

FROM A CENTURY OF DISHONOR

JOURNAL OF THE MARCH BY E.A. HOWARD

The story of that removal was written out in full at the time by the agent who superintended it. That he should forward this report to the Department of the Interior was natural; but that the Department of the Interior should have been willing to publish it to the country, to have it on the official record of its management of Indian affairs for the year 1877, is strange. It will make a fitting conclusion to this sketch of the history of the Ponca tribe. The name of this agent was E. A. Howard. He calls the report "Journal of the March."

"May 21st. Broke camp at seven o'clock and marched to Crayton, a distance of thirteen miles. Roads very heavy. The child that died yesterday was here buried by the Indians, they preferring to bury it than to have it buried by the white 'people.

"May 22d. Broke camp at seven o'clock and marched to Neligh, a distance of about twenty-five miles. The day was cool, and, the road being high and comparatively good, the travel was made without much inconvenience.

"May 23d. The morning opened with light rain; but at eight o'clock a terrific thunderstorm occurred of two hours' duration, which was followed by steady rain throughout the day, in consequence of which we remained in camp. During the day a child died, and several women and children were reported sick, and medical attendance and medicine were procured for them.

"May 24th. Buried the child that died yesterday in the cemetery at Neligh, giving it a Christian burial. Broke camp at ten o'clock and marched about eight miles, crossing the Elkhorn River about two miles below Oakdale Village. Were unable to cross at Neligh, the road being about two feet under water and the bridges being washed away. The road was fearfully bad, and much time and labor were expended in making the road and bridges at all passable over the Elk-horn flats, where the crossing was affected.

"May 25th. Broke camp at six o'clock and marched twenty miles, to a point on Shell Creek. No wood at this place, and none to be had except what little had been picked up and brought in by the trains. Weather cold, damp, and dreary. The Indians during the day behaved well, and marched splendidly.

"May 26th. The morning opened with a heavy continuous rain, which prevailed until ten o'clock. Broke camp at eleven o'clock and marched eight miles farther down Shell Creek, when it again commenced raining, and we went into camp. The evening set in cold and rainy, and no wood to be had except what was purchased of a settler.

"May 27th. The morning opened cold, with a misty rain. Rain ceased at half-past seven o'clock, and we broke camp at eight and marched eight miles farther down Shell Creek, when, a heavy thunder-storm coming on, we again went into camp. Several of the Indians were here found to be quite sick, and having

This evidently was not the "consent" of which we have heard. We come to it presently.

"On the following morning, however, May 16th, they sent word to me, at an early hour, that they had considered my words, and had concluded to go with me, and that they wanted assistance in getting the old and infirm, together with their property, over the Niobrara River, which was much swollen by the rains and at a low temperature."

What a night must these helpless creatures have passed before this "consent" was given! Seven hundred people, more than half of them women and children a farming people, not armed with rifles, as the Ogallala Sioux were, when, one year later, on this same ground, the Chief Spotted Tail told Commissioner Hayt that, if he did not give an order to have his tribe on the way back to White Clay Creek in ten days, his young men would go on the war-path at once; and the much terrified commissioner wrote the order then and there, and the Sioux were allowed to go where they had chosen to go. Behold the difference between the way our Government treats the powerful and treats the weak! What could these Ponca farmers do? They must, "without delay," give their "final answer whether they would go peaceably or by force." What did "by force" mean? It was "by force" that the Government undertook to compel the Cheyenne to go to Indian Territory; and in that Cheyenne massacre the Cheyenne men, women, children, and babies were all shot down together!

What could these Ponca farmers do? What would any father, brother, husband have done under the circumstances? He would have "consented" to go.

The agent, as was wise, took them at their word, quickly, and that very day, "at five o'clock P.M., had the entire tribe, with their effects, across the river, off the reservation, and in camp in Nebraska."

The agent should have said, "with part of their effects," for it was only a part, and a very small part, that this helpless consenting party were allowed to take with them. All their agricultural implements and most of their furniture were left behind.

"It was a hard days work," the getting the tribe and their "effects" across the river, the agent says; "the river being about forty rods wide, and the current so swift that it was found impossible to move the goods across in any other way than by packing them on the shoulders of the men, the quicksand bottom rendering it unsafe to trust them on the backs of animals; even the wagons having to be drawn across by hand."

Let us dwell for a moment on this picture. Seven hundred helpless, heart-broken people beginning their sad journey by having to ford this icy stream with quicksand's at bottom. The infirm, the sick, the old, the infants, all carried "by packing them on the shoulders of the men!" What a scene! The Honorable Secretary of the Interior said, in one of the letters in his newspaper controversy with the inspector in regard to the accounts of this removal, that "the highly-colored stories which are told about the brutal military force employed in compelling their [the Ponca'] removal from Dakota to the Indian Territory are

"**June 7th.** Quite a heavy rain during the afternoon. The storm, most disastrous of any that occurred during the removal of the Ponca under my charge, came suddenly upon us while in camp on the evening of this day. It was a storm such as I never before experienced, and of which I am unable to give an adequate description. The wind blew a fearful tornado, demolishing every tent in camp, and rending many of them into shreds, overturning wagons, and hurling wagon-boxes, camp-equipages, etc., through the air in every direction like straws. Some of the people were taken up by the wind and carried as much as three hundred yards. Several of the Indians were quite seriously hurt, and one child died the next day from injuries received, and was given Christian burial. The storm caused a delay until the 8th for repairs, and for medical attendance upon the injured.

"**June 8th.** Broke camp at Milford and marched seven miles. Roads very bad. Child died during the day.

"**June 9th.** Put the child that died yesterday in the coffin and sent it back to Milford, to be buried in the same grave with its aunt, Prairie Flower. Broke camp at seven o'clock and marched to within three miles of Crete.

"June 10th. Broke camp at seven o'clock and marched one mile beyond De Witt, where I employed a physician to visit camp and prescribe for the sick. A woman had a thumb accidentally cut off, which caused further commotion in the camp.

"**June 12th.** Broke camp at seven o'clock and marched to within two miles of Otoe Agency. Crossed Wolf Creek with a part of the train, the crossing being very difficult; but the Indians worked splendidly."

"The Indians worked splendidly!" Is not this a well-nigh incredible record of patience and long-suffering? These poor creatures, marching from ten to twenty-five miles a day, for twenty-two days, through muddy sloughs, swollen rivers, in tempests and floods and dreary cold, leaving their wives and their

"**June 13th.** After considerable time we succeeded in building a bridge over Wolf Creek out of drift-timber, and succeeded in crossing the balance of the train. Broke camp and marched three miles, and went into camp again near Otoe Agency.

"**June 14th.** Water-bound, and had to remain in camp all day waiting for creek to run down. The Otoe Indians came out to see the Ponca, and gave them ten ponies.

"**June 15th.** Still water-bound. Remained in camp all day.

"**June 16th.** Broke camp at seven o'clock and reached Marysville, Kansas, where we went into camp. During the march a wagon tipped over, injuring a woman quite severely. Indians out of rations, and feeling hostile."

What wonder that the Indians felt hostile? Hunger added to all the rest of their direful misery!

"recuperation," surely " much required " and fairly earned. Not one dollar had been appropriated for establishing them in their new home; not one building had been put up. This people was set down in a wilderness without one provision of any kind for their shelter.

"It is a matter of astonishment to me," says Agent Howard (p. 100 of this "Report "), "that the Government should have ordered the removal of the Ponca Indians from Dakota to the Indian Territory without having first made some provision for their settlement and comfort. Before their removal was carried into effect an appropriation should have been made by Congress sufficient to have located them in their new home, by building a comfortable home for the occupancy of every family of the tribe. As the case now is, no appropriation has been made by Congress except of a sum little more than sufficient to remove them; and the result is that these people have been placed on an uncultivated reservation, to live in their tents as best they may, and await further legislative action."

This journal of Mr. Howard's is the best record that can ever be written of the sufferings of the Ponca in their removal from their homes. It is "highly colored;" but no one, however much it may be for his interest to do so, can call it "a sensational fabrication," or can discredit it in the smallest particular, for it is an "official record," authorized and endorsed by being published in the "Annual Report" of the Secretary of the Interior.

The remainder of the Ponca tribe is still in Indian Territory, awaiting anxiously the result of the efforts to restore to them their old homes, and to establish the fact of their indisputable legal right to them.