

Crying in the Bottoms

According to the treaty of October 11, 1842, the Sauks and Foxes agreed to leave Iowa within three years. Early in the autumn of 1845 the Indians assembled at the Agency near Fort Des Moines at the mouth of the Raccoon River to receive their annuity payments and prepare to migrate west of the Missouri River. Of that occasion and conditions at the Fort, Editor J. Leland T. Mitchell printed the following account in his Keosauqua Times. — The Editor.

A few weeks since we were compelled to leave home upon business which detained us longer than we expected. During our absence we passed through the fertile and flourishing counties of Wapello and Mahaska, and through a portion of what is called the "three year tract," and as far up as Raccoon Forks. At this point is situated Fort Des Moines, garrisoned we believe by two companies of United States troops, under the command of Captain James Allen.

As to the Forks and its immediate vicinity we can not say we are so particularly pleased, the location being too low, from which cause the river at this point overflows its banks and hence is the cause of so much sickness. But from the head of

the "Narrows" of the Des Moines River, a more beautiful or finer country the sun never shone upon. Many of the curious have often thought and still think that the Forks will be the location of the Seat of Government for the future State of Iowa, but we hardly think so. In our humble opinion it will either be located above on the Des Moines Fork, or it will be situated some distance below the Forks. However, it is a mere matter of supposition at best and we therefore leave the subject for contemplation at some future day.

While at the Forks we witnessed the last payment of the Sauks and Foxes in Iowa, and were also present at several of their councils with the U. S. Agent, John Beach, which to us was very interesting having never before attended one. The first council was held several days previous to the payment. It was a deputation from the Fox tribe to inform the Agent that they would be prepared on the morrow to hear what he had to say to the combined tribes. On the morrow the two tribes met the Agent in general council. Owing to the indisposition of Mr. Beach, the council was short and soon adjourned until the next day. On the next day Lieutenant [Robert S.] Granger, of the U. S. Army, acted for the Agent. The Lieutenant sat near the doorway, the Sauks on his left hand and the Foxes on his right.

Keokuk is the head chief of the Sauks. His appearance is striking and commanding, with a keen and penetrating eye that seems to flash fire. It is said that he is upwards of sixty years of age, but from the firmness of his walk and apparent activity one would not take him to be over forty-five or fifty. On Keokuk's left sat his eldest son, a fine looking young Indian, with an eye like a hawk. Near him sat Appanoose, one of the head chiefs of the Sauk nation, and farther to the left and rather aside to themselves sat the two sons of old Black Hawk, Naseaskuk and Essomesot [spelled Wasawmesaw by Catlin], without exception the two finest looking men in the tribe, and their appearance still tells that they are the offspring of a mighty chieftain. The other head men sat in ranges of semicircles back of Keokuk and the others that we have mentioned.

On the opposite side sat Poweshiek, the head chief of the Foxes, backed in semicircles by the prominent chiefs of his tribe. His appearance is not so striking as Keokuk's but there is something in his countenance which denotes a warm heart. One expression of his we well remember. Speaking to the Agent of having to leave the land they had sold to the United States, he said he "knew it was right that they should leave, but, says he, there will be *crying in the bottoms*." How natural

the expression of the old chief. Here was the land where their fathers had lived for ages, and here rested the bones of some of their greatest chiefs and most renowned warriors for whom it was fit that there should be "crying in the bottoms".

Several chiefs spoke upon the subject of their leaving and other matters connected with their tribe, but Poweshiek's regret still hung upon our memory. It brought to our mind many an eloquent expression and beautiful thought made by these warriors of the forest. There is a song of Indian lament which reads:

Land where the brightest waters flow;
Land where the loveliest forests grow,
Where the warrior draws the bow,
Native land, farewell.

He who made yon stream and tree,
Made the white man, red man, free,
Gave the Indian's home to be
'Mid the forest wilds.

Have the waters ceased to flow?
Have the forests ceased to grow?
Why do our brothers bid us go
From our native homes?

Here in infancy we played;
Here our happy wigwam made:
Here our fathers' graves are laid,
Must we leave them all?

Taking the Sauks and Foxes as a tribe, we never beheld finer looking men anywhere — tall, erect, and graceful, they appear the very picture of "nature's noblemen." The number of this tribe amounts to 2457 souls [Beach reported 2278]. The Foxes number forty-three more than the Sauks. The time was when this tribe numbered its thousands, but now they are passing away and in a few years they will only be "known among the things that were" — dissipation and the encroachments of the pale face have done the deed.

During our stay we visited the garrison several times, and upon one occasion had the pleasure of witnessing an Indian war dance, and to one who had never before seen them it was quite a novel sight. After the dance was over the Indians to the number of seventy-five or one hundred then paraded on horseback to the tattoo of their drum, all the time singing their wild war songs. Having formed a solid square they marched in front of one of the officer's quarters, when what was our surprise to observe that preparations were making to *treat* them. A soldier of the infantry, we believe, took a large jug and went to the Sutler's Store and returned with it filled, the jug was then set before the Indians and they were *invited to drink*, and this was done in the presence of *several of the commissioned officers of the Fort*.

We must say that when we saw this we were not a little surprised, knowing well that it was a settled policy of the United States Government to have the Indians kept as far as possible from the baneful influence of liquor, and that companies of men had been sent out to seize upon all liquors brought into the Indian country, and we wondered how it could be possible that men who were placed there to enforce the laws and policy of the Government would thus violate them in so open and outrageous a manner. The natural enquiry with us then was why is this permitted? Is it a common occurrence? To the latter question we frequently received the answer that it was so common that no notice was taken of it.

For the sake of humanity, the poor Indian and the good name of our beloved country, we wish the proper authorities had been there to witness the act and to punish the perpetrators of it according to their deserts. We believe that every commissioned officer of the garrison is guilty of either having given the Indians liquor or has been cognizant of the fact of its having been given to them. And it is a fact that the location of Fort Des Moines among the Sauk and Fox Indians (under its present commander), for the last two years, has corrupted them more and lowered them deeper in the scale of vice and degradation, than all their

intercourse with the whites for the ten years previous. Captain Allen thinks nothing of TREATING the Indians to LIQUOR, and the night before the payment he sent a bottle of liquor to Poweshiek with his compliments by his servant, (a man by the name of Wells), and bottles of liquor to several of the head chiefs of the Foxes.

Now these are facts which have transpired so far from civilized society that they might never have been heard of; but believing it to be our duty to show to the public and the country the abuses that have been practised by their servants, we have taken upon ourselves this exposition, and when duty calls we must obey. The honor, upon which rests the duty of men occupying the position that these officers do, and more especially the commandant, should compel them to observe and enforce the laws rather than break them with impunity. It is said by those living near the garrison that Captain A. and the Sutler had a particular object in view in making the Indians drunk about the time of the payment. As to this we know not, but we do believe there has been and is great corruption *there*, and that if justice was done Capt. Allen would be dismissed from the United States service and the Sutler never allowed again to enter the Indian country. Allen's course has no doubt been dishonorable and disgraceful, as well as un-

officerlike. During one of the councils, several of the Indians were very much intoxicated, and a friend of ours asked the Captain where he supposed the Indians got so much liquor. His reply was: "The bottoms were full of it." Now if he knew such to be the fact or even supposed so, it was his duty to have those bottoms cleared.

Since penning the above we have received a letter from a friend who was at the Raccoon Forks the same time we were, but remained some time after we left. In speaking of the Indians he says: "On Sunday and Monday, after you left, there hardly could be seen a sober Indian or squaw. Where they got their *rotgut* I can not say; but such fighting of both sexes, I never witnessed in my life. Agent Beach made the second order on Captain Allen, to clear the country of at least the whisky peddlers, but he paid no attention to what Mr. Beach wished done."