

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF
NORTHWESTERN IOWA.

BY N. LEVERING, GREENWOOD, MO.

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For several years, there lived and roamed a small band of Indians in northwestern Iowa and southern Minnesota, who were robbers and outlaws from other tribes, banded together. They seceded, mostly, from the Sissitons and Yankton Sioux, and some thieving stragglers from other tribes. They were not recognized by government as a tribe until within a few years back; they, however, drew annuities from government, by attending the drawings with the Yankton Sioux, and passing themselves for Sioux. This band was originally known as the Two-Finger tribe, having taken its name from its chief, "Si-dom-i-na-do-tah" (two fingers), who had lost two fingers in battle. After Si-dom-i-na-do-tah's death, his brother, Ink-pa-do-tah (Red Top), succeeded him as chief. It was then known as Ink-pa-do-tah's band. They spent much of their time fishing and hunting about the lakes and rivers of northwestern Iowa. There were among their number several half-breeds. Their numbers have been variously estimated from fifty to one hundred and fifty.

Early in the month of March, 1857, a portion of Ink-pa-do-tah's band were hunting in the valley of the Little Sioux river, in the east of Woodbury county, when they chanced to pursue a herd of elk into the Smithland settlement, near the town of "Smithland," where (as I was informed by one of the settlers) the Indians' pursuit was intercepted by the settlers, who took from them their guns, and pursued the elk themselves. The snow was very deep, the weather cold, and the Indians hungry and weary, having been on the chase for several hours without food; now, deprived of the means of obtaining it, their savage indignation was aroused. They de-

manded provisions of the settlers, but, their stock being short, their wants were not fully supplied. Ink-po-do-tah and his people (estimated to be about fifty) remained some two or three days in the settlement. The settlers, becoming wearied with the protracted visit of their red brethren, resolved to resort to some strategy to relieve themselves of their company, as their cupboards were nearly bare, and meal-tubs empty, which may account for their pursuing the elk. Knowing that the bloody and disastrous defeat of Ash Hollow was yet fresh in the minds of all the Indians in the north-west, and that it had rendered the name of Gen. Harney a terror to every savage heart, they resolved to personate Gen. Harney. One of the settlers donned an old uniform of an army officer, and was soon seen on the opposite side of the Little Sioux river from where the Indians were camped, when he was pointed out by some of the settlers to the Indians as Gen. Harney, and they were told that he was in pursuit of them, whereupon they packed up their tents, and started up the river, with their savage natures aroused and burning with revenge which they yearned to gratify. They were not long in reaching a small settlement in Cherokee county, a distance of about twenty miles. Here they entered the houses of the settlers under the guise of friendship, and, after discovering the whereabouts of their fire-arms and ammunition, they at once seized them and turned them upon their owners, who, until now, had not divined their treachery, and who now found themselves entirely at the mercy of their unwelcome visitors, who were panting for their blood. They first helped themselves to such provisions as they could find, then amused themselves by shooting into the different articles of furniture, ripping open feather-beds and scattering their contents to the winds, and making general havoc among household furniture generally. In one house they found a lady washing; she had a stove boiler filled with water; quite a number of them found much amusement in discharging their guns at it, and would laugh heartily to see the water gush out of the bullet-holes. After they had amused themselves in this way a short

time, they then turned upon the stock, shooting down cattle, hogs, &c., cutting out the choicest portions, and leaving the balance; in the meantime, they kept close watch of the settlers so that none could escape. Their hellish passions were now aroused to deeds of a more diabolical character — they ravished the women in the most brutal manner; the half-breeds among them seemed to be the principal actors in these fiendish outrages; they, however, killed no one. After remaining here two or three days, they next proceeded to a settlement in Clay county, that being the next, or nearest, on their route. Arriving there, they scattered out in small squads to the different houses, made demonstrations of friendship as they entered the houses of the settlers, but were not long in developing their treachery. Here similar destruction of property followed as at Cherokee, and, if possible, the abuse of the women was worse. In some instances, they would make the husband and father stand, with the muzzle of a gun pointed at his bosom, and see his wife or daughter ravished by these fiends incarnate. After remaining here some two or three days, and laying waste the property of settlers, but sparing their lives, they left for Spirit Lake, and the Oak-a-bo-jie lakes in Dickinson county. These lakes, for years, had been the favorite resort for these Indians and nearly all the northwestern tribes. They are romantically situated, and their scenery is of the most enchanting character. Spirit Lake is about twenty miles in circumference, its waters remarkably clear and sparkling — so clear that the eye can penetrate its crystal bosom several feet. In the middle of this lake no bottom has ever been found. It abounds in every variety of fish found in, or common to, the north-western lakes and rivers, together with other aquatic game of every kind that is known to the country. This lake is about eight feet higher than that of East Oak-a-bo-jie, which is not over six or seven rods distant to the south of it. An enterprising yankee, in 1860, if I mistake not, cut a channel from one of these lakes to the other, and erected a grist mill on the bank of the Oaka-bo-jie, thus securing a most valuable mill seat, and forming

the only outlet to Spirit Lake. The waters of this beautiful lake are, at times, much agitated and thrown into great commotion, its waves surging and dashing their white foam upon its beautiful pebbled shores, while at the same time the waters of the Oakabojie are perfectly calm and tranquil. It is related that, at times, deep consecutive roarings are heard in the midst of this lake, as if proceeding from the depths of its silvery bosom.

“Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutored mind
Sees God in clouds, and hears Him in the wind,”

believes this roaring to be the voice of the Great Spirit, and this lake is the home or abode of spirits; so firmly were they of this opinion, that it is said that an Indian's canoe never pressed its crystal waters, or his dripping oar ruffled its bosom; hence the name of Spirit Lake. Oakabojie is also an Indian name, meaning a place of rest; or, as an old French interpreter defined it to me, “when I get there I feel rested; I don't feel tired.” East Oakabojie is about two and one-half miles long, and will not exceed three quarters of a mile in width at the widest point. The beautiful groves of timber that partly encircle this lake add much to its beauty and romantic character. Its waters are not so clear and pure as those of Spirit Lake, showing, conclusively, that there is no connection between the two. It, too, is filled with a large variety of excellent fish, and its bosom is constantly dotted over with countless numbers of aquatic fowls, which keep up a continuous squawking serenade, and inspire the beholder with a feeling of romance and pleasure. At the south-west extremity of this lake is located West Oakabojie Lake, united to the former by a small channel of water. At this point a peninsula extends from the south to within two or three rods of the opposite shore, forming an excellent wagon road, and across the channel is a good bridge, completing the road to the opposite shore. West Oakabojie is about the same size of its sister lake, but its waters more clear and pure, showing that there is no connection between the two, other than the channel before spoken of. The shores of this lake, in places,

are walled up with boulders for several feet in length, and have the appearance of having been built by the hands of some very skillful stone mason. Whilst many believe that human hands erected these walls, I cannot but think that the great Architect of the Universe, who scooped out these beautiful lakes and filled them with their limpid waters, erected these walls, in the lapse of time, by causing the waves to dash against the shores and wash out or remove the surplus gravel and stones, thus leaving the boulders one upon another as they now lie. In many places the shores are crowned with beautiful groves and charming foliage, that bend their waving heads over the brow of these rocky shores, as if to kiss the frothy waves that dash at their feet. This lake is the source of the Little Sioux river.

Well might the Indian call this, place of rest; for here he could rest his wearied limbs after a long chase, and cool his heated brow, and slake his thirst, and regale his appetite on the luxurious fish that coursed through these pearly lakes. The Indian was not the only one to appreciate and enjoy this beautiful country; these beautiful lakes and surrounding rich agricultural country, for many miles, soon attracted the attention of the hardy pioneers. In the spring and summer of 1856 a number of families, numbering in all about sixty persons, settled about these lakes, at different points, making the settlement very scattering. It was here that those savage miscreants bent their way after leaving the settlement in Clay county, with a determination to slake their thirst for blood. On arriving there, they scattered out in small bands to the cabins of the settlers, professing the same friendship as they had done on previous visits; when they had thus entered all of the houses in the settlement, they made a simultaneous attack upon the inhabitants, followed by an indiscriminate butchery and destruction of property. They spared none from the merciless tomahawk and scalping-knife except four women, who were made prisoners; they were Mrs. Marble, Mrs. Noble, Mrs. Thatcher, and Miss Gardner. Some five or six of the men were absent, thus saving their lives. Two

wounded men (Thomas and Carver, I think, were their names), and a boy twelve or fifteen years old, and a young lady were all that escaped. These four last named persons were afterwards rescued by three companies from Fort Dodge, and vicinity, under command of Maj. Williams, of that place, who, on learning of the terrible massacre, at once hastened to relieve the sufferers. These were noble-hearted men, for, in spite of the very deep snow, severe frosts, swollen streams, and warring elements, they beat their way through the snow—sometimes drifts of fifteen or twenty feet in depth—dragging after them their provisions and arms on hand-sleds, the deep snow and swollen streams rendering their horses and cattle of but little utility; the frozen earth was their bed at night, without a tent to cover their heads from the severe frosts or pelting storms. On arriving there they buried the dead, which were about forty-two. On their approach the enemy fled; they pursued them to the state line, when they retraced their steps for home. On their march homeward they were overtaken by a severe snow-storm, in which two of these brave men perished—Captain Johnson, and William Buckholder—whose bodies were afterwards found and decently interred; many others were severely frosted. The names of these noble men deserve to be written in letters of gold.

The Indians remained about the lakes for about one week after committing the horrid butchery, keeping a close watch all the while over their prisoners, whom they kept secreted in the brush; in the meantime, keeping a sharp look-out for the approach of troops.

In the fall of 1861, Mrs. Marble removed to Sioux City, and resided in the family of Wm. Granger (whose brother had fallen a victim in the massacre), when I made her acquaintance. I learned from her, through Mrs. Levering (for she would not converse with a gentleman upon the subject of her captivity), that the same Indians who murdered her husband and took her captive, were in the habit of frequently visiting her house, always manifesting warm friendship, and, on coming into the house, would leave their guns at the door, on the

outside; but, on the day of the massacre, when they entered they brought them into the house with them, which aroused her suspicions that all was not right. They ordered something to eat, which she immediately set about preparing for them; and, while thus engaged, they insisted that her husband should shoot at a mark with them, which he had frequently done. Mr. Marble was a good shot, and a good competitor for them. The mark was shot down, and Marble ran to put it up, and, thus engaged, they shot him down, killing him almost instantly; they then turned to Mrs. Marble and told her that she must go with them. After partaking of the repast which she had prepared for them, they loaded her down with such plunder as they wished to possess, and started for their camp, which was in the timber near the lake shore. The poor captive could now only gaze for a moment and for the last time, on the cold and lifeless form of him she so fondly loved, and with whom she had periled her life amid the wilds of the frontier, far from dear and loving friends, and among a savage and merciless foe. She was goaded on by these unfeeling demons, through the deep snow, and under a crushing load, to their camp, where she found the other unfortunate captives, who, like herself, with streaming eyes and a bleeding heart, had gazed for the last time on the lifeless forms of loved ones, and their rustic homes, once so happy and cheerful, now so gloomy and desolate.

On leaving Spirit Lake, the savages headed for Springfield, a small town in Minnesota, which they attacked, but were met with strong resistance, and were repulsed, the settlers fighting nobly.

From what Mrs. Marble could learn from her captors, some of the settlers about the lakes made a desperate resistance. On their leaving Springfield, they were closely pressed by a company of mounted infantry from Fort Ridgley, under Capt. Bee.

Captain Bee pursued the enemy only a few miles, overtaking some straggling squaws, and finding considerable plunder that had been left behind in order to precipitate their flight;

he was, undoubtedly, close upon them when he abandoned the pursuit. Mrs. Marble stated that quite frequently she fell prostrate to the earth from sheer exhaustion under her burdensome load, when one of the savages would place the muzzle of a loaded gun close to the side of her head and fire it off, the report of which, said she, "would nerve me up, and I soon found myself again upon my feet." So close would they fire the gun to her head that the hair was burned off the side of her head, and the skin on her neck and face filled with powder, the marks of which were visible for years after. In addition to the heavy loads they were forced to carry, each one was compelled to carry a pappoose strapped on top of their load. These tawny little specimens of human nature they were anxious to rid themselves of, if possible, and, whenever an opportunity presented itself that they were not discovered by the Indians, they would give the little copperheads such a blow with their fist, or pinch, as would cause them to yell lustily, so that the Indian parents soon came to the conclusion that "Injun pappoose no like white squaw," and they were relieved of them, in a measure.

When Mrs. Thatcher was taken prisoner, her little babe, about four weeks old, was murdered; and, not having a child to nurse, and being exposed to the deep snow and inclemency of the weather, her breast bealed, and her limbs became very much swollen, so that by the time they reached Big Sioux river she was almost totally unable to travel further. Having been goaded on for days under an intolerable load until her physical powers were completely overtaxed, weary nature now yielded, and death stood waiting for the last sands of life — not as the king of terrors, but to her, as a kind and benevolent friend, ready to relieve from distress. While she was making an effort to cross the river on a log or tree that lay across the stream, the savages, doubtless, thinking that she would no longer be of use to them, shot her through the head, her body falling into the stream, where it was left. Thus ended the sufferings of Mrs. Thatcher.

(To be continued.)

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