river, they slowly rode into the water and swam their horses and ponies over. Soon there were seen coming up the river, in canoes, several squaws, and some Indian men with them, who kept their canoes close to the opposite shore, or where the first Indians had rode in to swim over. Then came considerable numbers of Indians of all ages and sexes, wending their way through the bushes on Van Ruff's Island, some on horseback and some on foot. After a halt of a few minutes they came silently to the water, those with ponies riding and swimming, and those on foot getting into the canoes and passing over. The number of canoes continued to come up the river, and the Indians by land continued to come, until about five hundred had assembled on the ground of their ancient village—the lovely land of their birth and their former home. No wonder they were orderly, silent, sedate, and solemn.

Mr. Wells could talk the language readily. He was well acquainted with many of the chiefs and nobles, and they greeted each other with much cordiality, for Wells had lived at their village some time before the Black Hawk war. This was their first visit to their recent home after an absence of nearly five years. Mr. Wells asked them where they were going? They answered, "Minisek,* Sena Sackalos"—to Rock Island, to Major Davenport's. "What you going there for?" "Kaw-in,"—No; that was, they would tell him no further.

There were some eight or ten of us gentlemen of leisure at Mr. Wells's, who were quite unacquainted with the Indians, and we got Mr. Wells to introduce us to some of the chiefs—Black Hawk, Keokuk, Kishkekosh, Poweshiek, Wapello, White Hawk, Manathe, etc.; but they were not

* Minisek is the common name for Island; Sena for Rock; Sepo for water.

disposed to make new acquaintances at that time and place. Black Hawk and his family — two wives, two sons (young men), and several children, the smallest some ten years old — were under a neat wigwam. The squaws were picking up a comfortable dinner, or lunch, of cold, flat biscuit and venison. We asked Black Hawk some questions, who answered us politely in broken English. By one o'clock he and his family moved on towards Rock Island, about three miles, he and one of his sons upon good horses and his squaws upon ponies, with the tent and other luggage. Other Indians soon commenced following, who were not disposed to tarry long at their old village site, whilst some remained and strolled around. Many of them went up on the points of the bluffs, where was their burying-ground. Here were often heard loud lamentations at the graves of their dead. The squaws were more particularly demonstrative of their grief for departed friends. In the evening they kindled fires on those high bluffs, and their lamentations were loud and piteous, and continued until nearly twelve o'clock at night. We went up among them in the evening. We never witnessed a more affecting scene among the whites than we here saw with the Indians.

These Indians had been deceived by their friends, the United States government, the boundary line running some three miles north of Rock river, here near its mouth, instead of it running on the south side from its mouth towards the south end of Lake Michigan; thus taking away from them their village, their home, and the graves of their dead. This was their last and final parting with these sacred things. Their dead were not buried, but placed beneath a kind of small, low roof of slabs of split wood, in the surface of the ground, and their bones yet lie in their blankets, their bow and hatchet, their pipe and pouch, their wampum and moccasins, and jewels, all found and examined, and replaced again by loving hands.

My father was a Friend (Quaker), and he told me that our government had often robbed the poor Indians of their

lands. Hath not Uncle Sam taught his children the way of "land grabs?" Ought not the curse of a "Credit Mobilier" to rest heavily upon the necks of a wicked and perverse nation?

The next day there were assembled upon Rock Island nearly all the Indians of the Sacs and Foxes, and Major George Davenport, Antoine Le Claire, Sumner Phelps, Wm. Patterson, Mr. Hambaugh, and probably one or two others connected with the Indian trade, for the purpose of buying the lands of the half-breeds of these Indians. This tract of land embraced over one hundred thousand acres, lying at the mouth of the Des Moines river, and as far north as the point where the north line of the state of Missouri touches the Des Moines river. This purchase by these men was right and proper as a land speculation, and conducted in a legal manner in proving who the rightful owners were of this Indian reserve, reserved by the Sacs and Foxes at the treaty at the close of the Black Hawk war for the benefit of all the half-breeds of those tribes. At this time there were identified as legitimate owners of this reserve something over thirty, besides some six or eight others, rightful owners, who were not present. A few rights had been bought before this general purchase. It was understood that a half-breed share in these lands would be equal to nearly three thousand acres. I do not know what price was paid to each half-breed for their undivided interest in this land, but its market value at Stephenson (now Rock Island) and Davenport was two hundred and fifty to three hundred dollars, with a raising market.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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