

Reminiscences of a Wayfarer

Some of the Important Events of the Pioneer Days of Richardson County and Southeast Nebraska, as remembered by the writer, who has spent fifty-one years here.

Nebraska Indians Fifty Years Ago.

When I saw Nebraska first, it was practically an Indian country. True, the Indian title had been extinguished sometime before the erection of territorial governments, in the two territories, but the Indians were all here, none had been removed. The policy of the government for many years, and more especially with reference to the natives beyond the Mississippi, had been to locate the various tribes on small reservations of land, and devote the surrounding country to settlement by white men. This, of course, destroyed the hunting lands of the red man, and opened the way for civilization and all that follows in its march through the world. The effect can easily be seen. In his original hunter capacity, it is estimated to require fifty thousand acres of the wild domain for each hunter to support himself and such family as those people ordinarily had, generally not exceeding five, as an average. This was not conducive to a numerous population, as all such are limited, under any circumstances, to the food supply; and when that indispensable necessity was only obtainable from wild game in the woods, or on the prairies, by the efforts of the hunter, the community that he could support in that way, was of necessity small indeed. On the basis of the estimate mentioned, Richardson county, would not support more than twenty-five Indians; whereas, under the civilized rule, it now gives support to as many thousands, and is capable of supporting double that number.

If numbers add to the enjoyment of humanity, and the happiness of the race, the new order is preferable to the older one, but not otherwise. In those older countries where the consumers increase faster than do the means to feed them. Nature, which never forgives an offense against its laws, or remits a penalty, evens up the score with a famine. This may happen in any country, and will occur whenever, and wherever those conditions exist—and something very like it may be found in some of the over-crowded cities in our own land of plenty and waste. It is a fact beyond dispute, that approximately, ten thousand people die of starvation every year in the great city of New York. The island on which that modern Babylon stands, three hundred years ago, was inhabited by a small band of Indians, who supported themselves on game from the forests and fish from the sea, and to whom starvation was never known. When some philosopher shall arise with a system that will explain all the conditions of life as they have been, and now are, on a sufficiently sensible hypothesis to make it plain to the ordinary understanding, that it is better for the whole, that a community small in number, but as happy and contented as the animal man can be in the condition in which nature put him on the earth, should be destroyed to give place to a different order of the same species, vast in numbers but unequal in rights and the means necessary to physical life and individual comfort, in consequence of which a large percentage die every year from actual starvation, and a larger percentage are subjected to a life of misery, too abject, poignant and terrible to be described in any language, the world will receive something for which it has been waiting since Adam exchanged the delights of the garden for the hell he found on the outside.

But as I am not attempting a thesis on sociology, I will say no more on the subject. The Indians sold all their possessory rights for money, and the small reservations mentioned, upon which they resided, but which, except in a very limited degree they never cultivated. Their support came almost entirely from the government, in the shape of annuities, paid usually twice a year from the interest accruing on the money agreed to be paid for their land, and which was received in the treasury of the United States. On the western frontier, the tribes were not entirely deprived of hunting grounds; and until the Buffalo herds were wiped out by advancing civilization, which occurred about the end of the decade of 1870, the Indians along and near the Missouri made annual buffalo hunts on the plains to the west, and usually returned with enough of the meat of that animal to last them through the winter. It was prepared by drying in the sun for preservation, and would keep all winter without salt or other curing agency.

Boundaries, as well as courses and distances were all established and reckoned, by the various Indian reservations, here and there along the Missouri river and in the interior, but in every case on some affluent of

the mighty drain for the water shed, afforded by the Rocky Mountains to the west.

Commencing with the Wyandottes on the east, and the Delawares further up the river, the trust lands of which were located south and east of the Iowa reservation, which was situated partly on the right bank of the Missouri and on the right bank of the Great Nemaha, above its confluence with the greater stream just below the present town of Rulo, there was west of that reservation that of the Sac and Fox of Missouri Indian, extending further west along the Nemaha, and its south fork to Honey Creek, and south into Kansas about two and one-half miles. That reservation was cut down from time to time till its west boundary was Walnut Creek, and later on another slice was taken off and the remainder was allotted in severalty to the surviving members of the tribe, and the old reservation, established in 1842, became one of the things that had been, along with the tribe that once inhabited it.

To the west on Big Blue was located the reservation of the Otoes. It has long since passed into the hands of the white man, as nearly all the others have, and the foothold of the Indian has become lost in the country. In the early days the Otoe reservation was the only point of interest between the Missouri and the mountains; beyond was the spreading plains, the buffalo herds, silence and vacancy.

The Pawnees were a roving, thieving set of redskins, and were found mostly in the valley of the Platte and its several tributaries, and during the California emigration and for years after, were the scourge of the trail (that was the plainsmen's designation for the road those gold seekers in the fifties followed, to the new Eldorado by the Pacific), stealing everything they could get their hands on and could carry, or drive away; and in many instances were guilty of cowardly murders.

The Cheyennes further west and among the Black Hills—really a part of the Rocky chain—were not much better, but they did less mischief than the Pawnees. North of the range of that tribe, and scattered on both sides of the Missouri, all over Dakota and Minnesota, were the numerous bands of the confederate tribe of the Sioux—sometimes known as the Mandans, and celebrated by Longfellow

as the Dakotas, in his great poem of Hiawatha.

The North American tribes, though segregated into many apparently different peoples, are in fact a single race, different from all other types of the human family, in habitat, mental endowment, and physical characteristics. Nowhere in the world except on this continent is there a people who bear any striking family resemblance to them; nor is there a single fact in connection with them that indicates descent from any other known race of men. There is some evidence that another race once inhabited the southern half or at least a portion of the continent comprised within the middle western states of this republic, called by archaeologists, "The Mound Builders." But who knows anything about them, except they did what the known Indian tribes never did—built strange mounds in different parts of the country that still remain, after all other traces of the builders have become lost in the darkness of vanished time? No tradition exists among the Indians as to when or by whom those mounds were constructed, making it certain that no ancestors of theirs were the architects. Whence, and by what means did this singular people get here, and why is it, that they are as completely ignorant of the history of the "mound building" race that preceded them, as we are? These are questions for which there can be no answer, though we cannot forego the useless formality of asking them.

I have been betrayed into these speculations, first, because whatever is mysterious, uncertain or unknown, is sure to claim attention; and second, because the fact that human beings of some type have been found on every spot of dry ground where life was possible, all over the earth—separated by unsailed seas before the days of Columbus, making intercommunication among them an utter impossibility, and therefore their several origins an insoluble secret of God and nature, has been an un-failing source of speculative thought to me, whenever by any chance it is suggested, and the presence of the Indian on this continent when it was discovered, without any known means for him to have gotten here from any other habitable part of the earth, is excuse enough for what I have here said on the subject. All of which tends to show, that we know about as much, or as little, about the origin of man as we do about his ultimate destiny, and whole volumes could say no more.

But I must get back to the Nebraska Indians. The tribes north of us were scattered along the Missouri far up in Dakota, and thence into the British possessions. Those that con-

cern the matter in hand were the Omahas in the Black Bird Hills, adjoining which were the Winnebagos, and further up the river, but still in Nebraska, were the Poncas (pronounced Pankaws); and besides the various bands of Sioux located partly in Nebraska, and partly in Dakota and extending to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, there were occasional wandering tribes, with no fixed residence, that were constantly foraging on whites and Indians indiscriminately, from Texas to as far north as the buffalo were to be found, stealing and plundering, wherever stealing and plundering could be safely done. Among these were the Comanches, the Navajoes, kinfolks of the Apaches, and other red devils of that ilk, from Old and New Mexico.

There was now and then some trouble with our home tribes, incipient wars and scares, mixed with stealing and scalping, but on the whole the Indians were of more advantage to the early settlers than otherwise, for their yearly annuities were spent among our people, and as nearly always happens when the Indian deals with the white man, the red son of the wilderness got the worst of it. But that aside, it is a fact that the people of Falls City and Rulo, for the first two or three years that I was a resident of the country, depended largely on the Indian trade to get along at all. The Iowas patronized Rulo, while the Sacs did the same for Falls City. Those tribes had large sums in the federal treasury upon which the government paid five per cent per annum in semi-annual installments, which went to obtain the actual necessities of life, and—whiskey, which, though not a necessity, was nevertheless in great demand. The Sacs had about \$200,000 at Washington, and their trade was good for at least ten thousand dollars a year, which was exceedingly fortunate for the white people in this vicinity, as some of it lodged in the pockets of nearly everybody.

I never saw a genuine live blanket Indian until I came to Nebraska, though I had heard and read a good deal about them; and in a general way, had formed a pretty accurate opinion of the race, as contradistinguished from other kinds of people. As related in another paper of this series, the Indian village south of the Nemaha, was the first place of interest I visited after my arrival in Falls City, and the head chief of the Sac tribe, Ne-sau-quit, was the first specimen of aboriginal manhood to come under my observation. I met him in his castle (I suppose an Indian's wigwag-up is as much his castle as the house of the white man is his), surrounded by his court, as any other ruler of the kingly breed might be, but I observed that most of the numbers of his suite were females

—called squaws in the polite language of the tribe—of a very dirty and greasy appearance. They were dressed in calico shirt waists; that is, their garments might be called such now—so far as visible, and the balance of their bodies, in each case, was enveloped in a red blanket drawn close about them. There was a fire in the middle of the wigwag, over which, and suspended by some kind of crane, was a large pot in which the dinner for the grandees of the court was cooking. I saw enough of the boiling mass to learn that it consisted of a sort of hotch-potch, of beans, fresh meat of some kind (it might have been dog, as the Indians then regarded the flesh of that animal as of rare excellence), and some other stuff, possibly a hunk of bacon, producing a rather savory smell, not at all disagreeable to a hungry man, especially if he didn't know who was cooking, or what was being cooked.

It was early in the forenoon and therefore, our party not being particularly anxious for something to eat, did not wait to be asked to dine with the chief ruler of the dusky nation, but put in the time we had to spare in looking about the village, which was located on a ridge of land south of the falls and probably about a quarter of a mile in length.

The wigwags, and the people were much like those in the castle of the chief, dirty, greasy and repulsive, but with all that, there was not a single sick Indian in the village, which probably accounted for the absence of a drug store, though they had a medicine man among them, a kind of court physician, but I don't think they knew him by that title.

I am not conscious of any impression made on me by that first sight of the native race, except disgust, and I received that in full measure. If I thought of those people as a slowly fading race, it was probably because I thought they ought to fade, and to lose no time in doing it, for of all the lazy, useless, worthless human beings I had ever seen or heard of, those were by long odds, the worst. They have left no land marks of any kind on the continent—I am speaking of Indians generally—that evidence the fact that any such inhabitants were ever here; and except for the human bones sometimes found in the soil, the record of their existence here is a complete blank. They will have a place in history nevertheless, for they were touched by that great robber race of the world, the Anglo-Saxon, and that touch was annihilation.

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