

HISTORY AND REMINISCENCE

JAY AMOS BARRETT

SCHUYLER, Neb., April 19, 1895.—Jay Amos Barrett. Dear Sir: I will commence by giving my experience of the Indian as I found him. When I came to this state, or this territory, as it was then, the Omahas then, as now, occupied their reserve at Blackbird hill, in northeast part of the territory. I did not get as much acquainted with them as I did with the Pawnees. These I saw every day,—had them year after year harvesting corn. They camped near my house half the time in warm weather. I became somewhat acquainted with their language, so as to hold a talk with them. Well did Cowper say, to the poor Indian! I think that they were the worst abused people I ever heard of. They are called cruel, they scalp their prisoners, and so on. Is that any worse than the Turks have lately treated the Armenians without the least provocation? Where is the nation that has suffered the abuse that they have without retaliation? After I had befriended a Pawnee Indian, I would sooner trust him than one-half the whites. I speak from experience. When I came here the Pawnees were settled south of the Platte river, near Fremont. About 1858 or 1859, they were moved west to what was then a small Mormon settlement 103 miles west of Omaha. I will give you one case of many I know, to show the friendly feeling of some, at least, of that tribe.

A young man by the name of Bowen was crossing the Platte on the ice in March. The ice was mostly out. He broke through and the whites on the bank did not dare to help him. He was given up as lost. A young Pawnee squaw heard him crying out and as soon as she got to the bank she stripped to the skin and swam out to him, saving his life. This is known to be a fact. She carried a rope in her mouth. Where is the white girl that would dare to do the like? On the other hand this same tribe skinned a white boy in this neighborhood, to retaliate for his shooting an Indian girl just for his amusement. This was in the year 1849, thirteen miles east of Fremont.

I will now describe the Indian agent of whom it was said that if an Indian agent could not get rich in one year he had no business to be an Indian agent. I think no one not acquainted with their way of doing business could believe the fraud practiced upon the Indians. Situated as I was, I had an ocular demonstration every day for many weeks after they had received their payments. Is it reasonable to suppose that the government supplied dry goods such as superfine broadcloth pantaloons, made in the height of fashion, fit for any dude, and other goods of the same style? These are facts. Also carpenter's tools of the fancy kinds, made for the most fancy work. No one can think that the government had any idea that such things were sent to the Indians, who were compelled to take them at the agent's price. In the agreement with the Pawnees, they were to have so many. They received them, but such guns! They were only another evidence of fraud. Made in Pittsburg, flint locks, cast iron barrels, a most complete sham. Every squatter's house had them in every corner. A squash or pumpkin would buy one at any time. It is said that the Indians will always steal. So would a white man to keep from starving. When an Indian is without food he will sell anything. So will most white men. * * * * * As long as I lived among them, I can say that, dis-

gusting as the Indian is, no class helped the early settler more. Myself and two or three early settlers had a sharp fight with the Sioux in 1863. That was the only time that I was ever disturbed.

(To be Continued).

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