NORTHWESTERN IOWA IN 1855

[The following account of experiences in northwestern Iowa in the summer of 1855 was written in its present form about fifteen years ago by J. L. Ingalsbe, a pioneer surveyor, and is printed here with almost no editorial modification. Attention is called in the footnotes to an occasional confusion, by the writer, of certain individuals and events, due to the lapse of fifty years between the incidents and their final narration. These errors, however, do not destroy the value of the narrative, which presents a clear picture of the experiences of an early surveying party, and reflects the uncertain and perilous condition of the northwestern border throughout the fifties.—JOHN C. PARISH]

On the 25th of April, 1855, I was one of a party of surveyors starting from the City of Dubuque, Iowa, for the northwestern part of the State, at that time a territory nearly one hundred miles square, almost an unknown country save to hunters, trappers and nomadic Indians.

We numbered I think sixteen men, two "gangs" of six men each, with extra men in case of sickness or disability.

One party was led by Williamson G. Allen of Prairie P. O. Lewis Co., Missouri and the other by myself. Four years previously Warner Lewis Surveyor Gen'l. of Iowa and Minnesota had sent out a strong party under Alexander Anderson of Dubuque, one of his best surveyors to prosecute the townshipping of this region. They were unfortunately surrounded by a prairie fire and burned out, teams, wagons, camp equipage, provisions, field notes and records of survey. Charles Lewis the General's son lost his life, some of the men escaped to Sioux City, then only a small collection of shanties. I think it was never known how many lived or died, or to whence they scattered.[1]

[1] Warner Lewis was not Surveyor General in 1851 but took that office, for the district of Wisconsin and Iowa, in 1853. The Territory of Minnesota was at that time included in the above land district. The report of George B. Sargent,

At the time of which I write Anderson was living in Dubuque, his face badly scarred, one or both ears I think burned off and I understood that no communication passed between him and Mr. Lewis, the General blaming him for the death of his son. We had orders to trace surrounding or adjacent surveys, learn the location and extent of deficiencies, repair damages and carry on the survey so far as we chose or the seasons should allow. We traveled slowly with loaded teams passing through Anamosa, Cedar Rapids, Marengo, Newton, Des Moines and Adel, then pushed northward to our work.

Des Moines contained only a few rude soldier's barracks, deserted and rotting, surrounded by a few cabins occupied by settlers. A miserable old scow capable of floating only one team, afforded us the only means of passage. After passing Adel we saw no settlers, but I think we heard the name of Panora, and that there were settlers well up on Coon River.

I was attacked with fever soon after leaving Dubuque and lay helpless in a "Prairie Schooner" drawn by oxen, and could barely walk when we reached the beginning point of our work, three weeks later. Our method was nothing more or less than to find a well marked township corner and from this trace previous markings so far as any could be discovered and then proceed with new work. One pleasant afternoon in June while engaged in the search for evidences of the previous survey, I halted on a bit of high rolling prairie and while waiting the arrival of my chainmen that I might make record of the topography, I was

Surveyor General for Wisconsin and Iowa in 1851, mentions surveying work in progress in northwestern Iowa and lists Alexander Anderson as holding a contract during that summer for a survey of township lines which was not completed at the time of the report.— *Senate Documents*, 1st Session, 32nd Congress, No. 1, Part III, pp. 72, 81. None of the reports, however, for the years from 1850 to 1855 mention the catastrophe which Ingalsbe describes.

carefully leveling and adjusting my solar instrument and sighting back along the trailing party as they were strung out possibly nearly a mile. I felt something under my feet which upon examination proved to be a handful of iron tally pins used by surveyors. Further search revealed the chain with the remainder of the pins near the other end. Here then must be where the party were burned. From the position of the chain they had been going in the same direction we were and we were not more than ten or twelve feet off their course. We found no other relics of the camp or equipage, and at the close of the seasons work we returned the chain and pins to Gen'l Lewis at Dubuque. I am aware that usually it is not well to anticipate or depart from the chronological order in narration but in this case I may be allowed to state that during the next year while engaged in surveys on the head of either the Mermaton or the Little Osage Rivers in Kansas, I met a settler who was one of the unfortunate party and I learned that he escaped to the Missouri river but never returned to Iowa. He gave me quite a full account of the affair up to the time of the fire. He told me that there was a boy with them and that when too late to start a back fire for safety, they found themselves surrounded by the smoke and flames he threw the boy on the back of a pony and saw the pony run into a swampy low place and falling, the boy went over his head and the man thought possibly both might have survived.

As to himself the man gave me no particulars save that he came through alive and appeared quite unwilling to speak of the matter at all. As to the Iowa survey. We continued our work making good progress for several weeks averaging thirty miles a day usually, although about the third week the men began to suffer from what was called "splint" an inflamation of the cartilages of the ankles. I think I was the only man of the party who failed to give

up, but there were a number of days on which I was very lame. It seemed to me that I could actually hear the cords of my ankles "squeak" as I walked and to catch ones toe under a bit of tangling grass was absolute torture. Even the leader of the other gang a fiery little red haired Missourian but with "grit" sufficient for two big men, had to ride in one of the wagons for a week. We knew that the Indians beyond the Missouri were growing troublesome but to what extent we did not know. Coming out by the southern route we did not pass through Fort Dodge, which was the only military post in that region.

Being in the service of the Government we were entitled to military protection if needed, but in ordinary movements then, infantry would not average over twelve miles per day, and that by no means answered our purpose. Major Webster commandant of the fort sent word to us that if we met with hostiles he would protect us, and he had at least a small force of cavalry.[2] One day I ran my party through Old Wabasha's band moving on their summer hunt. He was I believe friendly to the whites but "Red Wing" beyond the Missouri was hostile. Wabasha was at that time said to be past eighty years of age and was the only Indian I ever met for whom I had any respect. Gray Eagle a young buck attached to the band and aspiring to the leadership I sized up as likely to cause trouble presently. During the interview with Wabasha an old squaw stole a ham bone from one of the wagons and started off with it concealed under her blanket. Detected by one of the men, the matter was reported as I stood talking with the old chief. He at

[2] There is no Major Webster who can be identified with Fort Dodge. Very probably the writer had in mind Major William Williams. Fort Dodge, as a government post, had been abandoned in 1853, but the sutler, William Williams, had remained at the fort and in the troublous summer of 1855 was acting, under authority of Governor Grimes, as an agent for the organization of defense against the Indians. It was he who, as Major, headed the relief expedition after the Spirit Lake Massacre of 1857.

once had the culprit brought before him and taking the fag end of a rawhide lariat he gave her a genuine flogging. The old fellow swung that rawhide with the skill and vigor of a Mexican mule driver, bringing the dust out of the dirty old blanket in fine style, and finally sending the offender back to replace the purloined soup bone. In doing so she dextrously slipped an entire ham beneath her clothing and again started off. I caught the eye of the cook by a warning shake of the head, adding "sotto-voce" "Not a word — Not a word". "If he sends her back again who knows but she will pack off team, wagon and the entire outfit". I have never been fully clear in my own opinion of that transaction. The thrashing was genuine without doubt, but whether a large well cured ham might or might not be in that market considered legal tender for such a "walloping" and entitle the old chief to a finger in the toast, I am not certain.

We were pushing on north and west entirely beyond any communication with civilization and possibly a week after the events mentioned a solitary Indian came to me as I was swinging on ahead of my chainmen at what was called the "Surveyor's lope" and partly in mixed English and Indian and partly by expressive pantomine he endeavored to turn me back. He would point eastward "Good-Good-Much Good", pointing west "Bad-Bad-big Bad" making motions as if to push me back. Failing to arrest our advance he finally sat down by one of our monuments and remained motionless as the post by which he sat until we lost sight of him in the distance. I will here state that an Indian hates a surveyor worse than he does a settler or even a soldier. When the surveyor has passed over the land measuring it off into parcels guided by his shining instruments, setting his monuments at the intersections of his trails the Indian feels a superstitious dread to step inside those bounds.

The figures and letters on the posts and surrounding trees, the chisseling on the stone, the hasty notes and scrawling diagrams made by the surveyor and then stuffed into his field wallet form a combination which the imagination of the Indian magnifies into some misterious "bad medicine" whose ills he must not dare to invoke. At the time of the occurrence I had no reason to suppose this Indian to have any other motive than his own unwillingness to abandon his hunting ground.

Readers who shall choose to follow up this narrative can judge for themselves. Toward the latter part of June we found our stock of provisions growing short, in some of the essentials and as we were continually pushing farther from any source of supply "Uncle Jack" Parker contractor on this job, decided that teams must go out to Fort Dodge for supplies. On the 20th. or 21st. of June I came in from the east setting corners on the north bounds of what is now Buena Vista Co and set a township monument between the towns Barnes, Douglass, Herdland & Lee, as now designated, finishing as the sun dropped below the western horizon.[3] Our camp was then on the southerly bank of the Inyan Yankey, near the township line striking this corner. At that time in all that region if any timber existed it would only be on the eastern or southerly side of water, so in this case our tents and wagons were close by this little stream for the concealment afforded by the strip of low timber protected by the stream from the western fires. At daylight on the next morning Mr. Parker decided that he with assistants and teams must start out for more supplies. The distance to the Fort [Fort Dodge], our nearest point, was said to be by the trail over seventy-five miles. He wished to keep one gang at work and this would leave but one man

[3] The townships of Barnes and Lee are in Buena Vista County and the townships of Douglas and Herdland are in Clay County.

to guard and watch the camp with its store tents, implements and records. No one seemed willing to stay. My crew pulled the most chain in a day and he prefered that I keep in the field, but finally turned to me, "Well Captain, I am not anxious for the job, but I'll stay if you say so". Our tents were quite well concealed in the low timber and there was to be no noise or smoke, no stirring out in daylight, or anything to attract notice. The Captain wanted my rifle, he had been shooting elk with it and had become attached to it. It was a big muzzle loading gain twist built specially for me by Nelson Lewis of No. 50 Congress St. Troy, N. Y. I do not remember the guage of the bore, but the barrel was thirty-two inches in length and weighed ten lbs. by itself. On the plains it was called "Old knock 'em down". After all were started I should be alone for a week probably. It was well known that the Indians were growing hostile and that lawless bands were roaming about and with the stores in our tents a life would not be safe if discovered, even by Indians professedly friendly. I had abundant time in which to work out several difficult problems in our work, consult logarithms cotangents &c., as I had no interruptions save by "Sport" a Spanish bird dog and he must be kept mostly muzzled for silence. I have never known mosquitoes so persistent and troublesome as at that time, I could not sleep. Build a smoke of willow bark in the tent and drive them out and when almost suffocated I lay with my head close to the bottom of the tent and raised it ever so little, a stream of the wretches would pour in destroying all effect of the fumigation. I think it was on the night of the 28th. that desperate from the torment and loss of sleep I resolved to go out to the higher ground where there might be sufficient wind to drive away the troublesome creatures. An old panther with I think, a couple of cubs had been squalling around for a night or two, attracted

doubtless by the scent of our meat, and when I was ready to start I called Sport as I thought that laying by me, he would give the alarm if she came too near us. I found that he would not leave the tent. Taking with me a double barrelled shot gun belonging to one of the men, and well charged with buckshot, I buttoned the tent and started off in a southerly direction for higher ground. Presently I left the mosquitoes behind and as I stumbled about in the darkness I happened on a flat rock, laid down and was soon asleep. Wakening somewhat before daylight I went back to the tents and found all in good order save a very badly scared dog.

A panther is a very cautious animal, suspicious of all new arrangements, but I had no intention to sleep on that rock the second night. This day was rainy and soon after noon the surveying party came in and owing to the violence of the storm we did not attempt any cooking. When the afternoon had nearly passed, the rain became less violent and about this time a party of Indians were seen coming down the creek, how many we did not determine. Several came into our tents rummaging over our provisions chopping open a lot of cans of various articles, drank a jug of vinegar and were angry because it was not whiskey. Finding a whet stone they sharpened their knives. One appeared to be in authority having on the uniform of a soldier and finding the fowling piece, pretended to wish to buy it, and asked of me the privilege of trying it. Getting no permission from me he persisted and got leave from some one or took it without any one's consent and fired it at a target. As the darkness came on he ordered our cooks to build a fire and give him and his comrads something to eat, I ordered them not to start any fire and we had nothing cooked. I had noticed that the gun had been thrown down beneath blankets, sacks of flour and other storage and although I was sus-

picious of treachery I did not deem it best to manifest the fact. My revolver was in my belt and I stepped out and filled the empty chambers. Presently at a signal from the chief the Indians giving their characteristic yell, sprang on their ponies and started for our teams which were hobbled and grazing perhaps fifty yards away, down the stream. Scarcely a minute elapsed before the Indians were firing into our teams, but I had started nearly as soon as they and was running with my colts pistol in my hand. Allen came running behind me and caught my hand in the endeavor to wrest the pistol from me. I held on saying "You won't hit them from here in the darkness" "Wait let's run right among them". He insisted and knowing that in the struggle neither of us would effect anything I let go my grasp and continued running. I had no weapon but a Bowie knife, but I was fairly raving. I was in no humor to use a pistol, it seemed too tame a weapon. I wanted to grapple with the villains, the idea of an ancient battle axe flashed across my mind. I wanted to see the blood run and hear the bones crack. Allen was behind blazing away, the balls singing by me as I ran, and as I was nearly among them the Indians having I suppose emptied their guns, scampered away across the creek and over the bluffs beyond. We returned to the camp and found the men badly frightened. We held a hurried consultation and as we had only the shotgun, my revolver and a couple of axes for weapons, for I think eight men, I proposed that two of us should start at once for help. All agreed to this as the best plan, but no one wished to go. "Well, I proposed the trip, if no one else will go I will" "The méssenger will be taken first no doubt". I wished if I left that Allen should remain so I selected Gus Carter a Kentuckyian, a strong active fellow able I thought to endure more than I could, and he had more experience than I. We had eaten nothing since morning and we took a

slice of raw pork and a bit of bread as large as one's hand and our blankets. As we started some of the men were sniveling "Never shall get out of here" "All be killed &c."

I took my revolver from my belt handing it to Allen saying "Its a good one Bill, if you don't return it, sell it for all you can". I thought there was a damp streak down his cheek but in the darkness I might have been mistaken.

He looked steadily at me for a minute and then it was "Jim-in-y Christopher", spoken slowly sylable by sylable at first, but at the end explosively. I think this was his only profanity for all occasions. As we reached the level prairie I noticed carefully the bearing of the wind and took my course as I expected to find a surveying gang at some point eighteen or more miles away, depending upon what part of their work they might chance now to be. I think it must have been in the region of Clear Lake, at least, I do not think we crossed the Cedar in our search for them. As we proceeded I halted in every low place and looked back. Rain was still falling and when the sky was lighted by flashes I could discern objects along the horizon distinctly. We had traveled possibly five miles when I thought I discovered moving objects following our trail. Waiting for a succeeding flash I was sure of it, "Gus, there are certainly two of the devils after us" "Now if I had my revolver I don't believe both of us would go on foot to Fort Dodge" "But what shall we do" "I don't know" "You don't know"? "Well then I do" "Come on". Turning square off to the right we ran perhaps a half mile. I directed Carter not to come in my trail, but some distance at one side and finally we lay down. Indian ponies will follow a recent trail through grass and weeds nearly as well as dogs, because the entanglements being separated the traveling is easier. In the darkness and rain cowering low to the earth I made a solemn promise to myself that come what might,

never again would I be caught in such case destitute of means of defense. I kept that promise, but how little we sometimes know what is best for us may appear presently. We remained quiet for some time and then resumed our course as nearly as I could judge in the darkness. Presently we detected a dark streak through the grass and feeling carefully with my hands I found that something had passed along toward our right. "Very well we will lay down again, they will not look for us here". After a time we started on again, finding another trail leading toward our left, we stopped again but finally got apparently beyond their search. We traveled on in the darkness, no star by which to guide our course, uncertain of the passage of time and I dared not light a match to see my watch. I had been traveling with the wind on my right cheek, and I was now growing suspicious. "Carter do you notice this wind growing colder?" "No I guess not" "Well, I do, I think the wind is turning to come from the north and if we continue to guide by it we shall go back among those scoundrels". We then lay down and I watched till I could see the light growing in the east and then traveled on. I thought once after daylight that I saw riders at a distance but it might have been elk as they were then plenty in all that territory. In the course of the forenoon we found work done by the party for whom we were searching, following it up we found their camping ground vacant, evidently abandoned. We found no signs of violence and whether they had been driven off or had left of their own accord we never knew. With no food we could scarcely hope to reach Fort Dodge alive. The chances of meeting parties of land or game hunters at this season of the year were too remote to be considered and to follow the trail of this surveying party would be folly, for either homebound or fleeing they would be light loaded and out travel us in our weakened condition. There

were at this time of course no maps of this region save those drawn by guess, and they were poor things for starving men to depend upon. I had traversed the township in which Storm Lake lay and two ranges east and four west of it, and given the lake its present name and it seems must have recorded the topography of the tributaries of Coon River, but did not know to what stream they belonged. I had heard that there were settlers well up on that river, and believed that to strike south-west, find and follow down it, was our best course. We traveled hard all that day in the rain reaching what we supposed to be Coon River, followed it down, and when too dark to travel well we went into the bottom land that bordered the stream and with our knives cut grass, spreading it on the ground, then spreading our blankets upon it, piled on more grass and finally crawled between the blankets, having traveled according to the marked corners passed, sixty-five miles since daylight in the morning. When I awoke the sun was shining brightly, Sabbath morning July 1st., 1855.

I dreaded to stir for I knew that with exercise our hunger would be almost unbearable. Presently Carter awoke and rising we commenced to shake the water from our steaming blankets. Roused by the noise a small herd of elk sprang up less than a hundred yards from us and raced away across the prairie toward the east. With our sodden shoes on, chafed and bleeding feet, we strapped our heavy blankets across our shoulders and started on. Happening upon some half grown sand hill cranes, Carter cut a handful of clubs and vainly tried to kill one. With a pin for a hook, fastened to a strip of willow bark by ravelings from my clothing I sought with like success to catch fish from the stream. "Hold on Gus. Hold on, that's no use. Only tiring ourselves out. Its just go out or die, that's all there is of it, Come on". Toward noon Carter became exhausted,

lost both reason and courage, lay down, threw away his shoes because they hurt his feet, declared he might as well die there as anywhere, &c., &c. I tied on his shoes and pestered him to make him angry and chase me, but even this failed of effect. Wildly muttering in disjointed senseless speech, he sank in perfect collapse. Fearing his death at any moment I dragged him to a stunted oak standing alone not far away and after tying my blanket to an overhanging limb pushed on alone. Perhaps a couple of miles farther, I came upon quite an abrupt elevation affording a good view southward. Seating myself to rest and reconnoitre I soon discovered in the distance a cluster of specks, which certainly moved. Were they elk or horses or cattle? Did they belong to white people or were they Indian ponies? Watching intently I saw a smaller speck moving out from the edge of timber toward the herd, and holding my hands to shade my eyes from the strong sunlight I caught a bright flash. I sprang to my feet with the thought "Indians don't carry bright tin dishes". It was quite a distance down to the objects and time would be required for a trip down and back. Could I save Carter now? I went back to the oak tree much quicker than I came. He was sleeping but I roused him with "Come Gus brace up and come on. There's help ahead. We shall get out of this all right yet". He was stiff, sore and very weak, but said if he had a drink of water he might be able to go. I took his shoes and ran down to the stream bringing them filled with water, giving him a drink and bathing his face with the remainder I got him on his feet and with some assistance he staggered along for awhile and presently as he became limbered up went alone. We came upon a wagon trail, leading into the timber and following it soon discovered a cabin. A middle aged German woman was there alone. We told her we were hungry and she said her son was out hunting for deer, but

she was frying balls of corn meal dough from a large brown earthen pitcher in a kettle of hot deer's tallow. I ate for a few moments and became sensible that this was about the worst possible food for men in our condition and I stopped. The woman made us understand that about three miles below there was a setlement of several cabins. I gave her some silver coins which she unwillingly took and as Carter declared he would "eat what he wanted if it killed him" I said "Gus you fool, come out of here" In spite of his struggling resistance I hauled him through the low doorway and out to the wagon trail. "Now sir get on to your feet and come with me or I will thrash you within an inch of your life". The German woman meanwhile berating me evidently to the extent of her vocabulary both German and English. It was dark when I got him to the settlement where we found several families and a number of men. I wanted a horse to carry me to the fort, but they positively refused to allow me to proceed before I had at least one night's rest. I laid on a puncheon floor, slept a little. Some travelers came in bringing the tidings that Captain Parker with his teams had left the Fort Dodge trail some twenty-five or thirty mile back, and had gone north on that afternoon. A terrific thunderstorm burst over us about midnight and I lay wondering what might be the condition of my comrads at our camp. Soon after daylight I had hired a white horse and a good saddle and with a number of men, some mounted and some with wagons in one of which Carter rode, we were pushing northeast to find Parker. He had been a soldier in the Black Hawk War and at one time commandant at Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin,[4] and subsequently one of the first settlers at Dubuque. I

[4] Fort Atkinson was built in 1840 on the Turkey River in northeastern Iowa. It was garrisoned at one time by Company A, 1st Iowa Volunteer Dragoons, under command of Captain John Parker.— *Annals of Iowa* (Third Series), Vol. IV, pp. 449, 451.

am unable to recollect at what time we had struck his trail and overhauled him, but it was arranged that he with the help and arms they had, should make all possible haste to our camp and if the men were alive or still undisturbed he should maintain the defense until I could bring help from the fort, but if all was lost, or the opposition too strong he should fall back and meet me on my return. I wheeled off and started for Fort Dodge alone, striking the trail west of where it passed between the Twin Lakes and rode into the fort in the evening as the soldiers were having a bonfire and preparing to celebrate the fourth on the morrow. Major Webster[5] heard my report and at once issued orders and declared that he would have a hundred mounted men ready for a start at sunrise. Soon after midnight the Major roused me to say that he had learned that he had no authority to take troops so far from the fort. I suggested calling for volunteers. "No, he dared not spare them". "Then furnish me what arms I can carry with which to arm our own men". He would not even do that. If I ever abused a man by language I did then and if I did not abuse him it was because I was not competent and failed of my intention. I wonder I was not put in the guard house, I certainly deserved it, and I could only account for the failure by surmising that somebody felt guilty and considered that I told the truth, and from some manifestations among the soldiers I suspected it might have been a difficult job to do. Obtaining writing materials I wrote a letter to a brother in Cleveland, Ohio, and he indiscreetly handed it to the Editor of the "Plaindealer". It was published and that copy of the paper must of a certainty have established its right to the title. I saddled my horse and started back reaching the Coon cabins at night. I think that must have been what is now "Sac City" and was said

[5] See footnote 2 above.

to be sixty miles from the fort. If so the trail must have been indirect. I passed that night in a settler's cabin standing a short distance west of a log bridge crossing the stream where the owners whose name I can not recollect and a young man from the east, a school teacher named Henry Evans were keeping bachelor's hall, and in the morning Evans started with me northward, no tidings having arrived from there. Now following the township line I had previously run and after darkness had set in and we were within three or four miles of the end of our journey we came upon the trail of several wagons going in a southerly direction. What should this signify? Had Capt. Parker abandoned the camp and was he steering toward Storm Lake and were we missing the connection? After a short deliberation I said to Evans "We are now so near the camp that we can learn the state of affairs there and if necessary get out before daylight, while if this trail is not that of our people, we shall be loosing valuable time by following it now. Let us push on". When we had passed on some distance I heard a bell away off diagonally on our right. "That's our bell as sure as fate, but what is it attached to and why is it there, where there is neither timber or water?" I decided to investigate the bell business at once. Proceeding in a direction to bring us nearly on a line between the bell and the point where I had left the camp, I directed Evans to lay down and covering him with one of my blankets which was white, that I might more readily find him I said to him "Now, if I am not back here in two hours, get out of here before daylight. Pull for Coon River, get into the timber and keep quiet till night and then work on down".

I could still hear the bell at intervals and started toward it. I made my approach with great caution peering into the darkness and listening intently for any indication of

either friends or foes, certainly supposing that I was crawling defenseless and alone into an Indian camp. Arriving nearer I could discern what appeared to be cattle, nearer still and I was quite certain that they were three of our oxen heads up and apparently wild as deer and I thought all hoppled. "Guess I had best not disturb them farther" "Somebody besides me may be watching also". No sight or sound indicated the presence of any living thing save the cattle. I was fairly puzzled and finally fearing that Evans might leave his place I drew off as silently as I had approached and finding him we started toward where I had left the camp. We soon came upon the trail made by the oxen and coming from the same direction in which we were going, and even in the dim light then approaching I could see that they had plunged along in struggling jumps despite their hopples. Coming from a southeastern direction in my anxiety I had left Evans some distance behind and as I reached a point from which I could overlook the little valley in which we had camped, a breeze which in that country frequently precedes the sun, was driving away the fog which had settled along the stream during the night and I recognized the place at once. There was the green grassy valley and the strip of timber only. I knew that the store tents if still there would not be visible from where I stood, but I had left some of our wagons in front, and where was Parker and his crowd? Had he been driven back and was it his trail I had struck last night? Worse than all as the fog passed off and the light became stronger I saw that the small trees standing near the spot were loaded and black with buzzards and what I had not before noticed there were great numbers of the odious birds floating in spiral circles as high as the eye could distinguish them. I hope in mercy never again to experience such moments. No language can approach a description of the anguish

and I shall not attempt it, nor do I after fifty years wish to rake it up.

"Whence comes this" "At whose door does this horrid goblin stand?" "Did I go wrong in my planning or have I failed in execution?"

I had gone beyond the realm of fear, hope, ambition, desire, or fear of consquences. One more duty only remains. I will know the fate of my comrads or leave my bones face forward on their trail. A rustling in the grass announced the approach of Evans and added more poignancy to my suffering. I regretted having brought him here. I desired no company. I wished to meet my fate alone. Without a turn, a look or any sign of recognition I started forward with a steady deliberate swing, looking neither to the right or left, in fact scarcely regarding anything, had a swarm of savages raised their yell from that strip of timber, I doubt if it would have changed my movements a particle. I had gone beyond all that. When I had passed possibly half way diagonally across the flat, there came the bark of a dog. It was Sport's yelp, and wheeling short toward the point from which the sound came, there were tents and wagons corraled on a bare smooth elevation back in a recess of the bluffs south of the stream and partly behind me on my left. Uncle Jack's tactics were visible in the little piles of dirt surrounding the camp, where he had caused the rifle pits to be dug. Probably I did not move a muscle, but it seemed to me that I had raised from the ground and was sailing through the air, as signaling to Evans to change his course I started straight for the new camp. Sport met me on the way almost overrunning me in his haste and as I was near the foot of the rising ground one of the tents was unbuttoned and Uncle Jack nearly "sans" everything but dragging his clothing behind him and kicking his shoes along the ground ahead, appeared

roaring "Hey — Hello here he comes. Roll out boys Roll out I knowed he'd fetch in an begad I telled ye so tew I did" Theer hain't redskins nuff on this yer hull damn perrary tew stop that thar critter, not by a doggoned sight, less so be they kill's im" &c., &c. Uncle Jack in his bluff hearty way was a staunch friend and a bitter enemy, and a treacherous act or a trespass was to him like a red rag to a mad bull, and when I recounted my experience with Major Webster the old war-horse was furious, but after awhile cooled down to this "Wall 'taint no great harm so fur anyhow" "Ye see when them varmints they sent arter you come in the next morning an didn't ketch ye, by goll the hull passel on 'em skedadled in a tarnal hurry". "Bill watched 'em with a glass an he says there was a bilin grist on 'em up the creek a piece, an the way they got out was a caution cuss 'em". We learned that the chief who came into our tents was Inkpaduta a vagabond leader of a band of renegades from several bands or tribes. He was the moving element in the massacre of a thousand whites at Spirit Lake, Minnesota in 1862 and only got his deserts after that.[6]

At the time of which I write Genl. Harney was on a campaign against the Sioux beyond the Missouri and Capt Pitcher was moving across Iowa with reinforcements for Harney. I never knew what route Capt. Pitcher took or how near he passed by us and I do not think he knew of our presence in the region nor do I know whether he visited or drew any forces from Fort Dodge. If so that might have been why Major Webster was so unwilling to afford us

[6] Here the writer has confused two incidents, the Spirit Lake Massacre which occurred in northern Iowa in 1857 and involved the killing of about forty whites, and the Outbreak of 1862 in southern Minnesota, in which over a thousand settlers were killed by the Sioux under Little Crow. Inkpaduta, who perpetrated the Spirit Lake Massacre, was never brought to punishment by the United States government.

help, but if Pitcher had been at the fort I should certainly have been informed of it when there. At all events it is evident that Inkpaduta had knowledge or strong suspicions of help coming, and knowing that we started hungry and without rations it is reasonable to suppose he feared we knew where it was, and deemed it best to get away quickly. I have aften wondered if Wabasha sent that Indian who warned me back. If so that Indian risked his life for had the Red Wing bands or Inkpaduta's cut throat gang known his errand he would have been scalped without mercy. It was during this campaign I think that Genl. Harney cornered an entire village of hostiles in a ravine at Ash Hollow and gave them such a trouncing practically wiping out the whole business, bucks, squaws and pappooses. Greeley through the Tribune rang the changes "brutal" "butchery" "merciless slaughter" "a disgrace to a civilized nation" &c., in his usual vigorous style. Harney had I think a couple of short brass mountain howitzers and I suppose his gunners did peel the turf from that ravine beautifully. Very few plainsmen have any sympathy for an Indian and I have sometimes thought that if Horace Greeley had enjoyed the means of information afforded by some of my experience with them, he would if not in the columns of his paper, possibly have occasionally in private conversation hurled anethemas in that squeaky falsetto equal to anything ever known in the private sanctum of The Tribune. Witness the recompense for the chivalry of Genl. Canby and his surgeon in the Modoc camp and fate of Meeker the N. C. M. of the Tribune, who gave up his life for his kindness to the White River wretches.[7] I have strayed too far and too long from the surveyors camp on

[7] General Edward R. S. Canby was killed in California, in 1873, by the Modoc Indians while in conference with them regarding a treaty of peace. N. C. Meeker, who had charge of the White River Agency in northwestern Colorado, was killed by the Utes in 1879.

the Inyan Yankey and will only add in extenuation that I lately stood reverently by a grave in the old cemetery in the rear of the brick house occupied in revolutionary times by Albert Baker in the village of Sandy Hill, Washington Co. N. Y. and read of a man whom I never saw

Major Matthew S. Pitcher U. S. A.
Died Sept. 17 1858. Ae. 48 yrs.

and the circumstance has stirred recollections long past but not forgotten.

We spent the day about the camp almost before we were aware of the passage of the time, and that night I slept as I never slept before. I was half reclining against a tent pole when I forgot all my troubles and was only aroused by the clatter of the cooks around the fire, at daylight on the next morning. Attempting to rise I found that my comrads had covered me with blankets sufficient to nearly smother me. On a second effort my stiffened limbs went groggy and I landed on one knee and one hand after a staggering plunge toward the entrance of the tent. All hands were at their breakfast and I was not observed and remained quiet.

Uncle Jack and Allen were presently heard talking and supposing me to be still sleeping they were complimenting me. I had already heard all I wanted of that and poking my head under the bottom of the tent called out, as though just awakened "Now Bill Allen tell me straight, were you popping at me the other night or at those damned Indians". Allen was on his feet instantly his red hairs bristling, every feature of his freckled face an interrogation point. "Why" Receiving no reply he pulled the blankets from over me, ran his hands over my arms, shoulders, and down to my feet, rolled me carefully over and finally set back on his heels as if waiting for an explanation "Well now I'll tell you Bill the fact is I've been knocking round pretty busily

for about a week, not paying much attention to myself and I have been thinking that if you were cracking away at me down there probably I am all right, but if you were gunning for Inkpaduta perhaps I had best institute an examination''. The men over at the fire set up a roar. It required sometime for Uncle Jack to see the point, but when he got it fairly he laid back rolling his ponderous corporosity back and forth, kicking his short chubby legs in the air, till positively exhausted then getting his breath he would scream ''Bill—Bill—Oh————Bill''. Allen regarded me for an instant with an attempt at a grin and failing in that, tried to speak but could only stamp off among the wagons pretending to be in high dudgeon and muttering about making ''sich a doggoned fuss''. I never obtained any further information save what I have recounted. I was of the opinion at that time and am still that had the two or more Indians who were detailed to capture Carter and myself, succeeded or had we killed one or both of them, our whole party would have been cut off, but our escape put a new face on the matter, disconcerted their plan and lacking the desire for vengeance that would have been roused by a loss of some of their number they preferred to haul off and await a future chance for operating without so much uncertainty. I think an Indian of fifty years ago was much like a panther in one respect at least. If acting aggressively on his own motion he lies in ambush unknown to his prey, he can make one dash with great ferocity, if this fails or develops unknown difficulties he is ''all abroad'' almost never known to rally effectively. Latterly they have been learning from the whites, led by chiefs educated by our Government furnished by traders with better arms than our own soldiers, sometimes and results have been modified. We continued our work without any special annoyance from hostile Indians till we were within three townships of the north

boundary of the state. Our provisions were again nearly exhausted by reason of the number of men we had with us for several weeks after the outbreak and we deemed it best to work quite close together for greater safety, but this interfered seriously with the progress of our work and it was decided to close up for the season and we returned to Dubuque.

I doubt if those now living on the ground we traversed during that summer can realize its condition at that time.

We learned of no settlers north of the "Coon Settlements". When we returned we struck timber at the "Lizzard Forks" said to be twelve miles above Fort Dodge. There was a settler's cabin and a young man "batching it" and a bit of cultivation started. As we passed eastward I noticed one day a large train halted, perhaps one half mile south of the trail we were following, but paying no special attention to it we passed on, without stopping. Sometime previously I had been in Elyria, Ohio, and there became a member of "The Ohio Emmigration Association", a Committee from which were then in the west seeking a location, when each member must within a certain time, build and occupy a cabin on land assigned to him, &c., &c.,

I subsequently learned that the encampment mentioned was composed of the members of this Association and became what is now the City of Waterloo, Black Hawk Co. Iowa. The Secretary of the Association had lost all tidings of me and I had lost my inheritance. At that time, and I presume no essential change has since been made, the surveys of the public lands were let by contract at some price per mile, as agreed on. A contractor must produce a responsible party to go on his bond for double the amount of his contract, that the work shall be done correctly within the time specified, four per cent being kept back to pay an Inspector for passing over the work and report, before the contractor could draw his pay.

The regular charge paid by contractors for their outfit was then four per cent a month demanded by firms who furnished supplies to be paid for when the contractor received his pay from the Government.

Subdividing townships into sections might be done with a magnetic instrument but all beyond that must be done with a Solar instrument. Subdividing or sectionizing prairie was done at $3.00 per mile as the chain run. Townshippers received $4.00 for prairie and in more difficult country a higher rate in both cases. On standard parallels and meridians requiring greater skill and care $25.00 per mile was often paid. Standard parallels or correction lines were located twenty-four or more miles apart as circumstances might require.

One set of corners were marked on correction lines as much more than six miles apart as the meridians starting north from these corners would be less than six miles asunder on reaching the next correction line. Thus the towns and sections would contain as nearly as possible the requisite amount of land, owing to the convergency of meridians and the curvature of parallels.

The U. S. Deputy Surveyor should be competent to calculate these elements correctly at any point of his work. In one case a surveyor following alongside my work on closing up to the correction line and failing to strike the correction corners supposed himself to be in error, and as a last resort, measured across from my corners and thus located his own, manifestly wrong for in so doing he disregarded the convergency of meridians entirely. In each Surveyor General's office there was always kept a standard measure of length which at sixty degrees of temperature was precisely of the proper length and every surveyor on going out on a contract must have all his chains agree with this standard and he must keep one measure

not used, and must adjust on each morning all chains employed on the survey noting the amount of correction needed on each day's work. A U. S. Dept. Surveyor is a confidential Agent of our Government who is sent to pass over territory acquired by treaty, purchase or otherwise, to define and locate its boundaries, extent and capabilities, prizing it in three qualities, mapping and taking notes of soil, minerals, timber, streams, locations for water power, bridges, &c., in fact bringing in the first definite information received of the new territory. All surveyors chains were of iron wire with the ends of links and the connecting rings simply bent around and these links and rings by reason of the constant pulling were continually opening, rendering the chain too long. The links at each end of the chain had from one to two inches of thread cut on the wire and the brass handles could be screwed up to that extent, and when the thread had all been used in bringing the chain to the proper length we must then drive the wire through the handle to shorten the chain and bend the wire to hold it there. When farther shortening was required we would with a tally pin pry open and take out a ring. These operations soon destroyed the accuracy of our chains by rendering the terminal links too short and created a fruitful source of error. I wrote to my friends W. M. & L. E. Gurley of Troy N. Y. requesting them to make for me a chain of light steel wire with all bends and rings flattened instead of round form and all joints brazed. They made be a chain of No. 10 steel wire which was much lighter and stronger than the old style of chain. I afterward had them make me a chain in the same style of steel wire No. 14 and those chains are now correct after so many years of use, and are without doubt the original chains of that style.

We frequently employed two sets of chainmen on difficult or important surveys starting one chain in advance and

the other following but starting from a point not the same as that from which the first chain was started and known only by the surveyor himself.

Solar instruments were then made only I think by William S. Young of Philadelphia and Burt & Bailey of Detroit, Michigan, with plain open sights. A St. Louis Instrument maker named Nutz made at least one with two telescopes end for end, one above the other and collimated in the same plane. I went to his shop, did not like the instrument and coming east I brought a new Solar of the usual form direct from the works of Burt & Bailey, took it to the Gurley's at Troy N. Y. and designed and superintended the construction of the first telescopic Solar Transit and wrote the instructions for its use as printed for years in their Manual.

Northwestern Iowa was then and had been a favorite hunting ground for the Indian tribes of the western territories. I had seen a band of mounted braves start out in the morning and at a distance not to alarm the game, surround a herd of elk, then gradually closing up from all directions, one rider would dash at full speed in chase of the flying herd, which as it approached the surrounding circle of guards would be turned back, a fresh rider and pony pursuing the chase, in a couple of hours or more the whole band of Indians could ride among the exhausted game and cut their throats without leaving their seats on their also exhausted ponies.

Then the lazy hunters would lay down and the squaws must move the village with its tent poles, skin coverings, papooses and dogs to the vicinity, skin, dress and prepare the meat, collect wood or buffalo chips, rosin weed or some combustible, for fuel, provide for a gluttinous carouse for their brutal lords, till the place became too offensive for even an Indian to endure it, when after starving for several days they would repeat the foray in some other locality.

Horses and mules hate the smell of an Indian as much as they do that of a bear, and if a village was at any time on the move between us and the wind, our teams would not fail to notify us by their uneasiness. If any reader not disposed to credit my written testimony, can imagine an old decayed buffalo skin, wet and dried a hundred times accentuated by other odors likely to be acquired by years of use under such circumstances, then multiply the result by the several hundred in the fragrant procession, the final result may possibly indicate an antidote to "Hiawatha" or "Ramona".

At some time during that summer it became necessary for us to communicate with another party at quite a distance across country, and taking a saddle horse I set out one morning for the trip. Anticipating a full days ride I was going at only a fair gait, being quite too experienced a horseman to crowd my mount so early in the day, when with an audible snap something struck the leather cover of one of my stirrups. My horse sprang as though from the stroke of a whip, and rounding up to look back I saw the head of a large snake waving back and forth over the grass. Almost spontaneously my revolver came out of its holster, but my horse was dancing, pawing and snorting in such terror that I could get no chance for a shot. There was nothing save large rosin weeds to tie to, I dared not trust to my picket pin, and the best I could do was to face about at a distance and shove my horse straight ahead with the spur till he was raising to bolt, when shoving the snaffle rein savagely across his neck to the right, thus bringing his head sharply round to the left, I upset his calculations leaving him for an instant, balancing on his hind feet which gave me my only chance for a quick shot. I repeated this maneuver till presently at the crack of the pistol the villainous head lopped and there was what looked like a very

large animated corkscrew rolling about in the grass and a very badly frightened horse bounding in rabbit like jumps to get away from the spot. I have no definite idea of the size of my game but it must be quite a snake that can rap his jaws on a horseman's stirrup.

As soon as I could quiet my horse sufficiently for the purpose I hauled up and filled I think four chambers of my revolver then with a look at my watch and a glance at the sun, I was casting about to determine my course, thinking "Well — quite a circus" "Yes, and now I think of it — I wonder what about the spectators".

I knew that roving bands of Indians were liable to appear at any time or place and that riding as I had been, not rapidly and continually in one direction, in plain sight at least on each roll of prairie passed, I was liable to be flanked on one or both sides by an enemy knowing each sag in the surface, each strip of high reedy grass, and the distance direction, entrance and outlet of every ravine. Short deliberation decided like this--"Lucky for me the fool killer is not on hand this morning, but if I'm followed I will try and pull some of them up in sight, even if I run into a hornests nest doing it."

I started at a sharp gallop nearly at an angle of ninety degrees from my former course and almost opposite to the route I intended to pursue. Riding thus for possibly a mile a low vista opened before me, ending not far off in a steep gully bordered on each side by stunted oak trees and hazel bushes. I dashed into the head of this and wheeling short about rode carefully back till by rising in the stirrups I could just overlook the surrounding prairie and shoving the rim of my hat between my thigh and saddle I sat still, save rising quite often to watch. A raven soon flew past and alighting on a dead branch behind me and well down the ravine commenced his signal croak at regular intervals.

I wanted no better watcher on that side. For a time I saw nothing stirring in my front but presently I detected flocks of birds rising from the prairie, nearly in the direction I intended to go. Watching closely I could see something on the ground, coming nearly toward me and the birds were continually flying to each side of it, and soon a large wolf, loped past the entrance of my ravine and on the brink of the bluff, halted and turning about seated himself on his haunches scanning the route by which he came.

I thought now if my horse will only keep quiet I will watch this exhibition awhile for my own information. That is a timber wolf a regular old gray back and he knows his business. He has not run far for he has now closed his mouth and stopped lolling. He does not like the bright sunshine and he was not routed up from the hot dry prairie. He was lying shaded by the bushes at the head of some valley like this, watching for game that might be passing in or out.

It was not hunters or trappers that drove him out for none would be here at this season of the year, and if they were, he would only trot off a short distance and lay down and watch them. He was hustled out so quickly that he has not fully made up his mind what it was that scared him and he is now trying to study it out.

Discovering no farther manifestations, I started out swerving temporarily from my course in order to follow somewhat near the route by which the wolf had come I soon came upon another valley quite similar to the one I had left and it seemed to lead in about the same direction. Not stopping to look for trails, I swung off to my former course with the thought "Yes, sir,—Yes, sir, exactly". I had it right the first time trying". "A small party of Indians saw me fooling with that confounded snake, and when I started on another track in such haste they rushed

down this valley to head me off where the valleys come together''. ''Well if they stay there till I come they will need their supper.''

I have no doubt they found my trail and whether or how far they followed it I never learned, but if they had continued to where I drove my picket pin at dark, they would have found the latter part of that trail quite too hot for their comfort, unless in greater numbers than I conjectured.

J. L. INGALSBE