

Indian Alarm

In the spring of 1857 occurred the Spirit Lake massacre. The Indians camped near Smithland for the purpose of hunting and fishing. Occasionally a few would pass through the town. One day three or four called at a small store, with a few ears of corn gathered up in a field on the commons. A few of the whites, or rather roughs, asked them where they had obtained their corn, to which the Indians frankly replied. No more was said, but the whites went out into a thicket, cut each one a hickory, then returned, fell upon the Indians, and chased them into their camp. Most of the braves were absent on a hunt, so the whites gathered up all of their remaining guns and brought them to Smithland, having made the Indians promise that on the following day they would go down and shake hands with the hostile Omahas, which the Indians knew would be certain death.

When the hunters returned and found what had been done, they started in the night up the Little Sioux River and commenced their depredations. When I tell you that liquor was the moving cause, my readers will not need any further

explanation. If those roughs had behaved themselves, the Indians might have retired, and this sad affair would never have taken place.

As my quarterly meeting was at hand, I had to pass through Smithland and up the Maple Valley to Ida Grove on their trail. I never before witnessed such a state of excitement. The settlers had gathered into the little towns, selected the strongest house for a fort, then fortified it to the best of their ability — the males on guard without, and the women and children within.

One man, on his way to town with many others, boasted of what great feats he would accomplish in case of an attack. The party concluded to test his heroism by a little maneuver. They planned for one to pass through the brush ahead, and wait until the company came up; then the war whoop was to be sounded. The plan was executed, and the yelp given at the proper time, when lo! the boaster dropped his coat, which he had been carrying on his arm, his hat flew off, and such speed as he made the famed Dexter hardly could have excelled. He never looked back to count the slain, but concluded that for him the only safety was in flight. When the party reached town, they handed him his lost apparel and congratulated him on his safe arrival. And thus ended his Indian campaign.

On my return from Denison, riding on horseback, I made a very narrow escape. The road was along a willow creek, which before me I could see some distance. As I rode along, thinking of something else, suddenly directly ahead of me, about thirty rods, in a little opening of the willows, I saw an Indian sure enough. The main road would take me within eight rods of the place of concealment. "What should I do?" My thoughts ran fast. Fortunately for me, before I reached the lurking enemy, the road made an inward curve behind a little bluff out of their sight, and at the center of the curve a ravine ran up to the left, which would take me behind the hill to the main road at a distance of about a mile. You may rest assured that I improved my advantage. Within a few minutes I was out of the reach of danger, and thanked God for the rescue. This narrow escape I did not at the time reveal to my own friends, lest it might increase the excitement, or be attributed to a freak of the imagination arising from the alarming state of things.

Right here I wish to present a few thoughts in relation to Indian character. And inasmuch as I am neither a hater, nor an admirer, what I write may be regarded as the honest convictions of my heart. I have no apologies to make for

their code of justice, killing the innocent instead of the guilty; I have but little confidence in their honesty or innocence where occasions offer to test them; and their cruelty to prisoners is inexcusable. Yea, I believe them to be treacherous in every sense of the word, except in solitary instances; and yet I am fully satisfied that their association with the whites, copying their vices, purchasing their liquor, and swindled by their deception, has had much to do in giving a still darker shade to their degradation. As they hold sacred the law of revenge, is it a great wonder, after being so often deceived and imposed upon through government officials, that they are brought to despise government, and take matters into their own hands! They are a down-trodden and degraded race, of but little value in the world's history, and our business as a Christian nation is not to make them worse, but to do all within our power to lift them up to a higher plane; and this can be done only in the exercise of justice, mercy, and truth.

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