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LETTERS FROM THE PAST

Timothy E. Ranney and his wife, Charlotte, after their marriage in 1844 in Westminster West, Vt., set out as missionaries to the Indian country; and Charlotte's last letter in our July, 1953, issue expressed the hope that their work at the Pawnee Mission would be fruitful. This series of letters began in the April, 1953, issue with an introductory note by Charles R. Ranney. The notations are by Mr. Ranney. Editor.

PART III

IT IS EVIDENT that Charlotte's dream failed to come true, at least not in the next year, as shown by the following letter which is dated Bellevue, Council Bluffs. This Bellevue was on the west side of the Missouri, across the river from the present city of Council Bluffs. Whether it was located on the site of the present town of that name a few miles south of Omaha, is not evident. C.R.R.]

20.

My Dear Mother:— Bellevue, Council Bluffs, Dec. 25, 1845.

I have received no letter from you or any of our friends at Westminster for a long time, but I am laid under obligation to you by the receipt of a present by the hand of brother Joseph Addison. He wrote me when he returned from Vermont to Illinois that he had \$5 in his possession for me from you and wished to know how he should forward it to me. I requested him to use it in making the purchase of some books for me and to send them through a merchant in St. Louis, which he did. I received the books about the fifth of the present month. Some of the books were for Charlotte and some more particularly for me. These were very acceptable and have been read with much pleasure. They will be kept as a precious memorial of yourself and will be read, I trust, with gratitude to The Giver of Every Good Gift as well as to you.

You will see by the date of this that we are not now at our post among the Pawnees. We were frightened from our home last June by the Sioux Indians and came to this place, where we have been waiting to hear definitely something from the United States Government and from the Board of Missions. I have not written much to my friends in the East since we have been here because I have not known where

we should be to get answers. From intelligence I have received, if we do not return to the Pawnees, I expect to go among the Cherokees or Choctaws.

You may be interested to know something of the particulars of our fright in the Pawnee country, or perhaps you have heard through Charlotte's friends or from brother Joseph. We had been quite frightened several times by hostile tribes of Indians, and have been fired upon at our house. Once two balls from one gun were lodged in our house by the Puncah Indians. One of the balls came through between the logs and passed across the corner over our bed and stuck in a log at the end of the house beside the bed. It was in the afternoon near night and Charlotte was standing at the window on the side of the house from whence the gun was fired. The firing of this gun was the first intimation we had of the presence of any Indians in the neighborhood, but we were soon sensible there were some on all sides, for very soon the firing of guns was heard from every direction and Indians were seen, though not in large numbers. We do not think there were many, probably not more than twenty-five or thirty. We could see to count only twenty. This was the first time we had known of anything like opposition to our operations by any enemies of the Pawnees. After this, however, we were convinced by continual attacks and in various ways that it was the determination of the bordering tribes that we should not stay in peace. Horses were taken from us (the whites) and run off, before our eyes. On another occasion when I went to the door of our house, one Indian stood by the side of the door with his gun raised over my head. There were more a little distance from me, one of whom had a gun pointed at me, and two had their arrows on their bows pointing directly at me. What their object was I do not know. Perhaps they thought Pawnees were in the house and supposed that they could dispatch them upon their coming to the door. However, when they saw me and I spoke to them, they came up and appeared friendly and went on their way, but after getting out of sight they shot two cows.

How often after this hostile Indians came upon us, I do not now recollect, but we were often on the lookout for our enemies or rather the enemies of the Pawnees, and frequently saw them. In the month of June last we were visited by a party of Sioux, who appeared to be of a large number and quite hostile. The whites in the employ of the United States Government were so frightened they came to the conclusion that they were not safe in the Pawnee country and decided to leave immediately. We thought that our friends would not feel pleasantly if they knew that we were staying there alone under the

circumstances and concluded to leave with the rest. The U. S. Government has promised to give us protection and we may return in a month or two or we may go south. We are not yet decided which course is best. We know that whether we go to the Pawnees, flee, or go to some other field, we are in the hands of an Over Ruling Being who will order all things for the best even in Infinite Wisdom. We may die, we must die, we may die by the hand of violence, but our aim is to be prepared and to be found in the path of duty and to go with joy whenever and wherever The Master shall call.

This from your son, Timothy.

[*Enclosed in the same letter was the following in the hand of Charlotte. C.R.R.*]

21.

Dear Mother:—

Bellevue, Jan. 1, 1847.

A little space is assigned to me on this sheet devoted to you and I cheerfully improve the opportunity afforded. We often think and speak of you in your lonely situation these long winter evenings and should love to pass some of them with you. In the early part of last summer I did indulge the pleasant thought that we might now be on a visit to our friends in the East. That privilege is denied us and so we will have recourse to our pens. There is no disappointment, however trying, but that we shall some time see that it was for the best. At present we do not see why we are compelled to spend the winter here in a state of comparative idleness and inactivity. So far as the society is concerned, our situation among the Pawnees was preferable to this.

We live in a log house, one room of which answers for bedroom, parlor, kitchen, dining room, etc. The other room is occupied by an Indian family. The society is composed of French traders, a few Americans and Indians of the Pawnee, Otoe, Iowa, and Omaha tribes. The prevailing religion is Roman Catholic so far as there is any. The people are very low and debased. I may say they are not far removed from heathenism. I think they all have heathen wives. Avarice is the ruling passion of the traders, and they are willing to brave any danger to accomplish their object. Some of them are in affluent circumstances, and have respectable families in the United States, but are absent from them eleven months of the year and have families of heathen here. So regardless is man of his best interests. How true it is that "The love of money is the root of all evil." We do not know how long we shall be situated as we are at present, but we will probably leave here early in the spring if not before.

Mother and brothers, I wish you a happy New Year! May you

enjoy many years of happiness and usefulness. We live in a world and an age that requires all our efforts, and we will put them forth this year with more energy and faith than we have done before.

When we cast our eyes over these vast prairies and see them dotted here and there with villages of people who have immortal souls destined to a future state of happiness or misery, passing on without knowing or caring for their high destiny, we cannot but utter an ardent prayer that the Lord of the vineyard would send forth more laborers into His harvest without delay. Years are passing rapidly and many heads around us are fully blossomed for a heathen grave. Will not some of you resolve that you will do all in your power to rescue some of the present generation?

Affectionately yours, Charlotte.

22.

[During the winter spent in Bellevue Charlotte kept a journal which was preserved with the package of letters. In order to keep the chronological sequence, quotations taken from this Journal are entered in this record here under the dates on which the entries were made. C.R.R.]

Jan. 1, 1847. . . . The children living with us received an invitation to visit the children living with Mrs. Platt. I have therefore had a tolerably quiet afternoon except some company from Indians. Soon after the children's return Mrs. Platt came in and we had a very pleasant sing. Have heard of the death of two Omaha Indians this evening and the wailing of the mourners may be heard in several directions. Their death was occasioned by the Sioux. They have probably gone to heathen graves with none to care for their souls.

Jan. 2, 1847. . . . Last night about its noon we were aroused from our sleep by the voice of revelry and drunkenness. It proceeded from Coon Skin, an Otoe Indian, who in a former bacchanalian fit killed a white man and at another time shot one of his own tribe. His tongue was pretty essentially unloosened, and he spoke two or three dialects with an ease with which I never heard him speak before.

This evening as we sat at the supper table a corpse was borne past our window upon the shoulders of four individuals. It was the body of the woman of whose death we heard last evening. She did not however die until some time to-day. Her son was wounded at the same time that she was and died yesterday. On hearing of his death she passed into a sinking state and did not revive until sometime this morning. She then spoke of going to a better country with her children, tore open the wound in her side that had previously been sewn up, and

died in about three quarters of an hour. The two bodies were placed in the same grave. There has been as usual loud lamenting at their graves this evening. . . . Soon after supper Mr. McKinney called for some medicine for his infant whom he feared was going to have the thrush. He said his wife had not enjoyed her usual degree of health for several days and gave me a kind invitation to go and visit. While he was in, the Missouri Chief called to get some medicine for sore eyes.

Jan. 3, 1847.—The Sabbath. At early dawn the notes of wailing fell upon my ears. They came from the friends of those who were buried yesterday. . . . Attended meeting, rather more than the usual attendance present. Timothy read the XVIII chapter of Genesis in Pawnee. Most of the children gave good attention except ours, and they pained me very much by their inattention. The sermon in English was founded on Job. VII, 16. 'I would not live always.'

This evening had some talk with Eliza upon her conduct in church. She appeared very indifferent to what I said and after I had finished asked permission to go about her play. I told her that God was angry with those who did not wish to keep His Sabbath, and that I was very much afraid she did not love Him and that He would be obliged to punish her. May the Lord take away her blindness and her hardness of heart, and lead her in the paths of rectitude and peace. . . .

23.

Jan. 4, 1847. This morning Coon Skin came in and said he drank whisky yesterday. He did not need to tell us of it. However, his conduct last night was ample proof of his assertion. He made some wise comments on the unprofitableness of trading for so useless an article. . . .

Jan. 5, 1847. This morning rose quite early to wash and was considerably startled by the noise of intoxicated Indians. They had been drinking all night and we heard them singing merrily about one o'clock. None of them came in here till this evening when Coon Skin came. The Missouri Chief who had not been drinking was here and was eating. Coon Skin did his errand and went out. He soon returned, however, with his woman and wished for something to eat. I gave him some food and after eating some and talking more he went out. He has been very noisy but is now quiet. Most of the Indians are drunk. . . . One of the Otoe chiefs (Big Kaw) sold a mule worth about \$30 for three little kegs of whisky and on coming home distributed it to his people. . . .

Jan. 6, 1847. . . . It has been very cold the mercury falling to zero. Eliza had a chill to-day and it made her quite sick. . . .

Jan. 7, 1847. . . . To-day has been severely cold. The mercury fell to eight below zero. . . .

Jan. 9, 1847. . . . Early this morning the Missouri Chief came in and spoke of the depredations the Omahas are committing upon the Mormons' cattle. Said that in one day they killed no less than fifteen. . . . This afternoon a Pawnee boy who is called Joe came in, as I supposed, for his supper. . . .

Jan. 10, 1847. The Sabbath. . . . Attended meeting, the text was Mark XIV, 7. 'and many were there found who bore false witness of Him, but their witness did not agree'. . . . Had some Indian company to-day. A woman calling herself a Pawnee came in this afternoon for her supper. She is the wife of an Otoe who is considered among the offscouring of his nation and has recently deserted her for what cause I do not know. She appeared happy and maybe she has no reason to appear otherwise. . . . Mr. Bloohen called for some medicine for Mrs. McKinney. He complained bitterly of the cold at their residence and thought we knew nothing of it. I assured him we had a pretty fair trial of it but failed to convince him.

Jan. 11, 1847. . . . This evening the woman who lives in the other part of the house came in and said that the news had come that the Sioux had fallen upon a party of Omaha and Pawnee and had destroyed them all. Soon after the Missouri Chief came to ascertain the truth of the report. We doubt it very much though it may be true. . . .

Jan. 12, 1847. . . . This morning had a call from the Missouri Chief and before noon Big Kaw came in also. He said his business was to inquire whether the Sioux had fought the Pawnee this winter as reported last evening. The report appears to be without foundation.

The Indian Agent came in and invited Timothy to be present at the trial of Mr. Platt this afternoon. . . . It has been very pleasant to-day. The mild influence of the sun has been unchaining the ice-bound earth and water has stood in some places to the depth of an inch. To gratify our children we invited all the Pawnee children in the country to come in and take supper with us. There were more than twenty present. . . .

Jan. 14, 1847. . . . Early this morning Timothy went to the Agency to carry my letters. He saw the Agent who had received some papers from below and among others an official document requesting him to

ascertain whether it was the Pawnees that robbed several wagons last fall on the Sante Fé road. . . .

Jan. 15, 1847. . . . The month of January is half gone. Thus rapidly is time flying. Little did I think when we took up our abode here last fall we should be found here at this time. . . . This evening though it is very cold the Indians have not neglected to make a fire near the graves of the friends they buried yesterday. This they do in part to protect them from wild beasts. . . .

Jan. 16, 1847. . . . While we were at supper Mr. Ray Harvey came in and brought a letter from Mr. Green and some papers from the office. Had my expectations somewhat aroused hoping to hear something more decisive as to our future course. The papers contained news of the death of Dr. William Armstrong, one of the secretaries of the A.B.C.F.M. He was lost on the steamer Atlantic on Fisher's Island. . . . There is a fire upon the bluff again this evening for the same reason that it was there last night. . . .

Jan. 17, 1847. The Sabbath. . . . Early this morning received a call from Big Kaw. He was inclined to be sociable, but I did not say much to him as his thoughts ran upon his treatment from the traders. . . . Attended meeting, the discourse was founded upon Gal. V, 9: 'A little leaven leavens the whole lump'. . . . As we came home Mrs. LaForce was standing at our door and came in with us. She said little but presented us with a bowl of walnut meats already extracted from the shell. . . . This evening the woman from the other side of the house was in. I asked her why the Indians made a fire near a recent grave. She said that it was because the mind was not entirely gone and it was made for that to see by. They usually have them burning two nights after the burial. She said she buried a child four years ago and every year she goes and destroys the grass near the grave so it may see. . . .

Jan. 18, 1847. . . . A very cold night and this morning blowing almost a gale. Some snow fell which found its way into our house. . . . About noon Mr. Bloohen came in. He said it was no good wind that brought him down here and that we could have no conception of how cold it was in his room. This morning when he awoke he was covered two inches deep with snow. . . .

Early this morning the Missouri Chief came in for breakfast. When he comes in so he usually stays during our devotions and always kneels. As he was about to leave he said, "Now brother and daughter,

I have no more to say." He has once or twice before called me his daughter. . . .

I am quite tired of this way of living and sometimes think I am ready to go anywhere if I may but be useful. It is my desire to have some purpose in the world. Here it seems that I am accomplishing nothing. I can only talk my native tongue, save a little broken Pawnee which does not amount to much.

Jan. 19, 1847. . . . The Otoes have killed an animal of ours to-day. The animal was very much chilled this morning as it was a very cold night. The Indians saw it laying there, as they say 'for nothing,' dispatched it and took the meat. An Otee whom the Pawnees call Eagle Chief came to ask for it, but seeing no one of whom he could get permission went out without saying anything. . . .

Jan. 20, 1847. . . . We were visited this morning by Big Kaw who spoke of Mr. Allis as about to go to the Pawnees and leave his wife here. . . . Mrs. Allis came in this afternoon but did not stay long. I accompanied her to Mrs. Platt's. Mrs. Platt spoke of her family of Pawnees as being very much endeared to her and of its being very trying to send them back to heathenism. She spoke of one in particular who seemed to be under the operation of the Spirit. That she had frequently spoken with her upon the subject of religion and of her personal feelings, also of her anxiety for her people. After conversing with her for a little time upon the prospects of the Pawnees, we spent some time in singing. . . . This evening have been very troubled to find that Eliza has been guilty of theft. I tried to impress upon her mind the sinfulness of the act and the displeasure God has of sin. She tried to brave it out in an indifferent spirit, but she eventually was touched and I hope will not again be guilty of a similar act.

Jan. 21, 1847. . . . I went to Mr. McKinney's early this morning and found them in their usual health but wanting some of the comforts of life, namely some wood. Mr. Pettjohn although his eyes were very sore went and drew them a load. . . .

Jan. 22, 1847. . . . Timothy went over the river to-day as Mr. Bloothen was going and called for him. . . . Mrs. Platt called this afternoon and spoke of a remark I made to her over a year ago about trading for children. I had entirely forgotten it but afterwards recalled saying I disapproved of the plan. She said if by giving the parents something they could obtain their children and save them from heathenism she could not see where it was wrong. After discussing

the subject a while, neither of us having changed our minds, we had a pleasant sing. . . .

Jan. 23, 1847. . . . Heard crying this evening in an Omaha lodge. Enquired of the Missouri Chief, who was in at the time, if he knew the cause. He said it was at his lodge but that he had been gone for some time from it looking for horses. When he came back he heard weeping but turned in here and knew nothing of the cause. . . . This evening anticipated some quiet and an opportunity to read, but have been disappointed as we have had plenty of Indian company that was inclined to be very social. . . . The men who were sent out to see into the condition of the Pawnee villages were expected to return to-day. They have not yet come in; we know not the cause of their detention.

Jan. 24, 1847. The Sabbath. . . . Did not attend meeting as Eliza had a chill. Read some in Dick's Christian Philosopher. This evening Coon Skin and his woman came in. . . .

Jan. 26, 1847. . . . Yesterday three of Mrs. Platt's children came and spent the afternoon with us. Timothy thought they might have come for religious conversation and he conversed with them some. He says they are seriously impressed. May it not be as the morning cloud and the early dew, but may the Spirit strive till they are brought to the feet of the Savior! Oh that the Lord would appear to build up Zion in this part of the world where nothing but sterility prevails!

Jan. 27, 1847. . . . Mr. Riggins applied to go to the Pawnees if we should return in the spring. . . . Eliza visited Mr. Papin and brought home some onions and dried venison. It is the first venison I have ever tasted. . . .

Jan. 28, 1847. . . . This morning was surprised to see an inch or two of new snow on the ground and still snowing. It has been still and quiet to-day, not enough wind to move the snow from the trees. This afternoon the sun came out mildly and pleasantly and this evening is truly delightful. As Mr. Platt is absent, Timothy and I spent a little time with Mrs. Platt. At the usual time for her children to go to bed she gave the Bible to Timothy and requested him to explain a passage to them and also to lead in prayer as was her usual practice. He read the parable of the Prodigal Son to which the children gave good attention. After the children had gone to bed, sang several tunes from the Northern Harp. . . .

Jan. 29, 1847. . . . The surrounding scenery this morning presented a most lovely aspect, everything was clothed in a garb of pure white,

a fit emblem of the spotless purity of that bright world where nothing is permitted to tarnish its glowing lustre and all is peace and happiness. . . .

Jan. 30, 1847. . . . Last evening just before retiring we heard loud weeping and other indications that the 'Hydra Monster' had again found its way into the lodges of the Indians. About ten o'clock we were aroused from our sleep by the clamor of the drunken. The author of the noise was in an excited and angry state and threatened the death of those who presumed to thwart his plans. . . . This evening the Missouri Chief who has absented himself from here for some time came in and took supper with us. He was social and pleasant.

