

Fanny Kelly

**NARRATIVE
OF MY
CAPTIVITY
AMONG
THE SIOUX
INDIANS**



Fanny Kelly

Narrative of My Captivity Among the Sioux Indians

**With a Brief Account of General Sully's Indian
Expedition in 1864**

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INTRODUCTION

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The summer of 1864 marked a period of unusual peril to the daring pioneers seeking homes in the far West. Following upon the horrible massacres in Minnesota in 1862, and the subsequent chastisements inflicted by the expeditions under Generals Sully and Sibley in 1863, whereby the Indians were driven from the then western borders of civilization, in Iowa, Minnesota, and the white settlements of Dakota, in the Missouri Valley, the great emigrant trails to Idaho and Montann became the scene of fresh outrages; and, from the wild, almost inaccessible nature of the country, pursuit and punishment were impossible.

I was a member of a small company of emigrants, who were attacked by an overwhelming force of hostile Sioux, which resulted in the death of a large proportion of the party, in my own capture, and a horrible captivity of five months' duration.

Of my thrilling adventures and experience during this season of terror and privation, I propose to give a plain, unvarnished narrative, hoping the reader will be more interested in facts concerning the habits, manners, and customs of the Indians, and their treatment of prisoners, than in theoretical speculations and fine wrought sentences.

Some explanation is due the public for the delay in publishing this my narrative. From memoranda, kept during the period of my captivity, I had completed the work for publication, when the manuscript was purloined and

published; but the work was suppressed before it could be placed before the public. After surmounting many obstacles, I have at last succeeded in gathering the scattered fragments; and, by the aid of memory, impressed as I pray no mortal's may ever be again, am enabled to place the results before, I trust, a kind-judging, appreciative public.

CHAPTER I

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*Early History - Canada to Kansas - Death of My Father -
My Marriage - "Ho! for Idaho!" - Crossing the Platte River
- A Storm*

I was born in Orillia, Canada, in 1845. Our home was on the lake shore, and there amid pleasant surroundings I passed the happy days of early childhood.

The years 1852 to 1856 witnessed, probably, the heaviest immigration the West has ever known in a corresponding length of time. Those who had gone before sent back to their friends such marvelous accounts of the fertility of the soil, the rapid development of the country, and the ease with which fortunes were made, the "Western fever" became almost epidemic. Whole towns in the old, Eastern States were almost depopulated. Old substantial farmers, surrounded apparently by all the comforts that heart could wish, sacrificed the homes wherein their families had been reared for generations, and, with all their worldly possessions, turned their faces toward the setting sun. And with what high hopes! Alas! how few, comparatively, met their realization.

In 1856, my father, James Wiggins, joined a New York colony bound for Kansas. Being favorably impressed with the country and its people, they located the town of Geneva, and my father returned for his family.

Reaching the Missouri River on our way to our new home, my father was attacked with cholera, and died. In obedience

to his dying instructions, my widowed mother, with her little family, continued on the way to our new home. But, oh! with what saddened hearts we entered into its possession. It seemed as if the light of our life had gone out. He who had been before to prepare that home for us, was not there to share it with us, and, far away from all early associations, almost alone in a new and sparsely settled country, it seemed as though hope had died.

But God is merciful. He prepares the soul for its burdens. Of a truth, "He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb."

Our family remained in this pleasant prairie home, where I was married to Josiah S. Kelly.

My husband's health failing, he resolved upon a change of climate. Accordingly, on the 17th of May, 1864, a party of persons, consisting of Mr. Gardner Wakefield, my husband, myself, our adopted daughter (my sister's child), and two colored servants, started from Geneva, with high-wrought hopes and pleasant anticipations of a romantic and delightful journey across the plains, and a confident expectation of future prosperity among the golden hills of Idaho.

A few days after commencing our journey, we were joined by Mr. Sharp, a Methodist clergyman, from Verdigris River about thirty miles south of Geneva; and, a few weeks later, we overtook a large train of emigrants, among whom were a family from Allen County with whom we were acquainted-Mr. Larimer, wife, and child, a boy eight years old. Preferring to travel with our small train, they left the larger one and became members of our party. The addition

of one of my own sex to our little company was cause of much rejoicing to me, and helped relieve the dullness of our tiresome march.

The hours of noon and evening rest were spent in preparing our frugal meals, gathering flowers with our children, picking berries, hunting curiosities, or gazing in wrapt wonder and admiration at the beauties of this strange, bewildering country.

Our amusements were varied. Singing, reading, writing to friends at home, or pleasant conversation, occupied our leisure hours.

So passed the first few happy days of our emigration to the land of sunshine and flowers.

When the sun had set, when his last rays were flecking the towering peaks of the Rocky Mountains, gathering around the camp-fires, in our home-like tent, we ate with a relish known only to those who, like us, scented the pure air, and lived as nature demanded.

At night, when our camp had been arranged by Andy and Franklin, our colored men, it was always in the same relative position, Mr. Kelly riding a few miles ahead as evening drew near to select the camping ground.

The atmosphere, which during the day was hot and stifling, became cool, and was laden with the odor of prairie flowers, the night dews filling their beautiful cups with the waters of heaven.

The solemnity of night pervaded every thing. The warblings of the feathered tribe had ceased. The antelope and deer rested on the hills; no sound of laughing, noisy children, as in a settled country; no tramp- ing of busy feet,

or hurrying to and fro. All is silent. Nature, like man, has put aside the labors of the day, and is enjoying rest and peace.

Yonder, as a tiny spark, as a distant star, might be seen from the road a little camp-fire in the darkness spread over the earth.

Every eye in our little company is closed, every hand still, as we lay in our snugly-covered wagons, awaiting the dawn of another day.

And the Eye that never sleeps watched over us in our lonely camp, and cared for the slumbering travelers.

Mr. Wakefield, with whom we became acquainted after he came to settle at Geneva, proved a most agreeable companion. Affable and courteous, unselfish, and a gentleman, we remember him with profound respect.

A fine bridge crosses the Kansas River. A half-hour's ride through the dense heavy timber, over a jet-black soil of incalculable richness, brought us to this bridge, which we crossed.

We then beheld the lovely valley of the prairies, intersecting the deep green of graceful slopes, where waves tall prairie grass, among which the wild flowers grow.

Over hundreds of acres these blossoms are scattered, yellow, purple, white, and blue, making the earth look like a rich carpet of variegated colors; those blooming in spring are of tender, modest hue, in later summer and early autumn clothed in gorgeous splendor. Solomon's gold and purple could not outrival them.

Nature seemingly reveled in beauty, for beauty's sake alone, for none but the simple children of the forest to view her in state.

Slowly the myriad years come and go upon her solitary places. Tender spring-time and glorious summer drop down their gifts from overflowing coffers, while the steps of bounding deer or the notes of singing birds break upon the lonely air.

The sky is of wonderful clearness and transparency. Narrow belts and fringes of forest mark the way of winding streams.

In the distance rise conical mounds, wrapped in the soft veil of dim and dreamy haze.

Upon the beaten road are emigrants wending their way, their household goods packed in long covered wagons, drawn by oxen, mules, or horses; speculators working their way to some new town with women and children; and we meet with half-breed girls, with heavy eye-lashes and sun-burnt cheeks, jogging along on horseback.

I was surprised to see so many women among the emigrants, and to see how easily they adapted themselves to the hardships experienced in a journey across the plains.

As a rule, the emigrants travel without tents, sleeping in and under wagons, without removing their clothing.

Cooking among emigrants to the far West is a very primitive operation, a frying-pan and perhaps a Dutch oven comprising the major part of the kitchen furniture.

The scarcity of timber is a source of great inconvenience and discomfort, "buffalo chips" being the substitute. At some of the stations, where opportunity offered, Mr. Kelly bought wood by the pound, as I had not yet been long enough inured to plains privations to relish food cooked over a fire made with "chips" of that kind.

We crossed the Platte River by binding four wagon boxes together, then loaded the boat with goods, and were rowed across by about twenty men.

We were several days in crossing. Our cattle and horses swam across. . The air had been heavy and oppressively hot; now the sky began to darken suddenly, and just as we reached the opposite shore, a gleam of lightning, like a forked tongue of flame, shot out of the black clouds, blinding us by its flash, and followed by a frightful crash of thunder.

Another gleam and another crash followed, and the dense blackness lowered threateningly over us, almost shutting out the heights beyond, and seeming to encircle us like prisoners in the valley that lay at our feet.

The vivid flashes lighting the darkness for an instant only made its gloom more fearful, and the heavy rolling of the thunder seemed almost to rend the heavens above it.

All at once it hurst upon our unprotected, heads in rain. But such rain! Not the gentle dro~pings of an afternoon shower, nor a commonplace storm, but a sweeping avalanche of water, drenching us completely at the first dash, and continuing to pour, seeming to threaten the earth on which we stood, and tempt the old Platte to rise and claim it as its own.

Our wagon covers had been removed in the fording, and we had no time to put up tents for our protection until its fury was exhausted. And so we were forced to brave the elements, with part of our company on the other side of the swollen river, and a wild scene, we could scarcely discern through the pelting rain, surrounding us.

One soon becomes heroic in an open-air life, and so we put up what shelter we could when the abating storm gave us opportunity; and, wringing the water out of clothes, hair, and eye-brows, we camped in cheerful hope of a bright tomorrow, which did not disappoint us, and our hundreds of emigrant companions scattered on the way.

Each recurring Sabbath was gratefully hailed as a season of thought and repose; as a matter of conscience and duty we observed the day, and took pleasure in doing so.

We had divine service performed, observing the ceremonies of prayer, preaching, and singing, which was fully appreciated in our absence from home and its religious privileges.

Twenty-five miles from California Crossing is a place called Ash Hollow, where the eye is lost in space as it endeavors to penetrate its depths. Here some years before, General Harney made his name famous by an indiscriminate massacre of a band of hostile Indians, with their women and children.

CHAPTER II

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The Attack and the Capture

A train of wagons were coursing their westward way, with visions of the future bright as our own. Sometimes a single team might be seen traveling alone.

Our party were among the many small squads emigrating to the land of promise.

The day on which our doomed family were scattered and killed was the 12th of July, a warm and oppressive day. The burning sun poured forth its hottest rays upon the great Black Hills and the vast plains of Montana, and the great emigrant road was strewn with men, women, and children, and :Bocks of cattle, representing towns of adventurers.

We looked anxiously forward to the approach of evening, with a sense of relief, after the excessive heat of the day.

Our journey had been pleasant, but toilsome, for we had been long weeks on the road.

Slowly our wagons wound through the timber that skirted the Little Box Elder, and, crossing the stream, we ascended the opposite bank.

We had no thought of danger or timid misgivings on the subject of savages, for our fears had been all dispersed by constantly received assurances of their friendliness.

At the outposts and ranches, we heard nothing but ridicule of their pretensions to warfare, and at Fort Laramie, where information that should have been reliable was given

us, we had renewed assurances of the safety of the road and friendliness of the Indians.

At Horseshoe Creek, which we had just left, and where there was a telegraph station, our inquiries had elicited similar assurances as to the quiet and peaceful tlstate of the country through which we must pass. Being thus persuaded that fears were groundless, we entertained none, and, as I have mentioned before, our small company preferred to travel alone on account of the greater progress made in that way.

The beauty of the sunset and the scenery around us filled our hearts with joy, and Mr. Wakefield's voice was heard in song for the last time, as he sang, "Ho! tor Idaho." Little Mary's low, sweet voice, too, joined in the chorus. She was so happy in her childish glee on that day, as she always was. She was the star and joy of our whole party.

We wended our way peacefully and cheerfully on, without a thought of the danger that was lying like a tiger in ambush in our path.

Without a sound of preparation or a word of warning, the bluff's before us were covered with a party of about two hundred and fifty Indians, painted and equipped for war, who uttered the wild war-whoop and fired a signal volley of guns and revolvers into the air.

This terrible and unexpected apparition came upon us with such startling swiftness that we had not time to think before the main body halted and sent out a part of their force, which"circled us round at regular intervals, but some distance from our wagons. Recovering from the shock, our men instantly resolved on defense, and corralled the

wagons. My husband was looked upon as leader, as he was principal owner of the train. Without regard to the insignificance of our numbers,

Mr. Kelly was ready to stand his ground; but, with all the power I could command, I entreated him to forbear and only attempt conciliation. "If you fire one shot," I said, " I feel sure you will seal our fate, as they seem to outnumber us ten to one, and will at once massacre all of us."

Love for the trembling little girl at my side, my husband, and friends, made me strong to protest against any thing that would lessen our chance for escape with our lives. Poor little Mary! from the first she had entertained an ungovernable dread of the Indians, a repugnance that could not be overcome, although in our intercourse with friendly savages, I had endeavored to show how unfounded it was, and persuade her that they were civil and harmless, but all in vain. Mr. Kelly bought her beads and many little presents from them which she much admired, but she would always add, "They look so cross at me and they have knives and tomahawks, and I fear they will kill me." Could it be that her tender young mind had some presentiment or warning of her horrid fate?

My husband advanced to meet the chief and demand his intentions.

The savage leader immediately came toward him, riding forward and uttering the words, "How! how!" which are understood to mean a friendly salutation.

His name was Ottawa, and he was a war chief of the Ogalalla band of the Sioux nation. He struck himself on his breast, saying, "Good Indian, me," and pointing to those

around him, he continued, "Heap good Indian, hunt buffalo and deer." He assured us of his 'utmost friendship for the white people; then he shook hands, and his band followed his example, crowding around our wagons, shaking us all by the hand over and over again, until our arms ached, and grinning and nodding with every demonstration of good will.

Our only policy seemed to be temporizing, in hope of assistance approaching; and, to gain time, we allowed them unopposed to do whatever they fancied. First, they said they would like to change one of their horses for the one Mr. Kelly was riding, a favorite race horse. Very much against his will, he acceded to their request, and gave up to them the noble animal to which he was fondly attached.

My husband came to me with words of cheer and hope, but oh! what a marked look of despair was upon his face, such as I had never seen before.

The Indians asked for flour, and we gave them what they wanted of provisions. The flour they emptied upon the ground, saying only the sack. They talked to us partly by signs and partly in broken English, with which some of them were quite familiar, and as we were anxious to suit ourselves to their whims and preserve a friendly intercourse as long as possible, we allowed them to take whatever they desired, and offered, them many presents besides. It was, as I have said before, extremely warm weather, but they remarked that the cold made it necessary for them to look for clothing, and begged for some from our stock, which was granted without the slightest offered objection on our part. I, in a careless-like manner, said they must give me some moccasins for some articles of clothing that I had just

handed them, and very pleasantly a young Indian gave me a nice pair, richly embroidered with different colored beads.

Our anxiety to conciliate them increased every moment, for the hope of help arriving from some quarter grew stronger as they dallied, and, alas! it was our only one.

They grew bolder and more insolent in their advances. One of them laid hold of my husband's gun, but, being repulsed, desisted.

The chief at last intimated that he desired us to proceed on our way, promising that we should not be molested. We obeyed, without trusting them, and soon the train was again in motion, the Indians insisting on driving our herd, and growing ominously familiar. Soon my husband called a halt. He saw that we were approaching a rocky glen in whose gloomy depths he anticipated a murderous attack and from which escape would be utterly impossible. Our enemies urged us still forward, but we resolutely refused to stir, when they requested that we should prepare supper, which they said they would share with us, and then go to the hills to sleep. The men of our party concluded it best to give them a feast. Mr. Kelly gave orders to our two colored servants to pre-prepare at once to make a feast for the Indians.

Andy said, " I think, if I knows any thing about it, they's had their supper;" as they had been eating sugar crackers from our wagons for an hour or more.

The two colored men had been slaves among the Cherokees, and knew the Indian character by experience. their fear and horror of them was unbounded, and' their terror seemed pitiable to us, as they had worked for us a long time, and were most faithful, trustworthy servants.

Each man was busy preparing the supper;' Mr. Larimer and Frank were making the fire; Mr. Wake-field was getting provisions out of the wagon; Mr. Taylor was attending to his team; Mr. Kelly and .Andy were out some distance gathering wood; Mr. Sharp was distributing sugar among the Indians; supper, that they asked for, was in rapid progress of preparation, when suddenly our terrible enemies threw off their masks and displayed their truly demoniac natures. There was a simultaneous discharge of arms, and when the cloud of smoke cleared away, I could see the retreating form of Mr. Larimer and the slow motion of poor Mr. Wakefield, for he was mortally wounded.

Mr. Kelly and Andy made a miraculous escape with their lives. Mr. Sharp was killed within a few feet of me. Mr. Taylor- I never can forget his face as I saw him shot through the forehead with a rifle ball. He looked at me as he fell backward to the ground a corpse. I was the last object that met his dying gaze. Our poor faithful Frank fell at my feet pierced by many arrows. I recall the scene with a sickening horror. I could not see my husband anywhere, and did not know his fate, but feared and trembled. With a glance at my surroundings, my senses seemed gone for a time, but I could only live and endure.

I had but little time for thought, for the Indians quickly sprang into our wagons, tearing off covers, breaking; crushing, and smashing all hinderances to plunder, breaking open locks, trunks, and box, and distributing or destroying our goods with great rapidity, using their tomahawks to pry open boxes, which they split up in savage recklessness.

Oh, what horrible sights met my view! Pen is powerless to portray the scenes occurring around me. They filled the air with the fearful war-whoops and hideous shouts. I endeavored to keep my fears quiet as possible, knowing that an indiscreet act on my part might result in jeopardizing our lives, though I felt certain that we two helpless women would share death by their hands; but with as much of an air of indifference as I could command, I kept still, hoping to prolong our lives, even if but a few moments. I was not allowed this quiet but a moment, when two of the most savage-looking of the party rushed up into my wagon, with tomahawks drawn in their right hands, and with their left seized me by both hands and pulled me violently to the ground, injuring my limbs very severely, almost breaking them, from the effects of which I afterward suffered a great deal. I turned to my little Mary, who, with outstretched hands, was standing in the wagon, took her in my arms and helped her to the ground. I then turned to the chief put my hand upon his arm, and implored his protection for my fellow-prisoner and our children. At first he gave me no hope, but seemed utterly indifferent to my prayers. Partly in words and partly by signs, he ordered me to remain quiet, placing his hand upon his revolver, that hung in a belt at his side, as an argument to enforce obedience.

A short distance in the rear of our train a wagon was in sight. The chief immediately dispatched a detachment of his band to capture or to cut it off from us, and I saw them ride furiously off in pursuit of the small party, which consisted only of one family and a man who rode in advance of the single wagon. The horseman was almost instantly

surrounded and killed by a volley of arrows. The husband of the family quickly turned his team around and started them at full speed, gave the whip and lines to his wife, who held close in her arms her youngest child. He then went to the back end of his wagon and threw out boxes, trunks, every thing that he possessed. His wife meantime gave all her mind and strength to urging the horses forward on their flight from death. The Indians had by this time come very near, so that they riddled the wagon-cover with bullets and arrows, one passing through the sleeve of the child's dress in its mother's arms, but doing it no personal injury.

The terrified man kept the Indians at bay with his revolver, and finally they left him and rode furiously back to the scene of the murder of our train.

CHAPTER III

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My Husband's Escape - Burial of the Dead - Arrival of the Survivors at Deer Creek - An Ill-timed Ball

When the Indians fired their fatal volley into the midst of our little company, while yet they were preparing to entertain them with a hospitable supper, my husband was some distance from the scene of horror; but, startled by the unexpected report, he hurriedly glanced around, saw the pale, terror-stricken faces of his wife and child, and the fall of Rev. Mr. Sharp from the wagon, while in the act of reaching for sugar and other articles of food with which to conciliate our savage guests. The hopelessness of the situation struck a chill to his heart. Having laid down his gun to assist in the preparation of the feast, the utter futility of contending single-handed against such a host of infuriated demons was too apparent. His only hope, and that a slight one indeed, was that the Indians might spare the lives of his wife and child, to obtain a ransom. In this hope he resolved upon efforts for the preservation of his own life, that he might afterward put forth efforts for our rescue, either by pursuit and strategy, or by purchase.

He was shot at, and the barbed arrows whizzed past him, some passing through his clothing. He saw Mr. Wakefield fall, and knew that he was wounded, if not killed. Mr. Larimer passed him in his flight for life toward some neighboring timber.