

THE LABORS OF MGR. A. RAYOUX

AMONG THE

SIOUX OR DAKOTA INDIANS,

FROM THE FALL OF THE YEAR 1841 TO THE SPRING OF 1844.

Compliments of
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N. B. A. D. 1890, at the urgent requests of the Sisters of St. Joseph, St. Paul, Minnesota, Father Ravoux, who had been their spiritual director for thirty years at least, had his photograph taken and gave it to them as a *souvenir*—that we should often think and reflect on the love of Jesus Christ, who, after having enlightened this world of darkness by His heavenly lessons and miracles, and by every kind of good works, died upon the cross to deliver us from our sins, to make us children of God and partakers of His infinite happiness and glory in heaven forever and ever.

The souvenir, or a frequent recollection of this incomprehensible love of Jesus Christ for us, would inflame our hearts with an everlasting love for Him, and induce us to be obedient to His divine will, in all things, even unto death.

MGR. A. RAVOUX'S LABORS AMONG THE SIOUX OR DAKOTA INDIANS

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THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS, MAR. 7, 1867.

Some time ago I was requested by the Most Reverend Archbishop of St. Paul, Mgr. Ireland, to write a short sketch of my labors among the Sioux, or Dakota Indians, in the early days of our missions in this Western country. I thought at first that I had already narrated in my "Reminiscences and Memoirs" all events of interest; but later various things of some importance, at least for many persons, came to my mind, and so I was induced to write what follows.

I ought to observe that my bishop, the Right Rev. M. Loras of Dubuque, in August, 1841, appointed and commissioned me to establish a mission among the Sioux. I was exercising the holy ministry at Prairie du Chien, where I had been sent in January, 1840.

Before leaving Prairie du Chien I had received much information about the Sioux Indians from persons who knew well their character and their disposition toward the Christian religion. I perceived at once all the difficulties I would have to encounter, but my only hope was in God, through Jesus Christ, our Savior, the Light of the world.

From the beginning I was convinced that little could be done by me for the conversion of the Indians until I would be able to instruct them by myself, without an interpreter, in a short, plain and clear expose of the good news announced to them, in the name of God, for this present life, and more so for an eternal life, full of joy, pleasures and delights of every kind.

The first winter I visited Traverse des Sioux, Little Rock (near Fort Ridgely), and Lac qui Parle. Everywhere I was welcomed by the gentlemen who had each of them a trading post for the Indians in these localities, as I narrated in my "Memoirs," written in 1890. I spent about two months at Traverse des Sioux with Mr. LeBlanc, one month with Mr. La Bramboise at Little Rock, and two or three months at Lac qui Parle with Mr. Riville. I will never forget how kind they were to me fifty-five years ago. May God bless their families! May their souls rest in peace! They all helped me with pleasure in my study to acquire a knowledge of the Sioux language, and as interpreters when I had to speak to the Indians.

A few words on the winter of 1841-42. It was a hard winter, the snow was deep, the cold intense, and provisions were scarce. In the beginning of January Mr. Riville sent two men with four or five horses from Lac qui Parle to Mendota for the necessaries of life, flour, pork, etc. After their return to Lac qui Parle, on the 2d of February, the condition of things was not much improved for Mr. Riville's family and employes. The men coming back from Mendota to Lac qui Parle lost one horse. The other horses were weak, because they had not much to eat; and to feed them they had several times to cut down small trees. They stopped one night at Mr. La Framboise's place, and the following day I was their companion and traveled with them. Before arriving at Lac qui Parle, we had to pass three or four nights on the banks of the Minnesota river.

The weather was very cold, and, though we had a good fire, it was almost impossible for me to sleep. I remember that once I fell asleep, enveloped in my buffalo robe. After a short nap I stood up, looked at my buffalo robe, and saw that it had

been pierced by the fiery element. On the 2d of February, about 11 o'clock, we arrived at Lac qui Parle. The weather was fine and the sun shining. In 1842, as I have remarked, I was for two or three months at Lac qui Parle, and early in the spring I returned to Mendota, where I spent a few months with my friend, Father Galtier. Often he left Mendota and visited other places, where he had a few scattered Catholic families. During his absence I took care of the chapels of Mendota and St. Paul. It was in the same spring that the Chippewas and the Sioux had a great fight at Kaposia. On the same day I visited their village. I heard all the night their cries and lamentations, etc. (Memoirs, 1890.)

In Mendota, with the help of some good interpreters, I continued to prepare what I considered most necessary or useful for the completion of my book and the success of my mission.

The Freniere families from Lake Traverse were encamped near our chapel for several weeks, and in September they induced me to accompany them to Lake Traverse, where they intended to have a trading post for the Sioux, telling me that the Indians would be pleased to see me and hear the word of God. I was much disappointed, for the Indians, with a few exceptions, had left. Two or three weeks after, having found a favorable occasion, I returned to Mendota, where I saw again my dear friend, Father Galtier.

A few days later I was induced by the Faribault families, but more especially by that old and respectable gentleman, J. B. Faribault, to spend the winter with him and two of his sons, Oliver and David, both married, at Chaska, where he had a trading post for the Indians of Shakpe, or Shakopee, and also for the Sioux of another village at Carver, or near that locality. I was much pleased to be with them, for they loved the Indians and were deeply interested in the success of my mission. They spoke equally well the French, English and Sioux languages. They were good interpreters and very useful to me in translating my book into the Sioux language. I was not a little surprised to see that in a short time I could write and understand the Sioux language, while at our colleges in France I had spent so much time learning Latin and Greek.

This is the plan that I conceived and followed. It may be useful to some young missionaries going to Africa, to Japan, to China, or to Alaska:

First—We must have good interpreters.

Second—Things prepared for translation ought to be very clear and easy to be understood.

Third—The sentences must be short.

These were my rules when I was twenty-seven years of age, and these would be yet my rules, now, when I am a little over eighty-two years old.

As some may desire to know the contents of the book I wrote in order to teach the Sioux the precious and consoling truths of our holy religion, I will give a short sketch of it.

The title of the book is: "Wakantanka Ti ki Chanku;" or, "The Path to the House of God."

First Part—"The History of Our Holy Religion," containing sixteen short chapters. Subjects: 1, God manifests himself to men by his works; 2, The creation; 3, The fall of our first parents into sin; 4, The deluge; 5, Moses and his great works; 6, The Son of God made man for our redemption and salvation; 7, His doctrines; 8, His miracles; 9, His passion and death on the cross; 10, The manifestations of his power, even at the moment of his death; 11, His resurrection; 12, He appears and speaks to his apostles; 13, The descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles; 14, The first Christians, their sufferings and their victory; 15, All men shall die; 16, The end of the world, the resurrection and the last judgment, followed by an eternity of happiness or sorrow, etc.

Second Part—"A Catechism by Question and Answers."

Third Part—"The Principal Daily Prayers recited every day by Catholics."

Fourth Part—"Canticles and Hymns." I had about twenty of these in the first edition of my book, printed in 1843. The principal subjects were: God is the creator of all things; The Son of God made man for our salvation; The passion of Christ, in thirteen stanzas; Christ inviting the Sioux to hear his voice in order to be saved; Asking the Lord's pardon for our sins,

with promise to observe the commands; On the resurrection of Christ; On his victory over death, not only for himself, but also for all Christians faithful to their duties.

I was much indebted for the translation of my book to Alexander Faribault and to his brothers, Oliver and David Faribault, and to many other good interpreters.

The canticles were translated from the French canticles, sung in our schools and churches. I must remark, however, that I had to make many changes to adapt them to the intellect and capacity of the Indians.

Thanks be to God! it was a success, and we had a certain right to consider ourselves as masters in the arts of poetry and music in the vast regions of the Dakotas. Hundreds, even thousands of Sioux in our Catholic missions are now singing the canticles and hymns we composed and sang, in 1842 and 1843, at Mendota and Chaska.

As soon as we had a canticle or even a stanza translated from the French into the Sioux language, we tried to sing it, and often we sang it with the same facility as the French canticles. At Mendota we had a few half-breeds who were excellent singers. Father Galtier, their pastor since the spring of 1840, had taught them how to sing the praises of God. Father Galtier was a good singer. His voice was clear, sweet, noble, rich and strong. The half-breeds, his pupils, could sing well the French canticles, and their voices were no less harmonious when they were singing them in the Sioux language.

Here we give a little specimen of our canticles:

Wokonse owast
Tanyan oyapapi kihan,
Owihanke wanin
Pida yaunpi kta che.

This means: "If you observe well all the commands, you will be happy forever."

The construction, it will be noticed, is quite classical, a literal translation of the Sioux being:

Commands all
Well you observe if
End without
Happy you will be.

In the fall of 1842 the Sioux Indians of Shakpe village (where is now located Shakopee) left their village, crossed the Minnesota river and traveled into the big woods for their autumn and winter chase. It lasted about two months. The snow became too deep and they had to return to their winter headquarters before the beginning of January. They planted their tepees near Mr. J. B. Faribault's trading post, but on the other side of the Minnesota river, where they were encamped for three months. They occupied a fine piece of heavy timber, in the bottom land, extending to the river. At the opening of spring they went back to their village to work on their farm.

During the winter I had every day some opportunity to see and speak to many of them, especially at Mr. Faribault's trading post. There was another village of the Sioux Indians located at Carver, or near it, and occasionally they came down to the same trading post. I worked for them, as I did for those of Shakpe, announcing to them, according to circumstances, the good news of the gospel.

The Messrs. Faribault aided the success of my mission, not only in translating my book, but also by their good advice to the Indians, telling them to renounce Paganism and embrace the Christian religion. We had some Indian families inclined favorably to hear us, but many were very much opposed to a change of religion, especially the men belonging to the Great Medicine.

The old and respectable J. B. Faribault was very zealous for the conversion of the Indians. He did all in his power for the success of the mission. He would advise me to have courage and confidence, and say that before long the opposition would cease. "Often I hear them speaking together on the subject of religion," said he to me, "and I have confidence many will send their children to be instructed by you, and little by little they will embrace Christianity."

After prayer and reflection, I resolved to build, before the winter of 1843-44, a house or chapel where many Indians might send their children to be educated by the "Black Gown."

Black Gown! This word brings to my recollection a fine black cassock that I wore over fifty years ago. It was really a production of the industry of the land. The material was deer-

skin, dyed by Indian women, and the cassock was made by them. Clad in my new cassock, which I wore two or three years, I thought it was as fine and rich a cassock as I had ever seen before. After about twelve months it was no more a black cassock. Its color had become purple. A year or two later it had shrunk so much that I could wear it no longer. Then, by Indian industry, it was turned into several pairs of moccasins which were very useful to me.

All the winter of 1842-43 we worked day and night for the completion of our book, in order to have it printed in the spring. In the beginning of April I went to Dubuque to see the Rt. Rev. Mgr. Loras, who was my bishop. It was a hard and perilous journey. The ice yet covered the Mississippi. I was a companion of the mail carrier, who carried the mail on his back from Fort Snelling to Winona (then a naked prairie), or to Trempealeau, if the other mail carrier from Prairie du Chien had not been able at a certain time to reach the place marked by a few standing boards, where the two men were accustomed to exchange the mail. We had to go to Trempealeau, and the mail was exchanged there. On Easter Sunday we arrived at Prairie du Chien, and two days later I was at the residence of the right reverend bishop of Dubuque. (See Memoirs, 1890.)

I revealed to Monseigneur Loras the state of my mission among the Sioux and he appeared to be satisfied. I was but a few days in Dubuque, and the right reverend bishop gave me for the mission building, etc., \$300. As to the printing of my book, he advised me to stop at Prairie du Chien and to see there the Very Rev. Father Cretin, who had a small printing press and who would be pleased to help me.

Father Cretin was very kind to me. Always full of zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, he could not refuse me his services for the printing of my book, written for the mission of the Sioux. He spent several days in teaching me the art of printing, and then he started to visit several places in the territory of his own mission. He left me in full possession of the printing press and of the parish of Prairie du Chien, with the duties annexed to it. I had only a boy twelve or

thirteen years of age to help me. Happily, the good boy knew the art of printing and he was very useful to me all the time I was in Prairie du Chien.

Father Cretin visited scattered Catholic families on the Mississippi and Chippewa rivers, and was absent for several weeks. Some days after his return he visited the Winnebago Indians, who lived forty miles south of Prairie du Chien. Once, coming back from that mission, after having traveled forty miles on horseback, he said mass at 11:30 o'clock and took his breakfast after 12 o'clock. I was much edified. Father Cretin had a small black pony, which would travel sixty or seventy miles a day. It was a fine animal, but I was told that more than once he had thrown his reverend rider head over heels. During the previous year, 1842, Father Galtier had visited the Catholics working at the sawmills on the Chippewa river. He found there forty men, who were much pleased to see a priest that could give them instruction as to their Christian duties and prepare them for the reception of the sacraments.

Father Galtier bought at the sawmills lumber, shingles, etc., for the construction of a new chapel at Mendota, and he told me that a great portion of the materials necessary for his new chapel had been given to him by the men working at the mills. His work completed, his mission over, he left them happy, and he was thankful to God for the success of his visit.

A few words on the old chapel. Its dimensions were about 13x26 feet. The roof was heavy. It was covered with bark, and between the bark and the slabs, or boards, there was at least six inches of earth. In a corner of the building we had a small bedroom. Father Galtier being absent, I occupied it. One night when asleep I was awakened by a great noise, as if the roof was cracking and coming down. I jumped from my bed and endeavored to open the door. It resisted and was too much for my strength. But I tried again and opened it, ran to the front door, opened it without difficulty, and I was then out of danger on the street. It was early in the morning and very dark. I stood for at least one hour, listening to the cracking of the lumber of the roof. My clothing was very light, but happily it was not very cold. This happened in June or July.

The work of my book completed, I returned to my mission

with a good carpenter, who built me a house, or a chapel as they called it. The dimensions of it were about 15x30 feet, and the cost was \$250, perhaps a little more or less. The roof was covered with shingles, and the whole building had a good appearance. The location was very fine, and not far from the Minnesota river.

The Shakpe or Shakopee Indians, after their autumn and winter chase, erected their tepees, as they had done the preceding year, near the trading post of Mr. J. B. Faribault, and they remained there till the opening of spring, when they returned to Shakpe village, where they had their farm. During the winter of 1843-44, I taught the catechism to a certain number of children, and began to instruct them to read our books, printed at Prairie du Chien. We sang several canticles and hymns, but the principal one was "Wokonze owasi," etc., in order to teach them the commands of God and the church, and how to lead a good life, and to enrich themselves for heaven. Many Indians were pleased; others were not, and caused me some trouble, but I thought that the true light had begun to shine in the darkness, dispelling the black clouds of Paganism. Such was the state of my mission before Father Galtier left Mendota in the spring of 1844, to assume charge at Keokuk, Iowa, of a new congregation. Obligated to take care of the Catholics of Mendota, St. Paul and other localities, I could not continue the labors of my mission among the Indians of Shakpe. Mgr. Loras promised me again and again to send up a priest to Mendota, but he was unable to do so.

Some three years after I had left Chaska, Messrs. Faribault, who had taken care of the chapel, informed me that it was in danger of being burned by the Indians, unless it was removed to some other place. I wrote Mgr. Loras that the little chapel was in great danger of being destroyed, if it was not taken away. I requested him to let me have it. We would bring it down to St. Paul on the river, and could use it as a residence for the priest. He refused my request, because St. Paul was not in his diocese. He told me to endeavor to have it taken to Wabasha, and added that in order to help in defraying the expenses, he would give \$40. I let the Catholics of Wabasha know the proposition made by Mgr. Loras. It was accepted,