

1851
May

5th

Continuation of the Report on going to the Prairies

Early in the morning, we began to have our provision, & other articles for camping in readiness, until the liberal hearted trader Mr. Sarpy should arrive with the mule team, to which he alone would tend, & about 7 o'clock he drove up a wild team of mules, Mr. Allis a horseback, & so the a Pawnee chief, & attendant. We tempestuous provision, blankets tent, gun, & our saddle into the wagon, & rolled out on the Prairie, in the mean ^{time} each of us tried to make as comfortable seat for him self as the mentioned means would afford. We followed a California road on the north of Platte river, & before we were 2 miles out we met a train of wagons bound for the Gold land coming right towards us. We were at a loss to comprehend this, but our company informed us of the cause. The different individuals interested in the ferries both on Missouri & Elk Horn rivers, would try & get the emigrants to the ferries they had an interest in, without being to scrupulous about these adventures taken the nearest course.

The Omaha Indians were not less annoyance. In great numbers they charge upon them, on their fleet horses to frighten ^{them} & in this way extort presents of them.

We evidently did neither take a very direct road, we thought we would follow the Platte, but instead of it we followed the Missouri river, for about 20 miles, to the old Council Bluffs. Now & then would we get a glimpse of

of the timber on or in the Platte river, which was the only woods except those on the banks of the Missouri river we could see.
From this point (old Council Bluffs) we took a more western direction & about sunset we arrived at the head of a creek called Papillion, where was a little timber, & where we made halt for the night, the first stop we made since we left Bellevue over about 30 miles distance. All hands were soon engaged to look for grass for our animals, which was very short & in the greatest part burned off smooth to the ground & to get sometny wood for fire, & to erect the tent.

The chief too, was unusual smart for Indian character, which ~~decorated~~ made him more welcome at our supper.

Mr. Sarpy, who has been with these, & other Indians in these parts, for twenty years, told us that the Pawnee men were unlike other Indian men, as they were not ashamed to lay hold of a plough or any other farming utensil, & only the instruction was wanting to make them industrious.

6th
After a disturbed night's rest, — for most all night did wagons arrive to stop here, & therefore a continual hawing & gieing & haying — we rose at day brake, & at sunrise, we had breakfasted. cups plates & pans washed, & with light hearts ascended the Prairie again. From this creek to the Elk Horn river, about 9 miles is beautiful Prairie, but along the latter stream is ~~too~~ a strip of timber but so poor that it is hardly fit for any thing but fuel. Two "halfbreeds" keep a ferry here, & without delay ~~they~~ put us across. From this place to the Platte, where we intended to cross it, a distance of about 10 miles, is quite low Prairie not

3) not more than about 6 feet above the level of the Platte,
& quite level. After we came within two miles of the river
we left the road we had come so far, to our right
& shortly crossed another road, both meeting a little above
this point. & at noon we were on the river bank, & soon were
surrounded by a host of Indians, & thronging to shake hands.
but we thought the articles on our wagon took their attention
more than our selves. Many women were here with hoes
digging for artichokes, who eyed us from a distance
only. Some of these had besides a piece of buffalo ^{skin}, a short,
dirty, ragged gown on, & on the whole had not much differ-
ent appearance from the black soil they dug up.
We were now much concerned how to cross, singular, great
river, at least one mile wide, & although mostly only covering
its bed, had, on the whole, scarcely any bottom, on the account
of the quick sand, which is very soft, & uneven, so that one
never has a sure foothold. How our luggage, wagon
~~we~~ we could cross it was of not little moment, & the same
time a load above us was shedding its contents on us.
We resolved at last to get the Indians to carry the things
over, & draw the wagon by hand through. But the chief
with us, was miffed, because we thought it best to go to
the head cheif's lodge, & would therefore, with the men never
not stir. We had to send a messenger to the head cheif,
& some of his "young men", who was too very prompt in
complying, for soon we saw quite a lively army, mostly
naked, wading through the river, ~~with~~ holding their buffalo
skins, & few of them blankets above their heads. On their arrival
not only shaking of hands commenced again, but imbr-
^{as} aying

4) bracing each other too. Soon had they rolled our things into the skins, mules were soosened, which were to carry us over & the wagon was drawn by hand. 16 men were engaged in this way. It was a hard ride on the bare back of a mule, with the feet mostly as high up to the animals neck as possible for 30 minutes, which time it took us to cross it.

Amidst a heavy shower of rain, we arrived in the "Louri" Tawne's village, which is quite close to the river, but on the second rise, or bank which has an almost perpendicular height of about 80 feet. Here are their mud hovels about 80 in number, as close together, as only to leave room for to pen their horses up between at nights; all in the greatest irregularity, that it is almost impossible to find again after coming out the same lodge, without inquiring.

But their lodges are much larger as one might imagine them to be, by hearing them called mud hovels, for those 80 houses contain about 2000 inhabitants. Many of them were 50 feet in diameter, much in the shape of an old fashioned bee hive made of straw. in the centre of the top is an aperture of about 3 feet diameter, for the double purpose, of shedding light & smoke conductor, right below it is the common fire for the different families occupying it, but have their respective sleeping apartments allotted to them, by a division made of the cratchies, which support the polls & branches, on which the prairie sod is filled. These ~~scratches~~ are about 6 feet apart, & so standing as to bring them about 4 feet from the wall inwards, an apartment ~~for~~ ^{is} therefore 6 by 4 feet larger.

Meany.

Many have the fronts of them shut, with willows plaited. The one opposite the entry (the entry is always on the east side, & is about 15 feet long, before one enters the lodge) is the medicine lodge, or apartment, in which hang or lay their articles of devotion, such as bows & arrows, spears, skins, scalps &c. We, as "medicine men," were directed with our luggage to the latter, which we did without being annoyed, by its holliness, but deeply aggrieved that they should feel any reverence for the old trash, which their hands had made & the buffalo skulls, which they themselves had devested of its power.

Whilst we were unloading & taken off the wagon what might hardly be loosened, so that to bring it in our apartment that we might not be short of it when we wished it again for us — a Government officer arrived with interpreter, for the purpose of inviting the Pawnees to the contemplated council at Ft Laramie.

Soon the lodge was filled of chiefs, counsellors & warriors, & the women receded. We wished for the Government officer to deliver his message to them first which he did, & made them great promises, if they should come to Ft Laramie, in order to induce them, which was very gratifying to them, & every desired object was promised, but have not kept them, as we have since learned. We were then introduced as the men of ~~the~~ ^{which} they were informed would come to see whether they wish to have a mission among them for to teach them & their children the words of the great spirit, upon which a general shaking of hands commenced again.

Our object was then made known unto them, to which they replied in the most enthusiastic manner as being in accordance with their wishes. The head chief replied in substance: I was poor & forgotten. Now I feel as if I had just awaked. I see now something better before me. I think we will not be so poor much longer. I am glad that our great father remembers us again. I am glad that good men wish to live with us, to teach us good words. When you now return to tell your friends that we wish you, you must not stay long, but come soon again. You must build your house close to our village, there is timber & water plenty here for you. So one after another spoke, with but little variation the same, each before & after speaking shaking hands with us. By their "talks" we thought, they were expecting assistance as to their temporal wants, & knowing, should they have such a impression, they would always be naked & have empty stomachs, & the main object of our labor be therefore lost— we thought it necessary to have it understood, that they could not expect that of us, & therefore replied, they should remember that we were not sent by their great Father, but by the great spirit, & bring one by his words with us; if they were very poor their great Father, if he saw fit would cloth them & feed them, & should they not be pleased with this declaration, we would rather take up our staves, & go to such which would have us on such a condition, but they took it very kindly, & further promised that they would guard us against the enemy with our property, instructed their "youngmen" in the strongest terms & frightful gestures that they must not steal any thing for

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of us, which they readily promised. But the chiefs not satisfied with this promise, called instances to their memory where they had promised & did not keep it, now they did not wish them to lie again, unanimous, & with considerable noise they promised again that they would not steal any more. Then after shaking hands again, & being embraced by the chiefs, & their pipe of peace had made its rounds several times, the council was closed, & interesting as it was, we were glad, for since sunrise ~~had~~ we not eat anything, & now it was 9 o'clock P.M. & so fatigued that we hardly knew to prefer food or rest. The former however prevailed, & soon a little ~~was~~ was furnished. ~~for it does~~ our being considered to small, for we had the chiefs for guests — the sight of which might have been sufficient under other circumstances to check all hunger, for cleanliness is no virtue with them. We put the victuals, which we had intended to have eat, on the table, or rather ^{on the} ground, for by their appetite we could not be guided, ~~this~~ we should not have been able to satisfy.

We had scarcely finished when a messenger came to invite us to a "feast" with a chief, we wished to be excused, as we had "feasted" enough for the night, but we were told by our interpreters, that we would give offence by not going, so we went thinking we might get something unusual to us, such as fresh buffalo, or venison, but we found ourselves greatly mistaken. No doubt, should they have had it, we should have shared with them, for we were served with their best, but which was nothing, but water & corn, without salt, grease,

or spices. This was set down for us, & the Buffalo horns made into a kind of a spoon, which would contain about half pints. It was laughable to look at each other fishing in the wooden bowl, & then trying to get something out of the spoon. We were here permitted to see their extreme poverty which changed the comical eating into deep fell sorrow about their wretched condition. This feast did not last long for another was announced, & we had to be in a hurry, to keep close to our guide, so as not to get lost in the winding streets. Here we found another dish, that is, the corn was in another form viz. pounded & made into a cake with water, & boiled in water how tasty, or savory this was can be imagined, but eat we must, only with this different that we had to eat with one spoon. We were heartily tired of feasting after we had gone to three more, when we were permitted to retire.
 7th to roll ourselves into our blankets, & lay on the floor amidst the Indians.

Early, we were up to take our mules to pasture, - for every thing of the kind has to be kept up during night, for fear of the Sioux - in the meantime we examined the timber near the village, where we found oak & cedar, some of it fit for building purposes, which was confined to the banks of the river, but in general there ~~above ground~~ ~~Oaks & Cedars~~ some of it fit for building purposes is none worth naming except on the islands of the Platte river.

About 8 o'clock we left for the upper Pawnee village, about 28 miles distance, up the Platte, several chiefs accompanied us.

We traveled on a high prairie, the nicest upland prairie we had seen yet, until now, when we went down to the river to get dinner, & to look at the place, which was recommended to us, as the most suitable for a mission & establishment on the account of the large island, abounding with timber

The island is separated from the shore by a small slough only, with a large growth of timber, but mostly cotton wood which is not durable. We were told, that this is the place, where the Sioux often crop, to hide themselves in the timber, or in the adjoining ravens between the bluffs which come close to the river, until they can make an attack either on men or horses of the Pawnees. The Indians, with us, showed much uneasiness here, always on the watch. & after we were on the upland again, several miles from our dinner place, they aspeare something there, & talked of Sioux. One of them rode up on a higher bluff, & soon reported that, what they had seen were Pawnees. How they could distinguish what it was, & even say what Indians, we could not comprehend, for we only saw a dark looking object.

We soon came to a place too, where we could ~~sometimes~~^{convince} ourselves that they do comen in conflict with the Sioux, ~~where~~ we saw numbers of broken arrows & some bones. Lately a party Sioux had succeeded to steal some horses, of them, but the latter detected them yet in time to give them a chase. A young chief's horse, however, soon ~~declined~~^{gave out}, his company not wishing to leave him, were encouraged, by him, to flee for life, as otherwise they would all have to die, as he would have to die at any rate. He alone would give them battle. The Pawnees enraged shot him nearly full of arrows, & then tore him to pieces. With apparent satisfaction the Pawnees related this on the spot to us.

We were now in sight of the upper Pawnee village, which is located in the bottom Prairie, & as soon as we drew near it, we were surrounded by a great number of children, we counted a hundred

but were tired of counting longer. These followed us to the head chief's
lodge, into which we were conducted, & where we met a scene which
we shall never forget. It was a "Medicine dance, a worship, but whom
they were trying to worship we did not learn, & so intensely devoted
were they that they could not notice the strangers entering. We have
to set down behind the scene, & there had sufficient time to think
over their ~~body~~^{mental} & wretched condition. What a lost estate they are
in, how blinded by satan - There were about a hundred worshippers
all men, who had the upper part of their bodies naked & frightfully
painted. Round their heads, & hanging down the back, were feathers
of different hues, & pieces of skin, these, together with the curious
ornaments round their legs gave them an unearthly appearance,
but farther from a heavenly. So they stood round in a circle,
until the musicians, who stood near the "medicine lodge" would
give the signal with their monotonous flutes, & simple wrought
drums, when all would begin to shump, & make a low mormoring
noise. As the noise of the musicians would increase, so would
the dancers, & shump higher & higher, until it had the appearance
as if they were all mad; as they would meet together a tremen-
dous shriek of them all would end this round, & in wild con-
fusion would they fall back again, to the place of commencement.
And are these rational creatures? we had to ask ourselves, & we
had to answer yes. created by a merciful God, & by a Saviour
who came to save them from their blindness, to deliver them
from the utter darkness, & from the chains of Satan, that
they might see, & flee to Him for refuge that they might
inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, for whosoever shall call
upon the name of ~~the~~^{the} Lord shall be saved. But how shall they
call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall

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they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" And
shall we whose souls are lighted by wisdom from on high
Shall we to man benighted the lamp of life deny?
All the objections, which we have heard of friend & foe, against
Indian missions, rushed to our minds, & although, we had
for a number of years made sad appearance, that but
little can be accomplished, & often, under disappointment
& discouragement called out "Lord it is enough, we are no
better than our father" But seeing them in this condition, &
comparing them with others who had the gospel, we saw
that little or least was accomplished, & being the will of
the ^{of} Saviour that all nations should have the gospel, we denoun-
ced all objections to bringing the gospel to the Indians, in
face of the great unfruitfulness, where it is, & whether in
ourselves or others, as coming from a unbelieving heart,
& in the same spirit, when Cain said: "^{I am} shall do my
brothers keeper?" We considered it shameful, ye sinful-
utterly wicked, that a mighty, wealthy, Christian nation
should let ^{tribes.} scorne, ye ~~patrons~~ before their very door, perish
for the want of the bread of life. yet we had to remember
that we were send, & now here to see what we could do for these.
^{But as} we considered the great difficulty, on the account of the
difference of language, their great ignorance in spiritual
matters, the great hold satan had on them, & we beeing weak
sinful vessels, could not promise that we would be faithfull
to morrow, we thought our hearts would break, & were almost
the first to desert the field. But a mighty hand held us, He
draw us near to him. We sought a retired place, to commune
with the heavenly friend, & who was near there too, after we had

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orborended our hearts to ^{them} about ourselves & the misery
of these Indians we returned comforted & peaceful,
& found the chiefs & counsellors assembled, which our
interpreter had arranged in our absence. & now they wellcom-
ed us heartily. The Council then proceeded like the one with
the other hand, & we could not have received greater encoura-
gements to come to live with them. Of course their very contrac-
ted ideas of what good we would have to bring, always recurred
again, to what benefit we would be them in afterward circum-
stances. & therefore too were they so willing to promise any thing.
Not a request of ours was negatived.

After the council, feasting commences again, & continue
until late in the night. To one we were invited which must
have been yet in connection of the religious ceremony of the
day. They went to work very solemn. After taking out of the
kettle, two leaps were made, or dedicated to the fire, then one
to a buffalo scull, in the "medicine lodge," & with outstretched
arms under murmuring noise we were blessed. To endel
this day, & we had again great reason, to bring our thanks offer-
ing & that to the true & living God.

8th

As we intended to go back to day, as far as the lower Pawnee village
we had but little time left for observation of the people & country.
We were up on the surrounding bluffs before sunrise, & were sur-
prised, of in seeing the Pawnee women turn out so early to their
corn patches, which are in the ravins, where the water washed off
the soil, & which are so narrow at places ~~that~~ ^{some} but two hills can be
made abreast, & so far from the village that the enemy has
an opportunity to kill now & then one of them. Their Lords deign
sometimes, however to keep guard, whilst they are at work.

The females are just the counterpart of the males. These, well build & looking tall & erect, almost majestically, when the former, from being compelled, not only to do all their handy work, but likewise carry great burdens, either in travelling, or building their houses. ^{their} have a stooping walk, with downcast, peevish countenances & their hair & dress in the greatest possible disorder gives them an appearance as if they were misery itself.

These houses, now 140 or 150 in number, ^(containing about 3000 souls) had been burned by the Sioux and Iowas last winter & were not yet all rebuilt, & we saw some of these poor creatures dragging timbers from the river, a distance of a few miles, & some of these timbers must be about 16 feet long & 8 to 10 inches thick, which makes it a considerable work.

We were told that plenty of stone were near this village, but found only a few scattered ones, & these unfit for any use, being flint stone. & the only one we had seen since we left Council Bluffs.

A very cruel practice we learned is prevalent with these Indians, & perhaps with all wild prairie Indians, that is, when their old people get so feeble that they can no longer accompany them on the hunt, at which times nothing can be left behind - they bury them alive. We had to believe it to be a fact, from the talk Mr. Allis made to them, he said, pointing to an old feeble man of very tall stature, who was once head chief: I have learned that you intent of putting your old chief down because he is now old & sickly & perhaps you will even think of burying him when he can not follow you well any more, but I want you to take care of him. He has been like a father to you when he was yet strong you know his kettle was always over the fire with plenty, & he has always been a friend of the whites & they will remember him as their friend, & you best esteem him too for the services he did

your nation, & not bury him until he is dead."

We could give many instances yet, all showing their wretched state & how completely Satan has ensnared them, but are afraid of becoming too lengthy, we will therefore commence our home journey. It appeared as if the head men reluctantly parted with us. The chiefs from the lower village, were again at our side as we started. We hurried much too thinking the Platte would soon rise from the heavy rains that had lately fallen. Soon after leaving the village, one of us went a horse back with the Indians & other way to examine a spring, to see whether it was not a suitable place to build to. It is but a weak one, with no other enclosures near it. At the dinner point we united again, where we shot some ducks, almost the only living creature we saw worth shooting, & we had expected to see buffalos, but to their range we did not get within 60 miles.

A little after night we entered the Loup village, which was in consternation about the Sioux, who, it was said, were seen not far from there. Many sentinels stood up on the houses, now & then yelling at a great rate, but did not learn whence otherwise than to let the enemy hear, if they are near, that they are on their guard. We had a very uneasy night, not on the account of the Sioux but the rain, which was not only coming through the covering, but through some holes near the ground, & inside being lower did not leave us a dry spot to sleep on. We shifted about in every direction until the approach of day.
 Considerable time passed round until we had made the arrangements to cross the river, & all our provision, except for two days, we left, likewise all Tobacco & ammunition, for crossing us. But the chief thought we wanted a great deal for such a short time.

The Platte had risen but little, but the Elk Horn, about 10 miles

from the Platte was bank full, where we camped for the night,
 & had again an unpleasant night, as a very hard rain came
 on again, & had nothing but our blankets to lay on the wet ground.
 About 50 of Pawnees were camped round us, & in general no shelter
 but what their buffalo skins would afford.

16th A man coming from the ~~Bellevue~~, told us that we could not cross
 Papillon, as it were at least 10 feet deep. We then turned
 to the right of the road we came, travelling nearer the Platte,
 & by such a course would cross the Papillon near the Omaha
 village, where we probably might get assistance in crossing
 it. Soon after noon we arrived at the stream, which was very
 high. We called for Omahas with their skin boats, but who were
 so long in coming that we thought of another plan viz: we took
 the wagon bed off, & rapped our tent round it, & in it ferried the wagon
 & ourselves over, a few Pawnees helped us, one swimming behind & one
 before the box to guide it, we were not quite done when some Omahas
 come with a skin boat, who took yet some over. We succeeded in this
 manner to land every thing save but dripping wet, as it rained
 continually. Now there was but one bad place yet to cross & we were
 safe. This was but a small creek, but as the mules would have stuck
 fast by inclining them to pull through, we had to loosen them
 & get them on soft ground, then by means of ropes & our own strength
 we overcame this obstacle too. Not only little tintened of Pawnee
 life, & by the many places we had to pass through, we arrived at the
 Mission house at ^{ly} Bellevue, where we were again very cordially
 received. ~~A boat~~ Here we had to stay a few days to avoid the arrival
 of a steamer which was hourly looked for, & on which we
 took passage to Kansas but 9 miles from Westfield. ~~At this~~

To this place we went afoot, & arrived here just as the congregation came out from their meeting house. And were heartily welcomed by them, & especially by the mission family. All in good health, & the Indians very much surprised that we returned safe, for they feared the Pawnees would kill us.

As can be seen by our statement in this report there is a door upon the cry is come over & help us, & should the Lord be pleased to use such weak & feeble instruments as we are in carrying the glad tidings to them, we say, though trembling; here we are, do thou & our blessed Saviour according to thy infinite love & wisdom.

Dr. P. Oehlers Fotografie ist von Dr.
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The "upper village" of
the Pawnee is described
as located on the south
side of the Platte River
in Nebraska, opposite
the mouth of the Loup
River