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FREDERICK AYER, TEACHER AND MISSIONARY TO THE OJIBWAY INDIANS 1829 TO 1850.

(Written at request of Rev. Mr. Boutwell.)

Frederick Ayer was born in Stockbridge, Mass., in 1803. When he was two years old the family moved to Central New York. His father was a Presbyterian minister, and he intended that his son should follow the same profession; but before he was prepared his health failed and he turned his attention to other business.

He commenced his labors for the Indians in 1829 by teaching the mission school at Mackinaw under the superintendence of Rev. Wm. M. Ferry. The pupils of this school were not all Ojibways, but were from many different tribes and spoke different languages.

Mackinaw was then a general depot of the North American fur traders. They brought not only their own children to the school, but such others as parents among whom they were trading wished to send. They were gathered from Lake Winnipeg, B. A., north, to Prairie du Chien and the head of Lake Michigan south. They were taught in English only.

In the summer of 1830 Mr. Ayer went to La Pointe, Lake Superior, with Mr. Warren, opened a school and commenced the study of the Ojibway language. In 1831 he met at Mackinaw Rev. Messrs. Hall and Boutwell, who were sent out by the A. B. C. F. M. to the Indians, and he returned with Mr. and Mrs. Hall and their interpreter to spend another winter at La Pointe.

The next year, 1832, Mr. Ayer wintered with another trader at Sandy Lake. He opened a school there and completed a little Ojibway spelling book, which was commenced at La Pointe. In the spring of 1833 he left Sandy Lake for Utica, N. Y., to get the book printed. Mr. Aitkin, with whom he had wintered, gave him \$80, and, with a pack on his back and an experienced guide, he started on his journey. Before they reached Sault Ste. Marie the ice in Lake Superior was so weak that Mr. Ayer broke through and was saved only by carrying horizontally in his hands a long pole to prevent his sinking.

(Before arriving at any settlement they were out of provisions; but fortunately, providentially, I should say, they came to a sugar camp. Here they got fish of the Indians and a quart of corn, which they crushed between two stones, and this sufficed till they reached Fort Brady.)

Mr. Ayer hastened on to complete the object of his journey that he might return to Mackinaw in time to go up Lake Superior with the traders.

Hitherto Mr. Ayer had been an independent worker. He now put himself under the direction of the "American Board" (he married a teacher of the Mackinaw school) and was sent to Yellow Lake, Wis., within the present bounds of Burnett county. Miss Delia Cook, whose name should never be forgotten among the early missionaries, of the American Board to the Indians, and Miss Hester Crooks, daughter of Ramsey Crooks, a girl educated at Mackinaw, and who had some experience in teaching, were among the number who coasted up Lake Superior in a mackinaw boat; the former to La Pointe mission, the latter to Yellow Lake, * with Mr. and Mrs. Ayer. They wintered in Dr. Borup's family at La Pointe. Mrs. Borup also had for some years been a pupil at Mackinaw. The next year Miss Crooks married Rev. Mr. Boutwell and went to Leech Lake; and John L. Seymour and Miss Sabrina Stevens, sister of J. D. Stevens, also Henry Blatchford, an interpreter from Mackinaw, were added to Yellow Lake mission. When Mr. Ayer told the Indians his object in coming among them they gave him a welcome. But six months later, seeing two or three log houses in process of building, they were much troubled, and met in a body to request him to go away. A Menomonee, from the region of Green Bay, had stirred them up, not against the missionaries, but against the general government. The speaker said: "It makes the Indians sad to see the white man's house go up on their land. We don't want you to stay; you must go." And further on he said: "You shall go." Mr. Ayer answered him. The party left at midnight, and the missionaries went to bed with heavy hearts, thinking that they might be thrust out almost immediately. But before sunrise the next morning about two-thirds of the

*Yellow Lake river, which flows into the St. Croix from the Wisconsin side half way between Lake Superior and the Mississippi, is the outlet of Yellow lake.

same party returned and said they had come to take back what they had said the night before. The war chief was speaker, but his words were mild. "Why," said he, "should we turn these teachers away before they have done us any harm?" They would like to have us stay, he said, but added that they did not want any more to come, for the result might be the loss of their lands. We might use whatever their country afforded, but they would not give us any land nor sell us any. "For," said the speaker, "if we should sell our land where would our children play?"

Mr. Ayer finished his school house and went on with his work as though nothing had happened. But evidently things were not as they should be. The old chief seemed to "sit on the fence" ready to jump either way. The war chief was always friendly, but he had not so much control over what concerned us. He did what he could without giving offense and was anxious that his daughter of fourteen years should be taken into the mission family. Mr. Ayer remained two years longer at Yellow Lake. In the meantime the chief of Snake River band sent messages inviting the teachers to come and live among them. Accordingly in the spring of 1836 the mission was removed to Pokaguma lake, eighteen miles up the river. The chief did all he had promised, and showed himself a man. Nothing was said here to remind the missionaries that they were using the Indians' wood, water and fish. On the contrary, when they sold their land it was urged that the teacher's children should be enrolled for annual payment the same as their own. The chief said that as they were born on the land it was no more than right, and he wished it might be done. Franklin Steele was the first white man who came to visit the missionaries at Yellow Lake. For sufficient reasons, Mr. and Mrs. Seymour had gone to Quincy, Ill., to pursue their studies, and Rev. Mr. Boutwell and Mr. Ely had been added to the mission. A school had been opened, some Indian houses built, gardens enlarged, a church organized, and the future looked hopeful. "But things have an end."

In 1840 the Sioux selected this settlement as the place to avenge the wrongs of the Ojibways—some of recent date; the principal of which was the killing of two sons of Little Crow, done in self-defense, between Pokaguma and the Falls of the St. Croix.

The Sioux arrived at Pokaguma in the night and stopped on the opposite side of the lake, two miles from the mission. The main body went to the other side, and, after examining the ground where they intended to operate, hid among the trees and brush back of the Indian gardens, with orders that all keep quiet on both sides of the lake till the given signal, when the Indians were busy in their gardens, and then make quick work. But their plans failed. Most of the Ojibways of the settlement had, from fear of the Sioux, slept that night on an island half a mile out in the lake (I mean the women and children), and were late to their gardens. In the meantime a loaded canoe was nearing the opposite shore, and the few Sioux who had remained there to dispatch any who, in time of battle, might attempt to escape by crossing over, fired prematurely. This gave the alarm and saved the Ojibways. The chief ran to Mr. Ayer's door and said expressively, "The Sioux are upon us," and was off. They seemed at once to understand that the main body of the enemy was close at hand. The missionaries stepped out of the door and had just time to see a great splashing of water across the lake, when bullets came whizzing about their ears, and they went in. The Sioux had left their hiding place, and the battle commenced in earnest. Most of the women and children of the settlement were yet on the island. The house of the war chief was well barricaded, and most of the men gathered in there. The remainder took refuge in a house more exposed at the end of the village. The enemy drew up very near and fired in at the window. One gun was made useless, being indented by a ball. The owner retired to a corner and spent the time in prayer. The mother of the house, with her small children, was on her way to the island under a shower of bullets, calling aloud on God for help.

The missionaries, seeing from their window quantities of bloody flesh thrown upon stumps in the battlefield, thought surely that several of their friends had fallen. It proved to be only a cow and a calf of an Ojibway. The mission children were much frightened, and asked many questions, and for apparent safety went up stairs, and were put behind some well-filled barrels. In the heat of the battle two Ojibways came from the island and landed in front of Mr. Ayer's house. They drew their canoe ashore and secreted themselves as

well as surroundings would permit. Not long after three Sioux ran down the hill and toward the canoe. They were fired upon and one fell dead. The other two ran for help, but before they could return the Ojibways were on the way back to the island. Not having time to take the scalp of their enemy, they hastily cut the powder horn strap, dripping with blood, from his breast as a trophy of victory. The Sioux drew the dead body up the hill and back to the place of fighting. The noise ceased. The battle was over. The missionaries soon heard the joyful words, quietly spoken, "We still live." Not a warrior had fallen. The two school girls who were in the canoe at the first firing in the morning were the only persons killed, though half of the men and boys in the fight were wounded.

The Sioux women and boys who had come with their warriors to carry away the spoil had the chagrin of returning as empty as they came.

The Ojibways were careful that no canoes should be left within reach of the Sioux. The Sioux marauders found a log canoe, made by Mr. Ely, and removed their dead two miles up the river, dressed them (seemingly) in the best the party could furnish, with each a double-barreled gun, a tomahawk and scalping-knife, set them against some large trees and went on their way. (Some of these articles, also their elegant (?) head-dresses were sent to the museum of the American Board in Boston.)

In the closing scene the missionaries had the opportunity of seeing the difference between those Indians who had listened to instructions and those who had not. The second day after the battle the pagan party brought back to the island the dead bodies of their enemies, cut in pieces, and distributed parts to such Ojibways as had at any time lost friends by the hands of the Sioux. One woman, whose daughter was killed and mutilated on that memorable morning, when she saw the canoes coming with a head raised in the air on a long pole, waded out into the water, grabbed it like a hungry dog and dashed it repeatedly on the stones with savage fierceness. Others of the pagans conducted themselves in a similar manner. They even cooked some of the flesh that night in their kettles of rice. Eunice (as she was named at her baptism) was offered an arm. At first she hesitated; but for reasons, suffi-

cient in her own mind, thought best to take it. Her daughter-in-law, widow of the son who had recently been killed and chopped in pieces by the Sioux, took another, and they went into their lodge. Eunice said, "My daughter, we must not do as some of our friends are doing. We have been taught better." And, taking some white cloths from her sack, they wrapped the arms in them, offered a prayer and gave them a decent burial.

About this time a Mr. Kirkland was sent from Quincy, Ill., by a party who wished to plant a colony not far from the mission station. He arrived at Pokagama very soon after the battle. Notwithstanding what had happened he selected a location on Cross lake, just where a railroad has now been in operation for some years (Pine City). He worked vigorously for two or three weeks and then went to consult the Indian agent and the military at Fort Snelling. They gave him no encouragement that the two tribes would ever live in peace and he went home.

The Ojibways lived in constant fear, and the place was soon deserted. This was a great trial to the missionaries, but they did not urge them to stay. They separated into small parties and went where they could get a living for the present and be out of danger. The teachers remained at their post, occasionally visiting the Indians in their retreat, hoping they might soon think it safe to return to their homes. In this they were disappointed. These visits were not always very safe. On one of these trips Mr. Ayer was lost, and from cold and hunger came near perishing. Not finding the party he sought, he wandered about for a day or two. In the meantime the weather became much colder. Not expecting to camp out he took only one blanket and food enough for one meal. In crossing Kettle river on a self-made conveyance, and there being ice on the opposite shore, he got wet. The Indians, anticipating his visit, had sent a young man to the mission station to guide him to their new locality. He returned in haste, fell on Mr. Ayer's track, and a light sprinkle of snow enabled him to follow it till he was found.

In 1842 Mr. Ayer went with his family to the States, and in Oberlin was ordained preached to the Ojibways. He soon returned to the Indian country, and David Brainerd Spencer, an Oberlin student went with him. They spent the winter of

1842-3 in traveling from one trading post to another, selecting locations for missionary labor. For their own field they chose Red Lake. When Mrs. Ayer, with her two little boys, six and eight years old, went to join her husband at the new station, Alonzo Barnard and wife and S. G. Wright, all of Oberlin college, went with her. Other missionaries soon followed, and that station was for many years supplied with efficient laborers. More recently the work there was assigned to Bishop Whipple, and is still carried on. The Red Lake Indians were a noble band—they had a noble chief. In civilization he led the way, in religion he did not oppose. He shouldered a heavy ax, and could be seen chopping on one side of a large tree in profuse perspiration, while his wife was on the other side helping what she could with her hatchet. This chief was also an advocate of temperance. Not that he did not love whisky, but he hated the effect of it on his band. He dictated a letter to the president, begging him not to let the white-faces bring any more fire-water to his people, giving as one reason that they had teachers among them who must be protected, and if they had whisky he did not know what might happen.

In the church there was much childish simplicity. Once, when Mr. Ayer was lecturing on the eighth commandment, he paused, and, without expecting an answer, said: "Now who is there among you who has not stolen?" One woman began to confess, another followed, then another. One thought she had stolen about seven times. Another entered more into particulars, mentioning the things she had stolen, till the scene was quite amusing. Another rose to confess, but was cut short by her husband, who said: "Who knows how many times she has stolen? We are a nation of thieves." And with a few remarks the meeting closed.

Mr. Ayer's health required more out-door exercise, and early in 1849 he left Red Lake, taking with him his eldest son, and went to the frontier of the newly purchased territory, locating on the east bank of the Mississippi river about twenty miles below the Crow Wing river (now Belle Prairie, 1894). His plan was to open an independent school there for the more advanced and promising children in different parts of the Ojibwa country. His wife and other son joined them in July, but in three weeks after the son passed away like a flower, to the great grief of the lonely little family. But Mr. Ayer was prospered

in his undertaking. That same year he raised a crop of potatoes and oats, for all of which those who were building Fort Ripley gave him \$1 a bushel, taking them from the field.

J. C. Burbank (afterwards prominent in business in St. Paul) was hired to hew the frame of a school house, and while Mr. Ayer was putting it up his wife went to the Eastern states and got money to foot the bill and at the same time engaged teachers. Mr. E. D. Neill said it was the best school house in the territory at that time.

Several of the fur traders and others gave him some aid, and when the school was opened sent their children. At first all the pupils had more or less Ojibway blood flowing in their veins. Over twenty were taken into the family, but in process of time, as the country settled, the school became more white than Indian. Mr. Ayer was particular to have good help. During the progress of the school one gentleman and two ladies from Vermont, two ladies from Mount Holyoke seminary, two from the college in Galesburg, Ill., a Mrs. Mahan of Oberlin and two or three others were for a longer or shorter time assistants in the work. They had a varying number of pupils till the commencement of the civil war and the Indian outbreak. When a district school was first organized it was joined with Mr. Ayer's school and remained so for some years.

Mr. Ayer's health improved, and when, after the war, men and women were called to go among the freedmen, he and his wife offered their services. In 1865 they were sent to Galatin, Tenn., but finding the place occupied by earnest Quakers, they went to open a school in Atlanta, Ga. He stopped at Chattanooga and shipped a soldiers' chapel for a school house. Ten days after his wife joined him, and they immediately commenced school in the African church. On the first day they had seventy-five pupils—on the next day over one hundred. In less than a week the chapel was ready for use, more teachers had arrived, and both houses were filled. The work increased rapidly, and Mr. Ayer was obliged to leave the schools to attend to other matters. But his place was filled in the person of the late Mr. Ware, president of Atlanta university. The American Missionary association built two large houses under his supervision and remodeled another. His varied duties led to an acquaintance with different classes of men, and all seemed to respect him. He looked on most of them with favor,

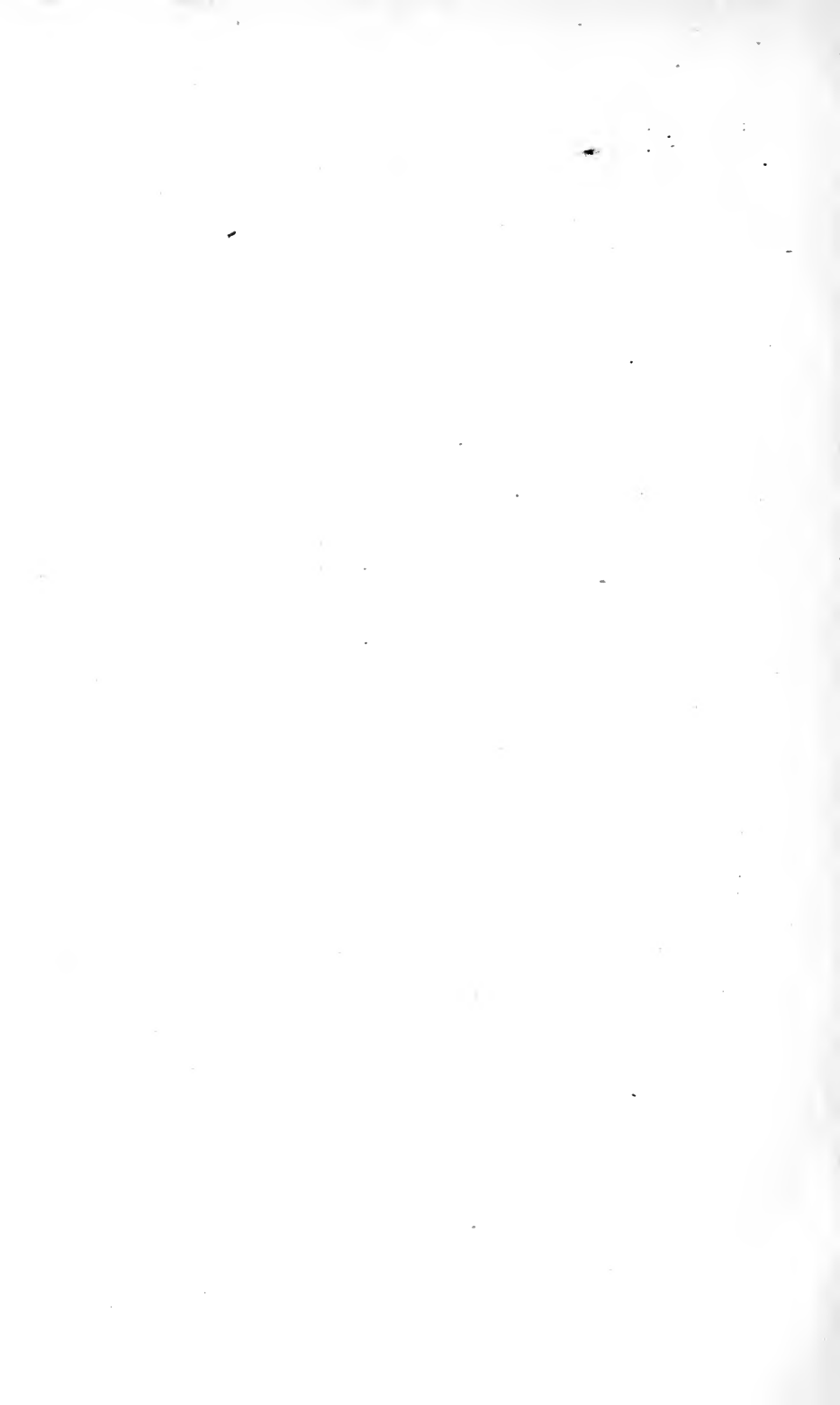
and the feeling was reciprocated. His first year in Atlanta was a peculiarly trying one. Members of families who had been long separated were in search of each other. They were cold and hungry. Mr. Ayer, by little and little, from his own private purse, saved many from starvation. He gave them no money, but for some time he had quite a bill to pay monthly at a grocer's. He gave tickets of small value for something eatable, just enough to keep them from starvation. Many did starve—both whites and negroes. Many others fed themselves by digging bullets from embankments in and around the city. There were others who lived by gathering bones, which were stacked in the heart of the city till they were shipped and ground to fertilize the surrounding country. It was whispered by anatomists that there was a large sprinkle of human bones among them. At the same time the smallpox was raging in the city.

Mr. Ayer organized a Congregational church and had a baptistry connected with the house of worship (Storrs school) that he might baptize by immersion, or otherwise, according to the wishes of the candidate. He also formed a temperance society, which, some months before his death, numbered more than six hundred members.

He was sick only three weeks, and in that time he was carried out two or three days to attend to important business which no other could as well do. To facilitate labor, his son, who, with his wife, had remained South after the war, had given his horse to his father and the latter bought himself a buggy. This enabled him to accomplish twice the work he could otherwise have done. In that hot climate he was industrious to a fault. He worked in summer as well as in winter, and seemed to enjoy it. "The spirit of a man sustaineth his infirmity." But his work was done.

At his death there was great lamentation. One aged rebel, who had lost a small fortune by the war, embraced the corpse, and, with sobs, said: "If he had not holpen me I should have gone before him." Many others, in word or action, expressed a similar feeling. All classes of people were represented at his funeral to the number (as was estimated) of three thousand. His remains were buried in Atlanta cemetery, Oct. 1, 1867.

Thus passed away one who had spent a life for the benefit of others.





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