

MINNESOTA AS SEEN BY TRAVELERS

BISHOP JACKSON KEMPER'S VISIT TO MINNESOTA IN 1843¹

The fourth decade of the nineteenth century witnessed the development of an increasing interest in the American Indian among churches in Europe and the United States. Missionaries were sent to many tribes but chiefly to those that came into contact with the whites on the western frontier. One of the fields "white for the harvest" was the area about the upper lakes and along the upper Mississippi. In Switzerland, in Austria — in Vienna and in the province of Carniola — and in France, in the eastern and southern states, and even in the new western states the church, whether Catholic or Protestant, made preparations for saving the souls of the Indians. First on the ground in what is now Minnesota were the Congregationalists and Presbyterians; next came the Methodists; and they were followed closely by the Catholics. The efforts of these sects aroused the Protestant Episcopal church to begin its labors among the Indians of the upper valley, and in 1843 Bishop Kemper made a trip to Fort Snelling to look over the field and make a report respecting the founding of a mission. During the next two years he and others agitated in diocesan and general conventions for the establishment of a mission among the Chippewa of Hole-in-the-Day's band, but success did not crown these efforts until 1852.

The following letters were written by Bishop Jackson Kemper during his trip to and from Fort Snelling in 1843. For eight years he had been missionary bishop — the first Episcopal clergyman in the United States to fill the office. He

¹ The documents herewith printed, together with the introduction and footnotes, have been supplied by Dr. Grace L. Nute, curator of manuscripts for the Minnesota Historical Society. *Ed.*

was born in Pleasant Valley, New York, in 1789, was graduated from Columbia College in New York, and was ordained a priest in 1814. For twenty years thereafter he labored with Bishop White in Philadelphia. Upon his consecration as bishop he took up his work in his new diocese, which included Indiana, Missouri, Wisconsin, and the region from which Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Kansas were to be formed. His diaries and papers, now in the possession of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, show that, like Paul, he was "in journeyings often." Those portions of his diary that relate to his trip to Fort Snelling in 1843 duplicate in a cryptic and disconnected fashion much of the material in the letters. For that reason they have been quoted only when they afford information not recorded in the letters. The letters in abridged form appear in Marcus L. Hansen's *Old Fort Snelling*. They are of timely interest because of the recent announcement by the Protestant Episcopal church that a statue of Bishop Kemper is to be placed in the great Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.

Letters lost by mutilation of the manuscripts have been supplied by the editor, and where this is done brackets are used.

JACKSON KEMPER TO HIS DAUGHTER, MISS E. M. KEMPER,
August 25, 1843

[Kemper MSS. — A.L.S.]

25th August 1843

DEAREST CHILD,

Here we are snug and almost dry on a [s]and bar and not more than 13 miles below St. Peters. While the Captain and his men are using all kinds of methods to get us off — the chief of which is to put our freight into a large barge aside of us — I will write you a few lines.² It is now past 8 00 P.M. We still hope to

² The name of the captain and of the boat can be determined by the following quotation from Bishop Kemper: "Having unexpectedly received an invitation to go to St. Peter's, I determined, if possible, to embrace the very favorable opportunity that was offered me through the kindness

get to the fort [b]efore night (mid-night I mean) Then the Captain says he will [g]ive us an early breakfast tomorrow and send us off to see the falls (8 miles distant) and we must return so as to start down the river by noon. This is too bad in many respects; but what can we do? I have not time to stay with M^r Gear until the next boat arrives; that may not be for a week or two; so I will say to Mr G. when I see him: Here I am, & I have come not to see the falls but you, and I am at your disposal as long as I am here.³ If you choose to take me to the falls, it is well; if you prefer that I should remain in your house I am content. It is still probable that I shall be at Potosi next tuesday morning. To travel on Sunday, and particularly to do so without an opportunity of preaching, will be very hard. There will probably be only 4 passengers besides myself on the return. There was a little boat the Otter a-head of us, and I hoped she might be detained at the

of Captain Throckmorton of the steamer General Brooks, to visit the Chaplain of Fort Snelling, the Rev. E. G. Gear, who is connected with my jurisdiction. Having made all necessary arrangements while the boat was at Galena, I ascended the Upper Mississippi, spent some delightful hours with the Chaplain, found him comfortably situated and usefully employed, and obtained some useful information concerning the northern tribes of the aborigines, which may be of use to the Church at a future day." George C. Tanner, *Fifty Years of Church Work in the Diocese of Minnesota, 1857-1907*, 2 (St. Paul, 1909).

³ The Reverend Ezekiel G. Gear was appointed chaplain at Fort Snelling in 1838 and remained in that office until the fort was abandoned in 1858. In a letter of June 12, 1841, written to Bishop Kemper and now preserved in his papers, Gear mentions his disappointment that the bishop's anticipated visit to Fort Snelling had not been possible, thus revealing the fact that an earlier visit than that of 1843 had been planned. In the same letter he refers to a Mr. Garrioch of the Red River settlements who was desirous of having Bishop Kemper visit the colony. From another letter of Gear written to Kemper on November 29, 1841, it is evident that the proposed visit to the settlements was considered seriously for some time. Kemper's diary gives further facts about Gear: "He teaches 5 days in the week (hrs from 7 to 12) & has about a dozen pupils. . . . a chief called Hole in the sky, a Chip living near Aiken has just consented to make peace with the Sioux that he may become a X^{an} & he called upon G[ear] to ask for a Miss[iona]ry. . . . The com^r (Capt Baccus [*Electus Backus*]) had a chief in prison for selling whiskey. the others were collecting to buy him off. . . . G[ear] said he thanked God for this visit."

fort until Monday — but that prospect has vanished, for she has just past us descending to Galena.

It is supposed to be 500 miles from St. Louis to Prairie du Chien and 300 from there to St. Peters. We stopt at Prairie du Chien for some hours and a Judge Lockwood came on board who with his wife is an Episcopalian.⁴ He told me there are several in and about the town & he thought the prospect of organizing a church a fair one if a Missionary could be obtained (We are off the sand bar). From the prairie our voyage has been delightful. At the distance of a mile or two from the river on each side are ranges of lofty hills, in a great variety of shapes. Many of them appeared as if the river had flowed for ages near to their tops. Some of them looked as if they had been cut in two; and on the peaks of several were large blocks of rock. As we were wooding I spoke of going up to one of them but was told it was dangerous on account of rattle-snakes.⁵ There is a

* At the close of the War of 1812 many young men of education and birth in the East, particularly in New York and New England, feeling the lure of the fur-trader's frontier and realizing its opportunities for reaping rich profits, went west to the upper Great Lakes to engage in the fur trade. Such were Lyman W. and Truman Warren, Allan Morrison, John Fairbanks, Charles H. Oakes, and James H. Lockwood — to mention only a few outstanding names. The last was born in the state of New York in 1793 and died in Prairie du Chien in 1857. During the War of 1812 he engaged as a sutler's clerk in the army on the Niagara frontier, and for the next few years was successively at Mackinac and Green Bay. In 1819 he took up his permanent residence at Prairie du Chien. When Crawford County was organized he became a justice of the peace and in 1830 he was appointed an associate judge of the county. *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 3: 55.

⁵ As the early steamboats on the western lakes and rivers used wood for fuel because of the ease with which it could be secured, regular "wooding" places were established at which stops were made. Many travelers tell of these wooding stops; only occasionally, however, can one get behind the consumer's point of view. The following extract from a manuscript letter of Sherman Hall to his sister, Lydia Burbank, written from La Pointe on January 14, 1851, shows the producer's side of the matter: "My two oldest boys . . . are regular in the woods on that day [*Saturday*] from morning till night cutting cord wood to sell to the steam boats next summer." Another letter mentions "about forty cords of wood" cut for this purpose. Photostats of the Hall letters are in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

curious fact connected with that reptile. Cannon river flows into the Miss¹ from the west — it is a long & narrow stream — nine miles above Lake Pepin. They are never found north of that stream, altho they abound below it. One of the hills we saw yesterday had 3 or 4 large blocks of rock upon it, called the pot & kettles from their resemblance to those useful utensils. The prairies were frequent & some peculiarly attractive. On Wabasha's we saw a Sioux village — and a farmer's establishment — he being sent there by the U. S. to civilize the Indians.⁶ This morning we passed another village called Red Wings but saw very few of the inhabitants. The corn field was very extensive and there were in it elevated frames where the boys are kept to scare away the blackbirds. I saw a smoke near the frames, the boys having kindled a fire to roast ears of corn for their comfort. The Sioux have winter & summer houses. The latter [*sic*] are conical made of buffalo robes covering poles. The summer lodges looked something like poor log huts & are made of poles & elm bark. Near Redwings village there is a Miss[ionar]^y establishment from Switzerland.⁷ Lake Pepin is a beautiful sheet of water thro

⁶ On the site of Wabasha's Prairie, the residence of the Sioux chief, Wabasha, and his band, stands the present city of Winona. James Reed was the government farmer to this band at the time of the bishop's visit. Of the work of the farmers to the various Sioux bands under his jurisdiction, Amos G. Bruce, United States Indian agent at St. Peter's, wrote to John Chambers, superintendent of Indian affairs at Burlington, Iowa, on September 1, 1843, as follows: "The farmers appointed under the fifth clause of the second article of the treaty of the 29th September, 1837, with the Medawakantons Sioux, have, the present year, been employed in fencing and ploughing the Indian farms. From their reports, and my own observation, I have the satisfaction of reporting that the prospect of an abundant crop is very flattering at most of the villages." 28 Congress, 1 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 2, p. 384 (serial 439).

⁷ In 1834 the *Société des missions de Lausanne* sent to the Sioux of the upper Mississippi two young missionaries, the Reverend Daniel Gavin and the Reverend Samuel Denton, one of whom located at Trempeleau and the other at Red Wing's village. Later they were reunited at Red Wing's village. The work was carried on by them until 1847 and was then continued by the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions. An extract from their annual report, dated August 8, 1843, may be found in 28 Congress, 1 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 2, p. 362 (serial 439). A recent account of this missionary enterprise, based

wh[ich] the M. flows or is an expanse of the M. & is 25 miles by 3. It apparently abounded in large fish, for they were constantly jumping out of the water. Its banks you know are celebrated for agates — but we have not time to stop a moment. The settlements above P. du Chien are very few — now and then a solitary dwelling & a wood-yard. At one of these places the man told me his nearest neighbour was 20 miles off. In winter there is a good deal of travelling on the river in sleighs. About half way up Lake Pepin is the lover's rock of which you have heard. The Chippeway river enters from the East just below the commencement of the Lake, & its mouth is 100 miles below St. Peters. Up it & like wise up the St. Croix are saw mills, as that country abounds with Pine. The mouth of the St. Croix is 30 miles below St. Peters. Here is a beautiful Lake as large as L. Pepin thro' which the St. C. flows just before it joins the M. We have a Mr. Akin on board whose trading establishment is 300 miles north of St. Peters & 60 west of Lake Superior. There he has been among the Chippeways 33 yrs.⁸ He has been thro Lake Superior 30 times to New York for goods & returned as often; and now

on letters and reports of the missionaries, is given by A. Grandjean in *La mission romande*, 22-30 (Lausanne, 1917). This volume is reviewed *post*, p. 280.

⁸ William A. Aitken, a famous Scotch trader, was born in Edinburgh about 1785. As a young man he emigrated with his family to Canada. He subsequently entered the employ of a prominent fur-trader, John Drew. Letters in the Sibley Papers show that Aitken was trading in the region around Sandy Lake, his headquarters for many years, before the close of the War of 1812. Later he became the chief factor for the American Fur Company in the Fond du Lac department. In 1838 he was discharged for incompetence and thereafter continued to trade on his own account. He died in 1851. Kemper, in his diary under date of August 25, gives further facts about the trader: "A[itken] I learn is considered a hard case & the introducer recently of whisky into the Chip Country whereby the commander at fort Snelling said he did more injury to the Chips than their wars had done. But it could not be proved—if it could the com^r said he could send him to jail. A[itken] considers the Chips remarkable for common sense—he appeared an amiable, intelligent man." Under an earlier date, August 24, Kemper writes of another trader well known in Minnesota history: "conversed with Sibley a trader 9 yrs. out all last winter with Sioux hunting. dressed as they did. br in law to C. C. Trowbridge, an assessor on board."

for the first time he has traded with St. Louis. He knows perfectly all the languages around him. The most copious is the Chippeway. He says they have some what of a written language, and he has frequently seen one indian write off a song for another on a piece of bark. He thinks the characters are something like those of the Mexicans. Now I suppose you would like to receive a letter with the St. Peter's post mark; and if I ascertain it will not take more than a month in its journey you shall receive this thro that channel; otherwise I will reserve it for the p. o. of P. du Chien

God bless you dearest child. Find the best maps & descriptions you can concerning this country & do you and the boys become as well acquainted with it as possible

Your ever affectionate father

JACKSON KEMPER

[*Endorsed:*] Bishop Kemper August 25th September 6th September 15th/1843

[*Addressed:*] Miss. E. M. Kemper care of Mrs. Relf 369 Walnut St. Philadelphia Penn^a

[*Via:*] Galena, Ill. Aug 29

JACKSON KEMPER TO HIS SON, LEWIS A. KEMPER,
August 29, 1843

[Kemper MSS. — A.L.S.]

POTOSI, WISCONSIN 29 Aug. 1843.

MY OWN DEAR LEWIS,

Altho you may not have a very high opinion of the West, yet I think you would have liked to be with me on my late trip to St. Peters. The weather was delightful and the scenery grand and very novel. You have probably seen my letters to your sister; I will therefore say, we arrived at the end of our voyage last friday night, and as the fog was very thick the next morning we could not see where we were until 8 o'clock. Then the fort [Snelling] on a high hill, with its flag flying, had a fine appearance. Mr Gear the Chaplain soon called at the boat and appeared greatly rejoiced to see me. I accompanied him to his quarters and saw his family and some of the officers and ladies

of the garrison, and then he and I rode out 8 miles to the falls of St. Anthony. Though very inferior to those of Niagara, they are still well worth seeing. The scenery is wild — there are many immense rocks in the river, evidently broken off from the precipice over which the water is dashed with considerable noise — the water in its fall is frequently broken — but even when it is not so, the height is not more than $17\frac{1}{2}$ feet. Returning we went to a hill from whence we could see the whole of the fall, for there is an island in the middle of the river which hides one half of it when you are near. A mile or two further brought us to a most beautiful and lofty cascade on Nine Mile river.⁹ The quantity of water was not large, but it fell amidst the wildest scene, unbroken, over a ledge of rock which extended far beyond its foundation. There were not many Indians. The few I saw were Sioux who looked most degenerated by their contact with the whites. The families of the officers appeared very happy; the ladies told me they were like sisters. For months they have no visitors but wild Indians — Sioux or Chippeways. An old scotchman who has been in this country 50 years told me that all the tribes to the north and west speak the Chippeway language or its dialects;¹⁰ that the Sioux is entirely different from it, but that a dialect of it is spoken by the Winnebagoes, with this difference that the Sioux language has not the sound of the letter R in it while almost every word of the Winnebago abounds with Rs. He thinks that a person knowing the two languages — the C. and S. could travel through the indian country from Mexico to the N. Pole and make himself understood. We had to return to the boat by one o'clock, and soon after we started down the river. Near the mouth of the St. Croix — about 45 miles below St. Peters, I saw on a prairie a large stone

⁹ This cascade is, of course, the Minnehaha Falls of the present time.

¹⁰ Kemper's diary, under date of August 27, gives the name of the old trader: "took Graham an old man on board at foot of the lake [*Pepin*] who has been in this country 50 Yrs. dirty. has been in employ of Hudson B[ay] C[ompany] 5 yrs. all over that country." Duncan Graham was born in Scotland in 1772; he was associated with Robert Dickson for many years in the fur trade; and in 1834 he took up his residence on the site of the present city of Wabasha. He died in Mendota in 1847.

painted a bright red, to which the Indians offer sacrifices of tobacco &c and consider a *Wa-Kon* or Spirit.¹¹ As we were on our journey Sunday afternoon I saw a bark canoe paddling towards us with great rapidity containing as I first thought an Indian and a white man. The steamer was stopt, and soon the chattels (kettle, coffee-pot, &c) then the men and afterwards the boat itself were on board. They proved to be a miner who had gone from Galena and a stout lad. Eight months ago a number of persons were induced by offers of land from [the] Government to go to Lake Superior in search of copper; and a large party had lately been occupied in removing an immense block of copper from the bed of a river which empties into the Lake.¹² This miner had been thus occupied; and he informed me the task was done—that the block weighed three tons—that it was to be taken [to] New York &c as an object of curiosity. A fortnight ago he had started from the spot—skirted the Lake to a certain river, ascended that to its source, then carried the canoe with its contents 2 or 3 miles on their shoulders until they met the head waters of the St. Croix, and descended that river to the Mississippi.¹³ You will find an interesting account of that block of copper, of Lake Superior, &c in M^cKinneys tour to Lake S. with Gen. Cass.¹⁴

¹¹ The rock which Kemper mentions has been moved from its original location and is now to be found in the village of Red Rock.

¹² Generations before the settlement of Michigan one of the points of interest on the southern shore of Lake Superior, on a branch of the Ontonagon River, was a huge boulder of native copper and rock weighing about three tons. In 1843 Julius Eldred of Detroit made preparations for removing the mass. The story of the first knowledge of the boulder, of Eldred's thwarted plans, of its public display in Detroit, of its confiscation by the United States, and of its journey first to the yard of the war department building in Washington and later to its present location, the National Museum, is given by Charles Moore in his account of "The Ontonagon Boulder in the National Museum at Washington" in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 27: 260-266.

¹³ Probably the miner followed the well-known route up the Bois Brule River in northwestern Wisconsin, the headwaters of which lie close to those of the St. Croix River.

¹⁴ George F. Porter, "Report on the Copper Rock," in Thomas L. McKenney, *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes*, 477 (Baltimore, 1827).

I hope you have persevered not only in buying but in reading with great care Allison's History of Europe which I presume is beautifully written upon correct principles. I find the author is the son of the English clergyman who had a church at Edinborough and who wrote the celebrated work on Taste.¹⁵

You and your brother will return to St. Pauls at the appointed time and pursue your studies with great diligence.¹⁶

This letter was begun some days ago but I have not been able to assume it until now — and now I am on board the Cleveland bound to Milwaukie where I hope to arrive this evening. My journies have of late been uncomfortably rapid — but duty apparently demanded them. I am my dear boy most truly your ever affectionate father

JACKSON KEMPER

7 Sep: 1843

[*Endorsed:*] Bp Kemper August 1843 Lewis A K

[*Addressed:*] Lewis A. Kemper care of Mrs. Relf 369 Walnut St Philadelphia Penn^a

[*Via:*] Milwaukie Wn. T. Sep 8

¹⁵ Archibald Alison, an Anglican clergyman, was the author of *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, which he published in 1790. His son, Sir Archibald Alison, was the author of a ten-volume *History of Europe*, the last volume of which appeared in 1842.

¹⁶ Probably Kemper's sons attended the famous Episcopal preparatory school, St. Paul's, in Concord, New Hampshire.



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