

The Red Barrier

Between Quebec and the Great Valley beyond the lakes, between the civilization of Europe and the wilderness of Ioway, an Indian barrier lay. More dangerous than uncharted streams and winter storms, more unrelenting than voracious insects and chronic fever, were the red men of the West. During a century and a half of conflict, the Indians held back the white intruders. — The Editor.

THE MASCOUTINS

It was October. Down the Mississippi from Lake Pepin, between banks aglow with the reds of the bitten leaf; past a phantom McGregor, Dubuque, Clinton, and Davenport; past the island of Rock Island festooned with the wild grapevine; past the island of the Mascoutins, its tall grass blazing, its wild life terror stricken and in flight; past these Ioway scenes came, one day, three canoes with a party of Frenchmen bound for Canada by way of the Illinois River and Detroit. "Let us seize these French!" whisper the Mascoutins to the Kickapoo. In light floats they put out into the river and bring the French to shore.

The Indians have made a ten strike; the captives are

worth while. They are Father Michel Guignas, the merchants Jean Baptiste Boucher de Montbrun and François Boucher de Montbrun, and an officer, Pierre Boucher, Sieur de Boucherville. Will the captives be spared? They proffer gifts. But gifts, too, are proffered by the Foxes, enemies of the French and eager to make the captives their own.

Winter falls : first snow, then cold. Snow, white, soft, beguiling; cold, turning the Mississippi to rigor in a night. *Saison insupportable*, laments Boucher de Boucherville. By dint of the rigored river two of the captives (the merchants Montbrun) escape to Kaskaskia where, as allies of the French, the Illinois are quartered.

The Mascoutins and the Kickapoo, fearful now of French vengeance at the hands of the Illinois, dispatch Boucher himself to the Illinois to bespeak peace. In 1729 the ice left the Mississippi on March 1st. Promptly Boucher (back now from among the Illinois and attended by Father Guignas) took canoe for Kaskaskia.

THE FOXES

The Foxes, or Meskwaki, (People of the Red Earth) stood the white man at bay. They would kill a Frenchman, it was said, because of his mere hairiness — his bearded condition. Hairiness meant outlander; and outlander, who was he but barbarian intruder!

The Foxes were against the French and against every

tribe; and the French and every tribe were against them — every tribe save the Mascoutins and the Kickapoo, and in part the Sauks. Yet in their isolation they were shrewd. They looked to their flanks. On the east they cultivated an understanding with the wild Iroquois, and on the west with the Ioways and the Sioux.

In 1736 Le Chat Blanc (great chief of the Sauks) told Father Guignas that "as for Him [self] and His people, they had Resolved to separate from that desperate nation [the Foxes]". Before 1739 the separation seems to have taken place; for in that year on October 12th the Governor General of New France, writing to Pierre Paul Sieur Marin at the Wapsipinicon (River of the Swan), spoke of the Fox chiefs as on the Ioway side of the Mississippi.

In Ioway the Foxes were in a measure safe from the French; but they were desperate. It was their decision to break up into several war parties, attack on all sides, and perish. This decision, under the counsels of Le Chat Blanc and Marin, was given over. Instead, they in part wandered back to Wisconsin. But now it was Ioway rather than Wisconsin that for the Foxes was the homeland. "The country toward the south", runs a Fox legend, "is too warm in summer. . . . The country at the north is better than that at the south. . . . But the winters are too cold. The land westward is too much prairie. . . . We have reason to be satisfied

with the place [Ioway] where we now dwell. . . . Winters are never too cold, and the summers are always pleasant. It is our wish to dwell here always".

And in Iowa they dwell to-day. "The Foxes", their chief Pemousa had said, "are immortal".

THE SAUKS

The Sauks (People of the Outlet, or People of the Yellow Earth) were less arrogant than the Foxes. More pliant, they were more amenable to authority. "The Sauk Indians", wrote Thomas Forsyth, Indian Agent in 1827 at Fort Armstrong on Rock Island, "pay great respect to their chiefs when assembled in council, but the Fox Indians are quite to the contrary, they pay no respect to their chiefs at any time, except necessity compels them".

The Sauks, after fleeing from Wisconsin in 1733 with the Foxes, were loath to return. "The soil", they said, "can no longer produce anything, being stained with French blood and with our own". In part, however, they did return, and built the village of Prairie du Sac. But in Illinois, meantime, they had founded a village on Rock River near the present Rock Island — the village Saukenuk which at the time of the Black Hawk War had become the chief settlement of their nation.

The Foxes and the Sauks were indeed "peoples of the sunset". Each day at the setting of the sun they,

with their videttes the Mascoutins (beyond whom no explorer save perhaps Radisson had ever fared), gazed into the Hereafter — the Hereafter of the red sky
And the sun falling through it.

THE IOWAYS

The Ioways were of enormous physique — fairly herculean — “deep-voiced and dark colored”. They were a close counterpart of the Yanktons, of whom Peter Pond observed: “They are faroshas [ferocious] and Rude in thare Maners Perhaps Oeing in Sum masher to thare Leadig an Obsger life in the Planes.”

The Ioways, so runs the account, “are never more delighted than when they are entertaining strangers”. They have “a very artless manner. . . . They are extremely courageous and good-hearted. . . . They are howlers; they eat meat raw, or only warm it over the fire”. To Perrot they fed morsels of buffalo tongue so bloody that he could but spit them forth.

On the Des Moines, in 1749, there befell the Ioways an experience which served to bring them to the notice both of the Governor General of New France and of the gallant, the illustrious Louis Marquis de Montcalm. “The Ioways”, wrote the French government in 1750, “were [last year] guilty of the murder of a Frenchman”. In 1755 they were thus guilty again; and in 1757 the Governor General wrote: “The commandant of La Baye [Green Bay] had occasion to see these

Ayououois [Ioways]. He spoke to them in my name with such firmness that 10 savages of the same nation came to Montreal expressly to deliver the murderers to me". "They presented them [the two murderers] to me in the name of their nation", writes the Governor General, "with great submission and resignation that I might have their heads broken if such was my intention. They nevertheless earnestly begged me to pardon them and assured me that they themselves would avenge the death of the two Frenchmen and would compensate me for their loss by the blows they would strike against the English".

The capitol [at Montreal] was filled with Indians for the campaign to be waged against the English. Indians from the West — Winnebagoes, Foxes, Sauks, Ioways. And the Ioways bore the bell.

Awaiting the fate of their two "feather-pates" the Ioways danced. They danced "western style", and Montcalm and the ladies were "enchanted". Heads shaved, bodies painted and greased, drums beating, they bent their bodies forward, leaped up with both feet at once and stamped loudly, perspiring violently, singing hi, hi, hi — so danced the Ioways.

An American exhibitor had in 1845, with the consent of the United States government and of local powers, recruited in Nebraska a party of Ioways for the East, this time a Far East — London and Paris.

Fourteen in all, the visiting Ioways, escorted by George Catlin, had at their head Chief White Cloud. In both London and Paris the Ioways met notable members of the white race — Benjamin Disraeli, Baron von Humboldt, Victor Hugo, George Sand, King Louis Philippe. Of these, *facile princeps* was Disraeli. Disraeli was not European. He did not paint his face; but he did (and that obviously) grease his coal black hair. He wore no blanket; but he had been known to flout convention in a black velvet coat lined with satin, purple trousers with a golden band down the outside seam, a scarlet waistcoat, long lace ruffles falling to the tips of the fingers, and white gloves with the fingers encircled by rings.

Amongst the first invitations to the Ioways, writes Catlin, "was one from Mr. Disraeli, M. P., for the whole party to partake of breakfast at his house, in Park Lane".

The Park Lane visit was for the Ioways a departure. Into the presence of Montcalm, a warrior, they had come with satisfaction. But Park Lane? There they must meet ladies; sit with them at meat. Most perturbing! Contrary altogether to the etiquette of the Des Moines and the Iowa. One thing appealed to them. They might don their best attire. Of a particular warrior, dressing for Park Lane, Catlin notes that he held in his hand his "little looking glass, which was always suspended from his belt". By its aid he

arranged his beautiful feathers and contemplated his patches of red and yellow paint. Was he not going to meet the ladies?

Apart from Mr. Disraeli, the London sight which intrigued the Ioways most was the markets stocked with fresh meat. They lived by the chase. They thought, says Catlin, that in London there would be little doubt of their getting enough to eat. Utterly American, the Ioways abroad grew homesick. Their criteria were those of their native land. In Hyde Park the banks of the Serpentine reminded them of the prairies on the shores of the Skunk and the Cedar rivers. Some parts, they insisted, "were almost exactly the same".

As far back as 1820 an Ioway chief (Hard Heart) startled an Indian agent by asking whether it were true that the earth moved round the sun. The sphericity of the earth, thrust upon the Ioways while abroad, was to them a thing of infinite jest. So inherently absurd did they consider the idea, so deliciously and peculiarly a crotchet of the white mind, that one of their number, "Jim", proposed for the white man's totem a globe with an elephant (elephants had intrigued Jim at the London zoo) topside down on the nether curve.