

## Day When Cruel Sioux Harassed the Pioneer

By BYRON BEALL.

### Episodes that Marked the Daily Life of Settlers Along the Platte in the Middle Sixties--Personal Recollections of One of Them Recounted for Readers of The Bee

**T**ODAY is Pioneers' Memorial Day, by act of legislature, as follows: "An act to establish a day to be known as Pioneers' Memorial Day for suitable recognition to the departed pioneers of the state of Nebraska."

"Be it Enacted by the People of the State of Nebraska:

"Section 1. That the second Sunday in June in each year shall be known as Pioneers' Memorial Day and the same shall be set apart for holding suitable exercises in the schools and churches of the state, and when possible in the cemeteries and over the graves of departed pioneers in recognition of the men and women who served and sacrificed as pioneers in the settlement of this great state, and that the present inhabitants and future generations may not forget the spirit and the achievements of the men and women who settled these plains and prairies and established the institutions which we now enjoy.

"Approved April 19, 1913.

"Laws of Nebraska, 1913, p. 523, chap. 171."

I have wondered if I might not assist in this good work as a pioneer, by giving a chapter of experiences with the Indians, of say about fifty years ago.

At that time, 1860, we lived at the mouth of Wood river in Hall county.

#### The Deadly Arrow.

A pathetic incident happened. About twenty-five miles southwest of us the Sioux attacked George Martin's ranch, shot two little boys of Martin's, Nat and Robert, who were riding a big fine stallion, trying to get away from the Indians, pinning them together, they fell off the horse and were passed by. They both recovered. Then came the terrible massacre at Plum Creek of an emigrant train; then the big stampede of the settlers beginning at Boyd's ranch. About this time, an old man whose name was Storey, a blacksmith who lived near James Boyd on Wood river, was killed while over north, away hunting juffalo. The man had a little time before bought a load of hay of my father. Soon a band of Indians came into Boyd's ranch from the north, about eight, and were taken in charge by a little squad of soldiers stationed there, who at once set out for Fort Kearney with them. They camped on an island of the Platte and next day returned and reported that the Indians escaped, but afterward admitted that they killed them. This was base treachery, the Indians were often wronged.

In the year of 1863, three of us were over to the Loup river hunting and trapping, when at night a war party of Sioux, with a bunch of stolen horses, passed by close to our camp and traps set for wolves. We trailed them for a time and then, being particular about the kind of people we associated with, packed up and went home, twenty-five miles away. We found the whole country in an uproar. We were supposed to be killed. The Pawnees, who had lost the horses, were out in great force after the Sioux.

#### Murder of Captain Smith.

The event of which I now write, happened fifty-two years ago, the fifth of last February, in the year of 1862. Up to this time we had lived in our settlement in peace with the Indians, but upon the above date occurred an incident that threw our little settlement into a fever of excitement and clothed two families in mourning. On that day Captain Joseph P. Smith with his two sons, Charles and Willie, aged 9 and 11, with a four-horse sled, and Alexander Anderson, a neighbor's boy, 14 years old, with a two-horse sled went to the Platte river four miles from Wood River, their home, and were all murdered by the Sioux, a small party who were out on a horse stealing expedition. They had been gone about two hours from home when Mr. Anderson, the father of the murdered boy, went down to the woods for a load of wood where, on a channel of the Platte about twenty feet wide, he found Mr. Smith with a boy on each side of him down on the ice, shot to death with arrows. Little Willie was not quite dead—he at once wheeled his team about and with the agony in his heart of a father who knows that a dear boy has been cruelly murdered, whom he sent away that morning with a father's kiss and blessing. He drove home and gave the alarm. Swift riders went up and down the road and soon a little party went to the woods to find the Anderson boy. He had run for 100 yards up the channel of the Platte before being killed. The party put the four bodies on the sleds and returned home, then pushed on after the Indians. But they were poorly armed and but a few of them, and a light snow began to fall, covering the Indian trail, so they turned back.

I saw the bodies of Mr. Smith and the three boys after they were prepared for burial. The sheet with which they were covered was drawn down to their waists disclosing their naked forms which were pierced time and again with arrows and spears. I shall never forget that sight. I certainly desire not to see such another. Sadly we lowered the four coffins into one grave under an elm tree on the bank of Wood river. It was such sights as this that so greatly embittered the white people of that time against the Indians.

#### Very Strange Dream.

I wish to relate two dreams, and will some of the wise men of the great universities about Lincoln give their interpretation. On the night preceding the death of these four persons, Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, parents of the 14-year-old boy who was killed, each dreamed that they saw four coffins. She related her dream after getting up, upon which her husband who had dreamed the same thing remembered his own. But believing his wife

to be superstitious, and thinking it would trouble her, said nothing of it. In two days they saw four coffins, and in one of them was the sweet upturned face of the boy who was killed upon the staff of their declining years. The light had gone out of their household and in its stead had come a great sorrow that cast its shadow across their hearthstone filling their hearts and home with chill and gloom and darkness.

#### Regulars Made Indians Laugh.

Meantime John Talbot of Dobytown, a little village two miles west of Fort Kearney, with a small company of settlers captured fourteen Sioux a little way east of the fort, and thinking them to be the murderers of Smith, took them to the fort and gave them up to the military. The commander turned two of the Indians loose, with instructions to go to the Indian camp and say that unless the murderers of Smith were promptly delivered up to him with the stolen horses, he would hang every mother's son of the twelve remaining Sioux. The Indians went away and soon returned with a message that unless the twelve prisoners were set free at once that there would be some dead white men ere long in that section. And now in the face of his threat and the fact that he had the twelve cutthroats in his power, and the regulars back of him, with iron nerve he promptly set them all free. Of course the noble red man could enjoy a joke like this, and the guffaw they sent up when their companions returned doubtless made the woods and fields ring.

#### An Old Time Plainsman.

Upon the death of Captain Smith, Fred Evans mounted one of his swiftest horses, and he was noted for having the fastest horses and for being the hardest rider in central Nebraska, and strapping on his six shooters, rode with hot haste to Fort Kearney to inform the commander of the post so that he might get his soldiers at once upon the trail. But that worthy did not purpose to risk his precious carcass upon any such effort and coolly informed Evans so, which had the effect to cause the plainsman to boil over with wrath, and to denounce the captain as a coward, which truthful effort nearly got him in the guard house. But Evans' work was not wholly lost, as a company of soldiers was sent out, which went a little way up Wood river but soon returned.

Up to this date the wily Sioux had eluded both the soldiers and the settlers, committed a number of robberies and murders and got away with hardly the loss of their usual sleep. But now a new enemy appears, as cruel, as cunning, and as rapid riders as themselves, the Pawnees. I think it was some time in March that a company of Pawnees, out for horses and scalps among the Sioux, overtook a band of them on Wood river and in one of the terrible blizzards of that time attacked their

camp and killed all of them but one. They returned in triumph bringing the yet bloody scalps with them and stopping at the widow Smith's told her they had avenged the death of her boys and husband by taking the scalps of their slayers which they showed. This to them would have been solid comfort; but it did not suit her and Naomi-like, her widow heart turned to the home of her youth and it was not long until she and her remaining children with her neighbor, Anderson, returned to Indians.

#### When Certificates No Good.

While in a general way there was peace between the Indians and whites at this time, you could never be quite sure what an Indian would do if you met him alone. I was encamped with three teams on the banks of the Platte, miles from any house in May, 1861. There were five of us, two young women on their way west, and two men who were hauling my father's goods to Wood River. All of a sudden we were surrounded by a war party of Cheyenne Indians, numbering, I judge, about 100; they had just come from a fight with the Pawnees where they had been roughly handled and were not as a result, full of that spirit of brotherly love that ought to mark a Christian; this I soon saw and when they pulled out papers which nearly all Indians carried stating that they were "good Indians, etc.," and to give them flour and meat and sundry other things, my plan was to give them anything they called for, that nothing we had was too rich for them, and so we contributed to their wants with a generosity that was by no means heartfelt. They had one new scalp and said they

had taken six; they soon departed when I found that while we were reading their certificates of good character, they had stolen a fine pair of my blankets from the wagon. This teaches us, I think, that we ought oft times to watch as well as pray, and that testimonials of good character are not certain evidence of its possession.

#### Pioneers Stampede.

Just about this time the Indians surprised at Plum Creek, an emigrant train, and massacred nearly all of them; a big stampede of settlers followed as one of the results. My wife, who has lived in Nebraska fifty-six years and lived then at Beatrice, said that the runaway extended to her people and home. Many running away up on the Wood river where I lived. We were at supper, I think, when a man rushed in from the road and yelled, "The Indians are coming, get out of here." We went to the door and the road was full of teams, and a string of them coming, all of the settlers west of us for miles. There was no time to investigate; if we stayed we would be alone, so hastily gathering up a few things we hitched up a team and joined the crowd. One writer says of this exodus: "The residents along the Platte from the mountains to Omaha were panic stricken, and even Omaha trembled at the reports of the thousands of Indians on their way down the Platte."

We went that night to the German settlement eight miles east and camped. The Germans remained and William Stolley built a fort 24x24 out of logs and others put up a sod fort about ten feet high around Koenig & Wiebe's store, but on we went to Columbus; there we halted. One writer

says of us: "Heavy loaded wagons of goods, droves of cattle and horses, people on foot, and people on horseback crowded down the valley in one solid mass of confusion and hurry." A fairly correct picture. But from Columbus, Fred Evans, always among the coolest heads, organized a small party and mounting swift horses and heavily armed went back to find out the true situation. The danger was not so great as feared, and before long most of us returned, although many never returned.

Right here I wish to call the attention of good old Dr. Bixby of the State Journal, to my attitude toward war in that early day. By the way I wish to ask, in passing, why the dear man is so fierce and warlike toward the preachers, and so loving toward the Mexicans? He loves excitement too well. His late poem, chaste, tender, full of pathos, I think shows this. It is entitled, "Give Me a Thrill, Mister, Give Me a Thrill." With great beauty, he says:

"I have grown weary in body and mind. Tired of this daily monotonous grind. Smooth flows life's current from summer to fall. Winter and spring no excitement at all. What is a story of excitement or flood. When in my heart I am thirsting for blood? O, the sweet yearning to cripple and kill— Give me a thrill, mister, give me a thrill."

Had the dear man been with me fifty-two years ago, riding a bucking broncho down the Platte valley, breaking all speed limits at every jump, he would not have needed to hawl, "Give me a thrill, mister." He would have had it all right.

I warn that dear brother that a day of judgment is coming for him because of his persecution of Nebraska preachers. But my attitude toward war, I admit freely that I ran away, and that if anyone got away faster than I, he must have been going some. But, there was a reason. I was then too young and giddy. I beg also, to call the attention of that sainted man to the fact that I am not in the Mexican war very deep; again, here is a reason. I am now too old and fat.

#### A Decoy to the Death.

I have written of these early experiences with the Indians as they were common in most settlements, and show some of our trials. But kindly read my last little story. I had a somewhat active part in it. I wish to note an incident occurring on the fourteenth of June, 1869, or just forty-five years ago today. On the night preceding, a party of Sioux waded across the Platte at the foot of Grand Island, ten miles east of the city, and stole two horses, one of them a valuable stallion. They stood the horses in plain sight on the southern bank, about one mile away. John L. Martin, their owner, sent two young men, William Shoulders, who had worked for me, and John Sanford after them, supposing the horses had simply strayed, while he watched them from the north bank. When they got within twenty feet of the southern bank where the water was about up to their breasts, and running so swiftly that they could do little more than keep on their feet, the Indians arose and fired, then rode into the water and scalped the boys permitting them to float away. A simple decoy to the death. My claim was within less than two miles and within an hour about 100 of us were on the bank. It was resolved to form a party to go over to see if we could find the boys. But the Indians might be waiting for just this. It was simply alarming to find that so many of the crowd could not swim, others were in such delicate health. John Myers, who now lives in Custer county, gave it out cold that he had not lost any Indians and did not propose to hunt for any. At least four of us volunteered to go, Ben Hurley, two others and myself. We approached the south bank with great caution. Each one of us was a good shot and carried a six-shooter in his hand, presented and cocked with his finger on the trigger. We ascended the bank and just on the other side, within thirty feet was a campfire, the ashes yet hot and by its side the scalp of William Shoulders which must have been dropped. We called out their names and went down the river a little way but no voice returned an answer, they were still forever. We returned and the scalp was handed to Martin, who turned pale and gasped for breath.

#### A Fond Good Bye.

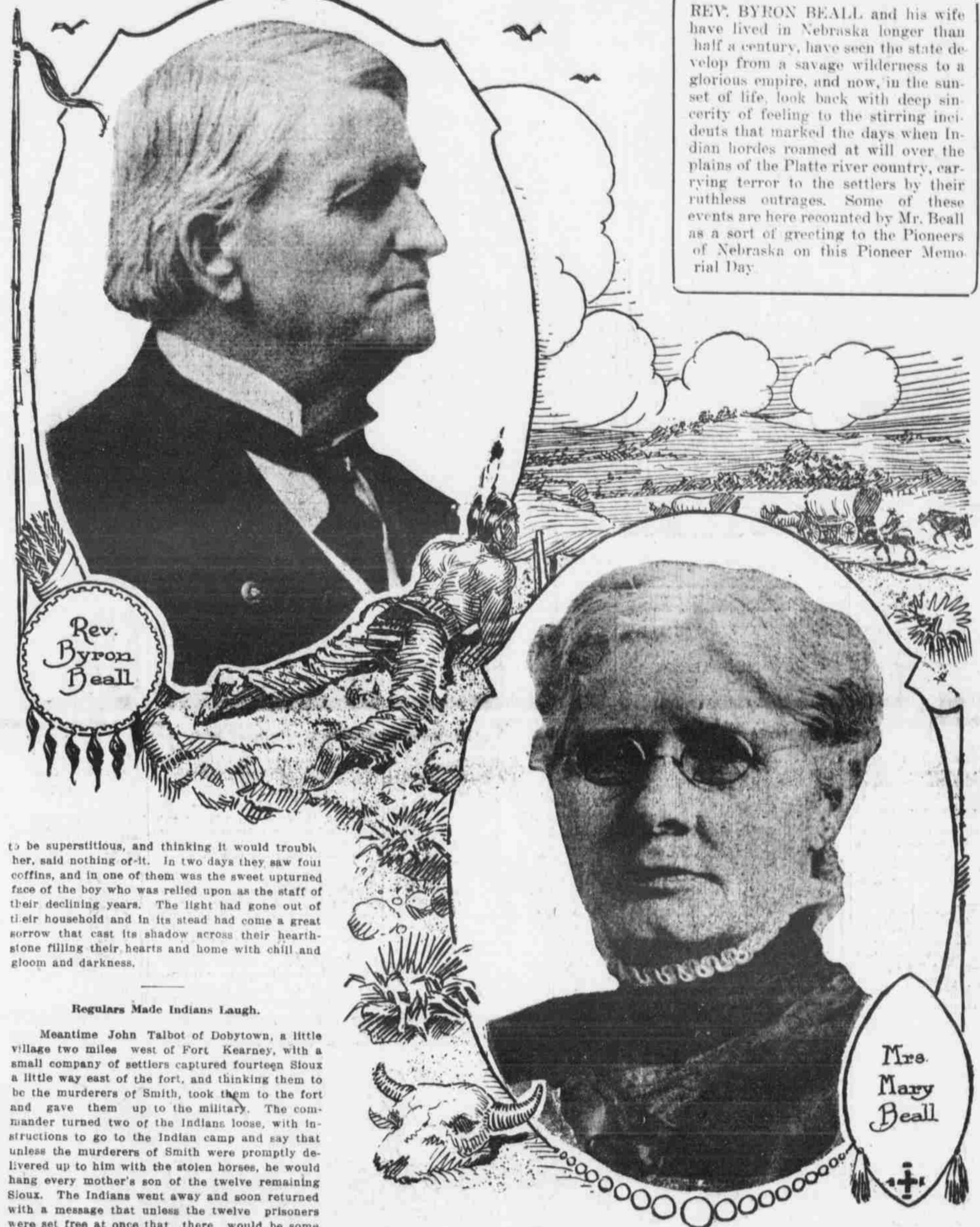
Pioneers of Nebraska adieu! "We shall, it is not likely, ever all meet again, even in this informal way over a newspaper. Some of us, it may be, by the next Memorial and Pioneer's day, will have passed over to the other side. It is likely that some are getting old. Remember we were before the G. A. R. men. Indeed if it had not been for us, there had not been any state to fight for. My last word is, keep your hearts young, let the man of Calvary live in them. Look at yourself, and then your good wife and children, and then say with the poet:

"I am not old—I cannot be old. Though tottering, wrinkled, and gray; Though my eyes are dim, and my marrow is cold, Call me not old today. For early memories round me throng— Old times, and manners, and men— As I look behind on my journey so long Of three score miles and ten.

I look behind, and am once more young, Buoyant, and brave, and bold, And my heart can sing, as of yore it sung, Before they called me old. I do not see her—the old wife there— Shrivelled, and haggard, and gray. But I look on her blooming, and soft, and fair As she was on her wedding day.

I do not see you, daughters and sons, In the likeness of women and men, But I kiss you now as I kissed you once, My fond little children then. And as my own grandson rides on my knee, Or plays with his hoop or kite, I can well recollect I was merry as he— The bright-eyed little wight."

But beloved Pioneers, with tears in my eyes and a choking sensation in my throat, again I say Adieu! My heart goes into this little verse: "God be with you till we meet again, Keep love's banner floating o'er you, Smite death's threatening wave before you, God be with you till we meet again."



REV. BYRON BEALL and his wife have lived in Nebraska longer than half a century, have seen the state develop from a savage wilderness to a glorious empire, and now, in the sunset of life, look back with deep sincerity of feeling to the stirring incidents that marked the days when Indian hordes roamed at will over the plains of the Platte river country, carrying terror to the settlers by their ruthless outrages. Some of these events are here recounted by Mr. Beall as a sort of greeting to the Pioneers of Nebraska on this Pioneer Memorial Day.