

TWO MISSIONARIES IN THE SIOUX COUNTRY

THE NARRATIVE OF SAMUEL W. POND

[*The third and final installment of the Pond narrative is presented herewith, bringing to a close Samuel Pond's story of his and his brother Gideon's experiences as missionaries among the Minnesota Sioux. Earlier portions of the narrative appeared in the issues of this magazine for March and June, 1940. T. C. B.*]

In recounting our various movements I have said little about our labor for the spiritual welfare of the Dakotas, for I preferred to keep these matters separate but from the time when we first began to speak their language we strove to make them understand that we came here to promote their religious interests and though we were willing to aid them in things pertaining to this life we considered things spiritual and eternal of paramount importance. But such language was new and strange to them and they were slow to understand how men could be actuated by such motives. In January 1837, after a residence of six⁷³ months in an Indian tent, I was coming down from the north in company with a young man, the first Dakota who learned to read, and as there was at that time a thaw, we were wading through the melting snow, and sometimes up to our knees in water, when my companion, who was a few steps before me, suddenly stopped and burst out into an immoderate fit of laughter.⁷⁴ Such a fit of merriment in an Indian, and under such circumstances surprized me, and I inquired the cause of his untimely mirth, when he replied "I was thinking what a fool you are to be here wading in this melting snow when you might [be] at home in a comfo[r]table house, with plenty of good food." Many a white man would no doubt, have called me a fool, but not many would have laughed so immoderately while standing in cold water up to their knees.

⁷³ Above the word "six" in the manuscript appears the pencilled correction "3."

⁷⁴ The Indian was "Walking-bell-ringer." The date of this incident is given as the fall of 1837 in Pond, *Two Volunteer Missionaries*, 122. It could not have been January, 1837, for Samuel was then in Connecticut.

The Dakotas had a general belief in the immortality of the soul, and a vague apprehension that men would be punished in another world for crimes committed in this. They also held that theft, lying, adultery, murder &c were crimes that deserved punishment so they had little to say against the doctrine of future retribution, but when we made known to [them] the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, they maintained that though it was a good religion for us, it was not for them. They however were most of them very reserved in regard to their views of religious subjects, and when we set before them the claims of the Gospel they either listened in silence, or simply remarked that it was all very good, so that it was difficult to ascertain whether they understood us but in the summer of 1837 I entered a tent where were some visitors from the upper country, and the man of the house who was a brother of the Chief, told them who I was and what I said to them about religion. I was surprized to learn that he had a clear understanding of some of the most important doctrines of Christianity and could state them in plainer language than I could have done at that time in Dakota.

That man on his death bed told me he should die trusting in Christ, and wished to be buried like a christian. He also requested me to instruct his son in christianity

We were not in a situation to hold regular religious meetings with the Indians until we were settled at Bloomington, but we talked with them, or rather talked to them on religious subjects in season and out of season whether they would hear or whether they would forbear so that there were few within our reach who were not compelled to hear how much they needed salvation, and what they must do to be saved. A few of them we believed were converted, but not many though the instructions they received from us may afterwards have borne fruits of righteousness when so many were baptized in one day by Dr. W. and Gideon.⁷⁵ Among the many children taught by my wife were two little boys, brothers. They were both bright boys and the youngest, though a wild head strong boy, was very much attached to his books and notwithstanding the ridicule of the Indians, persisted

⁷⁵ The reference is to the baptism on February 3, 1863, of 274 Sioux captives at Mankato following the suppression of the Sioux Outbreak. A great religious revival took place and the total of Sioux baptisms eventually exceeded three hundred. Folwell, *History of Minnesota*, 2: 250.

in carrying them with him wherever he went. He sometimes called on me at Shakopee, and commonly had a portion of the Scriptures along with him, but he was very eccentric, and we did not consider his case a very hopeful one: He was in the prison at Ma[n]kato with the men who were condemned, and some who were confined with him told me that it was through his influence more than anything else that they were first led to call upon God. He died at Rock Island, but his brother is one of the best and most influential men at Flandreau. I ought to mention here that other missionaries labored hard for many years among the Mdewakantonwan. The Methodists expended much time and money at Kaposia and, though that mission was so badly managed that they were compelled to abandon it, they doubtless left the Indians there better acquainte[d] with doctrines of Christianity than they would have been if there had been no missionaries there. And the indefatigable and long continued labors of the Swiss missionaries and their American wives, doubtless contributed to the final success of the Gosp[e]l among the Dakotas. The sudden awakening of the men in the prison at Mankato was not among an ignorant people who had never heard the Gospel, for it had been pressed upon their attention almost daily for a long series of years. So one soweth and another reapeth. But the labor of sowing was often painfully discouraging and seemed wasted. What troubled me most was the apprehension that the mission money that I was spending here might be more profitably applied in some other field, and I endeavored to get along with as little of that money as possible. I drew nothing for my support from missionary funds until I had been here three years, and then I commenced with a salary of \$200, which was never greatly increased.

I think that a few of the Indians at Oak Grove were converted to Christ, and died trusting in Him, but I had no such hope in regard to any here at Shakopee. I was with the Indians here about five years and Mr Riggs was about as long at Traverse des Sioux, but we both seemed to labor in vain. Indeed before the outbreak in 1862 I saw very few Dakotas that I thought gave decisive evidence of piety. Dr. Williamsons views in regard to the proper qualifications for church membership differed somewhat from ours or at least Mr. Renvilles did and Dr W. thought it expedient to follow his advice. When I visited Lac qui parle the first winter the Dr was there, I found that

Mr. and Mrs Renville were already members of the church, and two of his daughters were examined for admission while I was there. In examining them the Dr addressed his question to Mr. Renvilles clerk in English, and he repeated them to Mr. R. in French who translated them into Dakota, but the girls said little except yes a[nd] no. I asked them a few questions in Dakota to which they gave such answers as their father dictated. As the clerk who was a Catholic told us privately that one of them was "very wicked," she was advised to wait a while, but did not have to wait long. She and most of the family with many others were soon gathered in to the church. Mr. Renville considered himself the head of the church formed there and perhaps there was not much arrogance in his assumption.

During one of my visits to Lac qui parle I think it was in 1838, the first Sabbath after my arrival nearly all of the Indians staid away from the meeting, to the great surprize and disappointment of the missionaries. As I was to have preached I did not know at first but some prejudice against me kept the congregation away, but the matter was explained the next morning when Mr. Riggs recieved a note from Mr. Renvill written by his clerk in which among other things he said "If you can do without me I can do without you, therefore I staid at home yesterday with the Indians whom I have converted," *Avec les Sauvages que J'ai converti* The trouble was about a spinning wheel which Mr. Renvilles women wished to borrow. Soon after receiving the note Mr. R. and I waited on Mr Renville and when Mr. Riggs began to explain or apologize Mr. Renville said "It is nothing Mr Riggs. It is nothing I forgive you" and all was smooth again. He had shown them that he could "do without" them and that was all he wanted. The next Sabbath I preached to a full congregation Mr. R. being there with the Indians "he had converted" I was left in charge of the church at Lac qui parle one year and had reason to fear in regard to most of the members of the church that there was too much truth in Mr Renvilles assertion that he had converted them himself. While I was there he selected four or five men and asked me to recieve them to the church and when I refused and asked him to postpone the matter till Dr W. returned he said "I have prepared these persons for admission to the church and if you do not admit them they will never attend your meeting again." I told the men what Mr. Renville said and when I ex-

plained to them my reasons for not receiving them to the church they were satisfied, and much to Mr R's chagrin attended meeting as before. The members of that church were not hypocrites but there was no inseparable connection between morality and their type of piety, for many of them did not know what a Christian should be. One of Mr. Renvilles' sons had been accused of traveling on the Sabbath on his way home from Traverse des Sioux, and I was present when he appeared before the officers of the church to give an account of himself. He seemed frank and honest and freely admitted that he had traveled on the Sabbath and that he had no excuse for doing so. The Dr. who seemed desirous of finding some excuse for him, suggested that he might have been out of provisions but he said he had plenty of food with him. Then the Dr said "you did not intend to travel when you left Traverse des Sioux" but he replied, "Yes I did intend to travel when I left the Traverse, but I expected to repent of it when I got home." The fact is Mr Renvilles' ideas of religion were derived chiefly from Catholics, and we could have had plenty of such converts as his at Lake Calhoun or Oak Grove if we had had a Mr. Renville to "convert" and "prepare" them.

Though we had many other things to occupy our attention we did not in the mean time neglect the study of the language for we were convinced from the first that our influence over the Indians would depend very much on the correctness & facility with which we spoke their language. When we had been here five or six years we had learned most of the words in common use. Indeed I see very few words in Dakota books now that I had not then learned and after that new ones came in slowly. But we observed that no white man among the Dakotas pronounced the words correctly or spoke the language grammatically though some of them had Indian families and had been among the Dakotas thirty or forty years and we labored hard to avoid the defects we observed in others for we wished to speak like Dakotas and not like foreigner[s.]

Among the men of the mission my brother who had a remarkable faculty for mimicry succeeded the best in imitating the speech of the Indians and among the women Mrs Gavin though other female missionaries spoke the language very well.

Whatever discoveries we made in the language we communicated to other missionaries who were not so far advanced as we. We

began as soon as we came here to collect materials for a dictionary and grammar and prosecuted the work steadily from year to year with little help from others till it was completed. But the work was not accomplished until about the time I removed to Shakopee in 1848. My brother of course contributed his full share toward the work but his farming brought with it much labor and responsibility and as sedentary employments were always irksome to him the labor of writing devolved chiefly on me. When our dictionary was finished it contained as many words as were published four years afterward, and was borrowed and copied at other stations up the river. If my brother and I did not furnish more words for that dictionary than any other two persons it must have been because our capacity for learning was inferior to that of our associates or we used less diligence in studying the language than they did for we had been longest among the Indians and much more in their society than any of the other missionaries. Doubtless we learned much from our associates who were scattered all along the rivers from Red Wing to Lac qui parle. Mr Gavin my brother and I studied together one winter with Jack Frazier for a tutor and I learned some thing from the stories dictated to M Gavin by Madame La Chapell but my brother and I were pioneers and generally what was new to others was familiar to us⁷⁸. But no one person and no two or three persons could justly claim the authorship of the Dakota dictionary. It was the joint work of many men & women each contributing to it some more and some less according to his or her ability or opportunity. And there is but *one* Dakota dictionary. I have it in manuscript and Mr Riggs had a copy of it but it is the same work and though it cost me years of labor I should be ashamed to claim the authorship of it. Though the grammar is a much small[er] work than the dictionary it was in some respects more difficult and it was a long time before I could attain even to an approximation of what a grammar should be. Other grammars were of little use to us in this work. I have some acquaintance with half a dozen other languages but the Dakota has many pe-

⁷⁸ Jack Frazer was a famous half-breed warrior and guide. In 1840 Gideon Pond wrote that studying with him during the ensuing winter would be the best opportunity that the Ponds had had to acquire the Sioux language. Gideon Pond to Greene, October 16, 1840, American Board transcripts.

cularities that are found in none of them and to discover⁷⁷ these peculiarities so as to be understood required much time and patient study My grammar was finished about the same time as the dictionary but I was not very well satisfied with either of them for I knew they were full of imperfections.

Dr W borrowed my grammar and after examining it said to me, "I thought once that if any one prepared a Dakota grammar it would be me but after a thorough trial I am convinced it is a work I cannot do and Mr Rigg's grammar is not worth [much] so I wish to have your grammar published with the dictionary"

I did not however venture to offer Mr. Riggs my grammar for I knew that he would prefer one written by S. R. Riggs A. M. but while Mr Riggs was editing his grammar he wrote to me from New York saying "I wish you would send me your grammar immediately, for Professor Turner has pulled mine all to pieces" I hesitated about sending my grammar until he wrote to me the second time for it, and wish I had not sent it, for when it reached them they had printed a part of Mr. Rigg's grammar The syntax is mine but somewhat altered to adapt it to what was already in type. So the grammar is a patch work, — neither his nor mine but he may claim it, for I certainly disown it.

End of Volume first

As for Dakota books, I think the supply was, most of the time more than equal to the demand. Thinking it would aid us in explaining to the Indians the origin of christianity, I wrote an abridgement of the Scripture history which was published at the expense of the Board in 184[*blank in MS.*] and prepared a catechism which G. and I published at our own expense in 184[*blank in MS.*]⁷⁸ I think the latter was little used up the river but it was a favorite with missionaries at Red Wing for they said the Indians seemed to understand it better than any other book they had In 1841–2 at the request of the brethren at Lac qui parle my brother translated the Gospel of Luke and I that of Matthew Gideon read his translation with Alex-

⁷⁷The word "discover" has been crossed out in the manuscript and "describe" is written in pencil above it.

⁷⁸The works referred to were published in 1842 and 1844, respectively. They are listed in James C. Pilling, *Bibliography of the Siouan Languages*, 56 (Washington, 1887).

ander Faribault⁷⁹ and we compared our translations with the Greek but limited as our knowledge of that language was we were too well acquainted with it to imagine that we could make any improvement on the English translation, and we did not pretend to translate from the original for we knew there were many passages of Scripture that neither we nor any other missionary among the Dakotas could translate without the aid of the English or some other modern version. Our best trans[*l*]ations lost by comparison with the most ancient English translations within our reach.

While we were engaged translating Matthew and Luke, Mr Riggs prepared for pu[b]lication most of the New Testament except the Gospels and D. W translated a considerable portion of the Old Testament

When I learned how much of the Scriptures were to be published I withheld my translation from publication, thinking there might be faulty translations enough without mine, or at least more books than the Dakotas would need before we were able to give them better ones I intended to revise and rerevise my translation until I was better satisfied with it, and, though it was never published, I hope it was of some use, for D. W. borrowed it to read to the Indians, saying they understood it better than they did other translations. I think that when missionaries cannot report that much good seems to result from their attempts to instruct the heathen, they are apt to push book making a little too fast. They wish to have something to show as the fruit of their labors and if they cannot make converts they can make books and are tempted to undertake the translation of the Scriptures before they are competent to do it well And if one is a little ambitious of literary fame there is a tempting field lying before him, for he has little to fear from criti[*ci*]sm when publishing books in a language as little known as the Dakota and it does not require a man of profound erudition to do the work so that it will pass any examination that it is likely to meet with in the literary world.

It may seem strange that no portion of Scripture translated by me was ever published, and it will be naturally i[n]ferred that I was less competent than my associates to do such work. I certainly was not com-

⁷⁹ An interesting sketch of Alexander Faribault by Grace Lee Nute appears in *Minnesota History*, 8: 177-180 (June, 1927). A Minnesota city is named for this son of Jean Baptiste Faribault.

petent to do the work as it should be done before others stepped in before me and the field was occupied Mr Riggs had not been here five years before he had, or supposed he had all the Greek of St. Paul and St. Peter translated into Dakota I of course could not compete with such translating as that and before more translations were called for my connection with the mission terminated

There has always seemed to be a greater demand for hymns than for any other Dakota literature. Mr Renville composed the first hymns sung by the Dakotas but most of the missionar[i]es and many not connected with the mission have tried their hands at hymn making. It might be a matter of doubt whether the poets among the missionaries and half breeds have been as plenty as the hymn writers, but a person who could not succeed in writing a good verse in English can write a hymn in Dakota and if there has been no Watts nor Wesley among us our worst hymns are an improvement on the Dakota war songs.

Gideons translation of Luke was published but in the second edition it appears as the work of Mr. Riggs who of course translated it from the Greek but after comparing the two translations I conclude he did not find the work very difficult while availing himself at [*sic*] the labor that Mr Farribault, my brother and myself had bestowed upon it.

For nearly twenty years after we came here we were fully determined to spend our lives with the Dakotas and it was not without the greatest reluctance and a feeling of bitter disappointment that we came to the conclusion that we must leave them. If we had been located on the Reserve as Dr. W. and Mr. Riggs were perhaps we should have remained there, but we had reasons for leaving which they had not, for while they hoped the treaty of 1850 would be of great benefit to the Indians, we, taught by past experience, believed the results of the treaty would be evil and only evil.⁸⁰

After that treaty was made we were not long in deciding what to do. We had witnessed the effects of the treaty of 1837, and had been waiting patiently for fifteen years hoping that when the twenty years expired during which the Indians were to receive annuities, they would be compelled to resume habits of industry, for when

⁸⁰ The reference is evidently to the treaty of Traverse des Sioux, which was negotiated in 1851, not 1850.

we came here we found them as a general rule an industrious energetic people, and we hoped they would be so again when they were compelled to support themselves without the aid of the Government.

So we were counting the years as they passed by hoping to see an end of the annuities, and a change for the better, but it was like waiting to see a river run by, for before the termination of the twenty years, another treaty was made no better than the first, and all our hopes of a change for the better at an end. The older Indians had gradually lost their former habits of industry or were dead, and a new generation had grown up of insolent reckless fellows, who had spent all their lives in idleness and dissipation. So long as they were scattered in little bands along Mississippi and Minnesota, they were comparatively harmless. But now they were to be all gathered together on the Reserve where they could act in concert and encourage each other in mischief. We did not anticipate anything so bad as the Massacre of the Whites in 1862, but we thought there would be serious trouble on the Reserve, and did not like to take our families among such a horde of lawless, reckless sons of Belial. At the same time we thought the prospect of our being useful on the Reserve was not sufficiently encouraging to justify the expense we must incur in removing and erecting new buildings. Mr. [Selah B.] Treat the Corresponding Secretary made us a visit, and expressed himself as fully satisfied with our reasons for leaving the mission, and, what is more, he always seemed disposed to give us all the credit to which we were entitled and doubtless more than we deserved for what we had done.⁸¹ As we never regretted coming among the Dakotas as we did so we never regretted leaving when we did

In a pecuniary point of view it seemed safest for us to continue in the mission for we did not then know how we should succeed in supporting our families and if we were taken away suddenly we had little to leave them. We were then past our prime and having almost discarded the use of the English language for many years, we could hardly hope our preaching would prove acceptable to white people. For some years after we came to this country we had little use for the English except when transacting business at the Fort and we had little of that to do.

The language of the fur traders was French, and many of the

⁸¹ Treat was the corresponding secretary of the American Board.

Canadians could speak no other language. As we often had dealings with such persons we learned French enough to transact ordinary business with them. Mr Gavin aided us in learning to speak that language though I could read it very well and speak it some before I saw him. But it was the Dakota language that chiefly engaged our attention and we purposely avoided speaking English even in our intercourse with each other as soon as we were able to use the Dakota as a substitu[t]e for it. In fact for many years we used the Dakota so much more than we did the English that we thought in Dakota, dreamed in Dakota and when we spoke whether we intended it or not the Dakota would come first, so that I do not think we could speak the English as fluently when we were forty years old as when we were twenty.

It was not without many misgivings that we began to preach in English and if we did not succeed better than we expected we did not succeed very well. At the same time neither of us had the prestige of a collegiate or theological education. What we knew of Theology, languages &c we had not learned in colleges or theological seminari[es] and we knew this would affect our standing with our ministerial brethren and lessen with many of our hearers our influence and authority as preachers. When we began to preach to those around us it was simply because there was no one else to preach to them and with the expectation that we should soon be superseded by others whose services were more acceptable.

If our preaching to white people did not prove pecuniarily profitable we were not disappointed nor discouraged. Most of those who composed our congregations at first were poor. They promised us little and gave us less and we had to take the lead and be at more expense than others in building churches to preach in. This was especially the case with my brother without whom it would probably have been a long time before there would have been a church erected at Bloomington. The church that he gathered there seemed at first composed of discordant materials for its members were from three or four different denominations but they acted together harmoniously as long as he was their pastor and the efforts made by the clergymen of other denominations to draw away from him those who had formerly belonged to other churches all failed of success and he had the satisfaction of seeing many new converts added to his church.

He preached there [*blank in MS.*] years Quite as long as his health and strength were equal to the task And though he resigned the pastorate he seemed unable to lay of[f] the burden of responsibility connected with that office till released from it by death.

I hope the people of Bloomington will have better preache[r]s than he was but if his successors only do as well as he did they will be a people highly favored. I preached in Shakopee thirteen years and stopped as soon as I percieved that some of the congregation were dissatisfied with me and while a large majority were in favor of retaining me It is twelve years since I stopped preaching here and it is [*blank in MS.*] years since G resigned the Pastorate at Bloomingt[o]n⁸² He has had four successors and I four.⁸³

End of the History

⁸² Samuel resigned his pastorate in 1866. After a period of four months, however, his parishioners prevailed upon him temporarily to resume his position, and he served for the year 1867. The passage suggests that Samuel completed the present narrative in 1878 or 1879, but in the fourth paragraph of the account he refers to an event of 1833 as having occurred forty-seven years previously. Gideon resigned in 1874, but continued to preach during interims between successors until his death in 1878.

⁸³ A marginal comment by the author reads: "Gideon had four successors within three years from the time he stopped preaching."



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