

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

A MINNESOTA MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF 1893¹

THE STORY of this missionary journey begins at St. Columba's Episcopal mission for the Chippewa of the White Earth Reservation, where Miss Pauline Colby went in 1892. Deaconess Sibyl Carter had already started to teach lace work among the Chippewa, or Ojibway, Indians of Minnesota, and Miss Colby went from New York to help Mrs. Frances Wiswell, an English woman who had charge of the work at the Minnesota mission. Miss Carter went out to inspect the work and wanted to extend it to Leech Lake, with Miss Colby in charge. This led to the missionary journey here described and to the installing of Miss Colby as a missionary at Leech Lake, where she remained continuously until her retirement in 1922. She is now living quietly at a rest home in St. Paul.

The journey from White Earth to Leech Lake in 1893 was through many miles of wilderness. The intrepid little party consisted of Miss Carter, Miss Colby, Miss Grease (an eastern friend of Miss Carter's) and Nelson, a Swede who drove the lumber wagon in which they traveled. Besides its passengers, the wagon contained a few boxes and articles of furniture with which Miss Colby intended to start housekeeping at Leech Lake. There was no road except from White Earth to Detroit, now Detroit Lakes, and there the party spent the first night. Beyond that the road toward the east was only a trail. The nearest town was Park Rapids, more than forty miles away.

After leaving Detroit the travelers bumped patiently along, hour after hour, until they mistook the trail and lost their way. Fortunately they were near a herder's shack with a rough fence around it. The herders stayed there

¹As related to the writer by Miss Colby.

sometimes, when taking cattle through the country, and it was unoccupied when they arrived. Night was coming on, and they decided to spend it there. Miss Carter insisted on sleeping in the wagon. Nelson said he would sleep on the ground under the wagon, and Miss Colby and Miss Grease made themselves as comfortable as possible on two cots in the shack. Then came some herders. They politely offered to sleep outside and it seemed, for a while, as though everyone was settled for the night. But a heavy thunderstorm broke over the little camp. Everyone hurried into the shack. The windows were cracked and there was only one little kerosene lamp. While the storm raged outside and the lightning flashed, the herders tried to cheer the party with a little sociability, which irritated Miss Carter. They were kindly men, and in the morning they milked some cows and brought the milk to the women. Although Miss Carter would not touch the fresh, warm milk, the others found it somewhat refreshing.

As soon as possible the missionaries started on their way, but the trail was muddy and the trees were dripping from the recent rain. At last they reached the shack of a white man named Frost. He was away, but his wife and boy were there and with true frontier hospitality she gave the visitors a breakfast of salt pork, bread, and coffee.

After this repast the travelers started on a road that they thought would take them to Leech Lake, but one night it became evident that they were lost. The situation became worse when Miss Grease gave up. She was elderly and stout, and the hardships of the journey were too great for her. Her only request was that she be left there to die. The others did not know how serious her condition might be, as she was wholly unaccustomed to such experiences. But Deaconess Carter, ever efficient, exclaimed, "Nonsense! Nelson will make a fire so that we can find our way back. Nelson and I will go on foot and find the right road, while Miss Colby stays with you." Someone asked, "What

if the horses stray away?" Miss Carter replied, "No. They'll stay near people."

Dusk was coming on when Miss Carter and Nelson went away, and it seemed to Miss Colby that they were gone a long time. They returned, however, with the good news that they had found the agency. They came back in a wagon provided there by Dr. James R. Walker, and were guided by the light of the fire that Miss Colby had kept burning. Miss Carter had talked with the agent, who said they might use the schoolhouse, so the missionary journey was resumed. They left the wagon with Miss Colby's furniture which, she said, consisted mostly of packing boxes. The government teamster drove his wagon, the women rode on the high seats, and Nelson sat in the back of the wagon, leading his own team.

Arrived at the agency, they went to the government boarding school, which was closed for the summer. There they found beds and blankets, but no food. Early the next morning Miss Carter started out and found a "hotel" kept by an Indian woman and her white husband. It was he who fried the pancakes and brought them from the stove in his hands. Miss Colby pointed to a strange substance on a plate and asked, "What is that?" Miss Carter replied briefly, "Butter." Miss Colby said, "It was as full of flies as a plumcake of plums." There were two downstairs rooms in the house. One was the kitchen and they ate in the other room. After breakfast Miss Carter went to the store and got some food for her party.

A house had been provided for an Indian clergyman, but he had been transferred and it was vacant. The Reverend Joseph A. Gilfillan, an Episcopal missionary at White Earth, had paid for this house from his private means and he placed it at Miss Colby's disposal. The agent sent a team for her "furniture," and when it arrived her companions helped her in getting settled. There were some Indians who had been to government schools and could speak Eng-

lish, and Miss Colby had been at White Earth a year, so she was somewhat familiar with the Ojibway language. After two days, Miss Carter, Miss Grease, and Nelson went away and Miss Colby began a missionary service at Leech Lake that continued until her retirement. During the latter portion of that time she served under the United Thank Offering, a fund given by the women of the Episcopal church.

Miss Colby introduced lace work among the Chippewa at Leech Lake. This was a great help to the Indian women, for they were paid in cash, and could earn as much or as little as they desired. Miss Colby prepared every piece of work, taught the women to do it and to keep it clean, and when it was finished, she sent it to New York, where it was sold. Her house had two rooms downstairs and an attic. The front room was the mission room, where the women did their work, if they did not wish to take it home. Mr. Gilfillan provided a large stove for this room. The pipe went up through the attic, where Miss Colby slept. One must live in the North to know the cold of midwinter, especially in a room heated only by a stovepipe. During the first snowstorm of the winter, Miss Colby woke early in the morning and put out her arm toward the packing box that was her bedside table. Soft and cold the snow lay upon that little "table." She tried to light her lamp, but the chimney was full of snow. The matches were wet, and the floor was carpeted with snow. Down the ladder she must climb for matches, before she could begin another missionary day.

In the years that followed Miss Colby taught the little Indians in the Sunday school, cared for the sick by day and night, and read a simple service for the dead. She saw the Chippewa advance in the religion of the white man, in their long journey from the primitive religion of their forefathers. All this followed after her first journey, through the wilderness from White Earth.

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