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MS 35

From the Sioux City Journal
August 1, 1926

In a house on the bank of Perry creek a gray haired man sits at a desk writing. His face, tanned and wrinkled by wind, rain, sun and snow, would seem out of keeping with his long black robe of Jesuit priesthood were it not for the expression which illuminates it.

It is the last day of April, 1867. Through the open windows comes the jangle of cowbells, and the shouts of children at play near the creek. Seated on the grass just outside the window near which the priest is writing, is a group of blanketed Indians. It is Pananniapapi, chief of the Yankton Sioux, and his associates returning from Washington where he has been at the summons of the government.

The Indians wait as near the black robed priest as possible. They sit in silence in a circle there in the grass thinking over many things. There is bad business in the Indian country. The Indians do not like the treatment they are getting. They are restless and threatening to go on the warpath. Pananniapapi has spent some months in Washington and the great white father had talked to him. But what of it? The white men talk two ways: they say one thing to the Indians with one side of their mouth but take it back with the other. Only one man will the Indians believe. He is the man who sits at the desk writing. Father Pierre De Smet.

When Pananniapapi and his band arrived in Sioux City there to await the boat which would take them on to Fort Randall, they learned that Father De Smet on his mission of peace to the Sioux was also waiting in Sioux City for the boat. They came at once to the house on Perry creek where Father De Smet was a guest in the lodgings of the young curate, John Curtis. They greeted Father De Smet eagerly, and begged him to stop with them at Fort Randall to visit the Yanktons. When De Smet had returned their greetings and had given his promise, the Indians withdrew to the yard about the house, there to wait, content in being thus near the object of their veneration.

This is what the priest is writing:

"I have a little leisure here at Sioux City and will make use of it to send you a few words. I shall also make an effort during my long and dangerous mission to keep you informed from time to time in regard to what I see and what happens to me, whether good or bad, among the Indian tribes of the plains whom I propose to visit, if they will let me. Will they receive me among them, while all hatchets are raised against the whites, while hundreds of scalps dangle and flutter in token of triumph from the tips of their lances and are used for decorations for the warriors and their ponies? ***** More than ever the fearful Sassakwi, the Indian war cry, resounds through the great desert. The government asks me to go thither in the capacity of envoy extraordinary. **** I am on the road to endeavor to accomplish my arduous mission, which is simply one of charity, in behalf of the whites and in the interest of the Indians themselves, who are threatened with total annihilation unless they can be brought back to submission and peace. **** I enter these sad details to give you a faint idea