

MINNESOTA AS SEEN BY TRAVELERS

In Charles Lanman's book entitled *A Summer in the Wilderness*, published in New York in 1847, an account is given of a journey to Minnesota in 1846, and in one chapter the author tells of a somewhat unusual character whom he met in the wilderness. He writes:

I have also had the pleasure of meeting at St. Peter's M. Lamarre Piquo, the distinguished French naturalist from Paris. He has been in the Indian country upwards of a year, and is to remain some months longer. He is on a professional tour, collecting specimens in every department of natural history, and for that purpose is constantly wandering along the rivers, through the woods, and over the prairies of the northwest, with no companions but Half-Breeds or Indians. He seems to be a most passionate lover of his science, and the appearance of his temporary store-room or museum is unique and interesting. Here, an immense buffalo stares at you with its glassy eyes, while just above it, pinned to the wall, may be seen a collection of curious beetles, butterflies, and other insects; then an elk and a deer will display their graceful forms, while at their feet will be coiled up the rattlesnake, the adder, and other frightful serpents; here the otter, the beaver, the fox, the wolf, the bear, and other native animals; there a complete flock of web-footed creatures, from the wild swan and pelican to the common duck; here an eagle and hawk, a partridge and scarlet-bird; and there, embalmed in spirit, a vast variety of curious reptiles. M. Lamarre Piquo belongs to that honorable class of scholars whose labors tend to develop the glorious resources of our country, and among whom we find such men as Wilson, Audubon, Silliman, and Houghton.

F. V. Lamare-Picquot was born in Bayeux, France, about 1785. In the thirties and forties he undertook several journeys to remote parts of the world to make natural history collections. On one occasion his specimens were purchased by the British Museum and on another he was commissioned by the French minister of commerce to search for nutritious plants.

Upon his return to France in 1847 from an extended expedition to the interior of North America, Lamare-Picquot stopped in New York long enough to visit the editor of the *Courrier des Etats-Unis*, to whom he gave for publication a manuscript relating to the Minnesota Sioux. This was brought out in the French-American paper for January 12, 1847, prefaced by an informing account of Lamare-Picquot. A file of the *Courrier des Etats-Unis* is in the Library of Congress at Washington. From that library the Minnesota Historical Society has received a photostatic reproduction of the issue which contains the Lamare-Picquot material. It is believed that readers of this magazine will be interested not only in Lamare-Picquot's description of conditions among the Sioux but also in his expedition. The following translation from the French is the work of Miss Anne H. Blegen of the staff of the Minnesota Historical Society.

A FRENCH NATURALIST IN MINNESOTA, 1846

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A SCENE AMONG THE SIOUX

One of our compatriots, whose distant explorations have attracted, at different times, the attention of the scientific world, Monsieur Lamare-Picquot, has just arrived in New York, after a sojourn of four years in the most distant parts of the New World. M. Lamare-Picquot is accustomed to such peregrinations, undertaken by him with the aim of enlarging the field of the zoölogical and botanical sciences in which he is one of the most distinguished scholars. From 1828 to 1832 he traversed Burmah and India, from which he brought back precious collections which aroused a lively interest among the savants of France and Germany. In 1842 M. Lamare-Picquot again took up his pilgrim's staff, and, indefatigable explorer that he was, he traversed successively Upper and Lower Canada, Esquimaux Bay, and Labrador. Before leaving Quebec he had taken the precaution to leave a copy of all his manuscripts. This copy was burned in the fire which destroyed a third of that city, and at the moment when our learned traveler

was flattering himself for his prudence the trunk which contained the originals of his works was stolen from him. He has been unable to find any trace of it since then. From Canada, M. Lamare-Picquot traveled to the lands situated west of the Mississippi and occupied by the Sioux Indians. But the dangers which he encountered among these savage people did not permit him to push his explorations further. When he arrived in the country of the Sioux last summer, that tribe was in frightful need, the origin of which is as follows. It appears that before the war of the United States and Mexico the garrisons of the American forts situated in these quarters prevented by their vigilance the sale of too great quantities of whisky and brandy to the Indians by hawkers. But after the garrisons of these forts were withdrawn or diminished to go to fight the Mexicans the most deleterious spirits flowed in abundance among the Sioux who, being intoxicated from morning to night, neglected all cultivation, all work, and fought incessantly either with their neighbors or among themselves. At the moment when M. Picquot arrived among their tribe, they were awaiting a reply to a demand for aid which they had addressed to Washington, and they were deluding themselves with the hope that provisions would be sent them. This hope having been frustrated, they became furious and treated the Parisian traveler as a spy who was coming to try to reestablish the domination of the great French chief in the countries which formerly had belonged to him. Having shown them his scientific diplomas, his collection of plants, and his zoölogical collection to dispel these apprehensions, M. Lamare-Picquot found that he had fallen from Charybdis into Scylla. A superstitious fear succeeded the anger in the hearts of the Indians. They saw in M. Picquot an *homme de racines*, that is to say a sorcerer, a soothsayer, who by his conjuring was to cast upon them a sinister fate, and they swore his death. Our traveler escaped from this predicament only through the protection of M. Williamson, an American missionary, and he availed himself of a caravan which was passing through those parts in order to regain more hospitable shores. In spite of all these tribulations, M. Lamare-Picquot is carrying to Europe extensive collections of great value to science.

We were honored day before yesterday by a visit from this modest scholar, and he graciously offered to the *Courrier des*

Etats-Unis the following page taken from his manuscripts. It is a scene from the social life of the Sioux, which is in harmony with the welcome received by M. Lamare-Picquot from these fierce Indians.

Camp of Little Crow (Sioux chief).—Aërial tombs of the sacred hill.—Marriage of Little Crow to three sisters.—Military execution of the two brothers of Little Crow.

Upon ascending the right bank of the upper Mississippi, almost opposite the village of *Pig's Eye* (*oeil de cochon*), the traveler encounters a Sioux camp or village, which has been twice in the last summer the stage of horrible scenes among three Indian brothers. There was nothing remarkable in the appearance of this village when I passed it in the month of April, 1846. Viewing this camp and the narrow boundaries which it occupies, I found nothing, absolutely nothing, which could draw my attention; I was eager to see the inhabitants of this savage retreat, renowned for the war which they had carried on against the Chippewa the preceding year.

Not a living person appeared on the river bank to greet the first steamer, the first sovereign of the river in the new year, which was bringing abundance in its hold to the children famished by the river!*

Near the river bank, a little way up the side of the hill, one perceives a group of miserable huts, perhaps about thirty in number, forming the camp or village called *Little Crow*.

Everything has been seen when one has cast a rapid glance over the foreground of the river where the huts are situated. But if the traveler lifts his eyes above these huts toward the summit of a bare hill not far distant from the homes of these people, he perceives eight or ten sparse groups formed of several pieces of wood brought together which have a vertical direction and are raised from the ground about eight or ten feet; on the top of these can be seen something dark having the appearance of a kind of

* It often happens in the autumn that low water prevents the steamers — carrying provisions in sufficient quantity — from ascending the river to this point, and the unfortunates suffer some privation during a part of the winter.

bale five or six feet in length, lying in a horizontal position, and appearing to be fastened to other pieces of wood placed cross-wise.

On coming nearer, one perceives that these bales are made of a roll of bark, sometimes covered with a *blanket* (a covering of white wool customary among the savages) or with any other bit of cloth, red or some other color. Above this scaffolding, one sees a pole, from fifteen to twenty feet high, fixed in the ground, bearing at its peak a little flag, either red or white in color, very slightly respected by the weather.

These detached groups present a rather picturesque *ensemble* when observed from some distance. But how imposing this picture becomes in solemn meditations, when one learns that it is death that reigns in the open on this hillock, that this place is holy, sacred in the eyes of this savage people; that it is the aërial tomb of a father, of a mother, of a son, or of a friend, carefully rolled in a piece of bark and confided to the care of the relative or friend surviving; that the summit of this sacred little hill, in short, is the aërial shelter or sepulchre of a Sioux, mummified by the aid of the sun, the rain, time, and dessication!

I have said above that this camp had been the scene of two tragic events at two different times since I had passed it in the month of April. The following is what I have to tell of the chief who reigns as sovereign at Little Crow.*

The father of the present chief accidentally shot himself about two years ago. The eldest of his sons, recognized as capable of succeeding to the duties of his father, was elected by the majority of the Indians of the camp; the acclamation at the time of his accession was the final sanction of the people.

This man seemed to be well thought of by his fellows and by the other savages after his elevation to the rank of chief. He had given on different occasions proofs of the ability necessary for directing the affairs of the camp; in the art of speaking he surpassed all the others; his bravery in war was known to the Chipewewa (a savage tribe), his implacable enemies; the number of *kiliou* (eagle) feathers with which his head was decorated, announced the prodigious number of enemies that he had slain with

* Every Sioux elected chief of a camp loses his name and takes that of the place where he is in command.

his hand; I believe that he wears thirty-two or thirty-three of them according to what was told me during my stay at Mendota.

Little Crow lived in peace with his three wives, who were three sisters, whom he had married legitimately (as custom permits among the Sioux) — the daughters of a chief, his neighbor and his friend.

There is a singular established custom among this savage people: it is to buy the wife whom one is to marry by presents that one makes to the father or the mother of the loved one. If the suitor and his family as well are poor, lacking the means to send the gift that it is the custom to make, he consults a friend of the object of his tenderness and begs him to give him the means of buying the girl of his choice. It rarely happens that this proposition is refused.

The purchase of the young girl is made by means of firearms, toilet articles, blankets, horses, and the like.

When the suitor has obtained from a relative or from a friend the gift which represents the value of his loved one, he deposits it at the door of the tepee or lodge of her relatives. Sometimes it happens that the gifts are refused, but such a case is very rare. When the present is accepted by the family he has the right to take away with him his fiancée, which is the sanction or conclusion of the marriage. The young bride is received with her husband into the hut of the person who gave him the means to make this marriage or into the hut of her father if the husband does not possess one.

Little Crow, rich from the proceeds of his hunting, had bought successively, by similar presents, the three sisters who had become and still are at this moment his three wives.

The chief had several brothers, some of whom were scoundrels of the worst kind, like almost all the Sioux. One of them had killed a young Indian of the same tribe a few months before. This brother of Little Crow was returning to the camp last May accompanied by another of his brothers when the chief, seeing him approach, addressed to him, *as chief*, a sort of admonition. This wretch, a prey to a deep hatred which he bore for his brother *as chief*, takes two steps backward, and as his only reply fires his gun off almost point-blank, then takes to flight with his second brother leaving the eldest fallen on the spot. Little Crow was

very seriously wounded, but not killed. At the moment when he had noticed the movement of the assassin he took a step forward to stop him, but he was struck by the bullet, which broke both his arms. Immediately the friends of the chief brought him first aid while others hastened after the two assassins, who had escaped and who crossed immediately to the left bank of the river, where it was supposed that, after such an offense, they would establish their home, never daring to reappear in their brother's camp. They did nothing of the sort; it was soon known in the village that these two scoundrels had declared that they would pursue their brother to the death. For a long time Little Crow had known that one of these two miscreants had pretensions to the rank with which he was invested, having openly stated that he was more capable than his eldest brother of the management of the affairs of the tribe.

These designs had attracted very little attention from the chief because he exercised his power by reason of a general election by the tribe, which had judged him worthy of the duties with which he was invested. In the camp it was known also that this pretender had made many attempts to create a party for himself, but without success. It was even known that this young man, without having the means of ever attaining to the position of his brother — for his incapacity was recognized by the tribe — was harboring the project of assassinating him in order the sooner to achieve his end; but no one, not even the chief, took the matter seriously.

It was following these events that Little Crow was shot on May 10, 1846. The two brothers, having learned that the chief was only wounded, formed again a project for committing their crime. These schemes being known, some measures were taken to prevent them from returning to the camp.

In spite of the warnings which were given them to flee forever from the village, they came to live on one of the islands of the river at a short distance from the camp.

The chief, learning that his two brothers had come near again with plans for vengeance, called together the leading men of the tribe and the warriors of the camp.

As a result of the deliberations of this council of war, a supreme command ordered that if the two assassins reappeared in the camp they should be executed immediately.

Although these two scoundrels knew the plans made concerning them, they nevertheless left their retreat on the island and came to the camp to satisfy their hatred by another crime.

As the decree ordered, the warriors, in the name of the chief of the tribe, pronounced four times by a sort of proclamation the death sentence! A few seconds later four soldiers shot them, there where they were found in a state of intoxication.

The decree declared further, considering the enormity of their crime, that after their execution they should be deprived of the aërial burial of the sacred hill; that they should be placed in a pit dug in the center of the camp and trampled on with contempt in order to perpetuate the memory of such an offense in the village which had given them birth. But the condemned men escaped death by a kind of medical miracle of the doctors of their tribe. Their wounds, although of a serious nature, were healed by these savage doctors. After the extraction of the broken bones they applied every day to the wound ground up roots, and after the two fractures were suitably splinted the healing took place without inflammation and in less than six weeks.¹

I have desired to record here this trait of barbarism and of high justice in order to give the reader, by means of this episode, an idea of the savage customs of this tribe.

While I lived in Mendota last summer about two leagues distant from Little Crow, I had occasion a number of times to see this chief and to shake hands with him both before and after these two events.

LAMARE-PICQUOT

¹ A letter from Lamare-Picquot to Henry H. Sibley, dated February 12, 1847, found among the Sibley Papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society, is accompanied by a clipping from the *Courrier des Etats-Unis* which contains the following note: "A correction.—In the letter of M. Lamare-Picquot on the Sioux Indians published in our last issue an error in make-up slipped in which we must correct out of respect for historical truth. It was not the two brothers of Little Crow who were cured by the Indian doctors with the aid of ground roots, but Little Crow, their victim. The two murderers did not survive the punishment which was inflicted upon them." — *Ed.*



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