

Westward

The movement of civilization in America was westward and our two pioneers became a part of that movement as they went into Minnesota. They first stopped at Red Wing where Gustaf secured work, and they remained there two years. During this time a son came to them and as he resembled his father they called him by his name.

Minnesota had great stretches of open country and forest land which the government offered to those who were seeking homes. Gustaf and Ingrid were in a situation to appreciate such an offer and they worked toward preparing for a trip into this territory which held out the possibility of making a livelihood. The call came from beyond the primitive civilization to which they had become accustomed; out from the plains where wild animals roamed; out from the forests and lakes where the Indian pitched his wigwam and called it home.

There were rumors of great danger coming in from over the border of this territory. One was that a whole settlement had the previous year (1863) been killed by the Indians. Another rumor had it that one man had been killed most cruelly but placed part of the blame with the man himself in that he had a hankering to kill a red man and one day he satisfied this desire by shooting a squaw. When the men of her tribe learned of it, they set out to find him. His wife was alone in the house when they came and she was compelled to tell where the husband was. When they got him they removed his shirt and cut the skin from his chest sprinkling salt on the raw flesh. When he died from the cruel torture, they cut off his hands and head and hoisted them on poles as a warning to others. But in spite of such rumors the pioneers held the conviction that all would be well and they went westward.

On June 1, 1864, a small party met by appointment at Vasa, Minnesota. They had made preparations for a trip into the northwest but how long the journey would be or where they would stop, they knew not. Two prairie schooners, drawn by oxen, began to move out over the trail. The lumbering wheels of the wagons creaked and groaned in time to the slow swaying movements of the oxen. Gustaf commanded the train from the high seat of the first wagon, and at his side sat Ingrid holding little Gustaf, who now was one year old; while from their perch at their parents' feet Amelia and Carl observed all that passed before them. The rest of the wagon held bedding, trunks, cooking utensils, and food supplies.

In the second schooner was the family of Olof Fahlin, the number and age of their children being the same as those of

the first wagon. Following listlessly behind were eight cows, prodded on by a bachelor, whose name was Mikelson, riding a bay pony; and bringing up the rear was Gustaf's little black dog.

When they had gone nearly a hundred miles they stopped at St. Cloud, to look over the country that had been held out as having fair possibilities. The women stayed in town where they lived in a barn. This gave the children a much-needed chance to exercise as their confinement had become irksome to them. When the men returned it was decided to go farther and they headed for Ft. Alexandria, a government post about one hundred miles farther to the northwest.

Slowly they moved on over the trail, now past some clear lake, now through a meadow of tall grass, now through timber of oak and hard maple. Many of Minnesota's lakes lay along their trail and whenever it was possible these nature-loving Swedes selected a place near a lake for the night stop, where there was opportunity to bathe and to catch fish.

During the preparation for the trip, Ingrid had foresight in that she had an oven made for the camp fire, all her own design. It was cylindrical in shape and had a grate through the center. One end was open and this end was placed toward the fire and in this oven she baked as light bread as she was wont to do in her stove oven. She set the sponge in the morning from fresh milk; at the noon stop she made it into a stiff dough; and at the evening stop it was baked. In this manner there was no shortage of fresh bread. The lakes contained an abundance of fish, and what Swede would not smile when a fine pike was served, either fried a nice golden brown or boiled and served with a horse-radish sauce made from the stock in which it had been boiled?

This proved to be an enjoyable camping trip with an abundance of wood for the fire, fish and small game at most any time, bakeries established at pleasure, a portable dairy, and over all the serene peace of Nature's spring-time, and not an Indian to mar their peace.

But had it been left to Carl to judge of the surprise attacks, he could have told of an honest-to-goodness attempt at scalping, because his was the scalp. It happened one day when the father had taken his turn at herding the cows and the bachelor was captain of the schooner. Carl often became tired of the cramped position allotted to him and at this time, when not so closely watched, he attempted some stunts which sent him over-board. The last part of him to disappear was his abundance of hair and for this the bachelor grabbed just in time to save its owner the sad fate of landing under the wheels. But to Carl the rescue was of little moment compared to the

terrible pain which it caused and he sobbed long in his mother's arms.

Also Amelia could tell of an attack which very much disturbed her peace of mind. She was asleep on the floor of the schooner when she was awakened by some fearful excitement and a lot of yelling. The wagon was bouncing along over rough ground and she rolled about in the springless compartment, nearly cracking her head at times. She set up an awful howl but, due to the noise, no one heard her. Finally the schooner came to a stop with a tremendous crash which nearly stunned her and she yelled all the harder. Soon after, her mother picked her up and told her to stop crying and continued, "The poor oxen got tired of hauling us around so long and they decided to stampede to rid themselves of flies, wagon and everything. They dashed into the woods and stopped only as the wagon was caught between two trees. And here we are. Let us take a walk while the men free the wagon from the trees."

"I hit my head on the trunk and it hurts up there," and Amelia pointed to the sore place for her mother to take notice but her mother only said,

"Be glad that we didn't get hurt more than that," and as they walked along, Carl called out,

"Look, what is that?"

"That's strawberries growing here in the woods. Now we will have a real treat. Amelia you run over and get a dish and then you will forget about your hurt."

They picked all that they could eat and still had some in the dish for the men, who now had freed the wagon and were glad for the treat.

On the 17th of June they came to Sauk Center, a government post within a stockade, where they stayed that night. In the morning they started on the last stretch of their journey and as they slowly advanced they noticed that the lakes were more numerous and there was more forest growth surrounding them. They became thrilled with the beauty of this landscape and they had no regrets in coming so far.

June 24, 1864, was the tenth anniversary of Gustaf and Ingrid's wedding and that was the day on which they arrived at Ft. Alexandria. The wanderers were kindly received at the fort and were offered permission to live in the barracks while getting settled. The men were also given the use of the government horses when scouting the country to select their land.

There was a store within the stockade which was owned by a Mr. Cowing. Stores at the forts in the early days were an accommodation to the new settlers; that is, if they had money with which to buy such things that they needed. But to the man without money, well—they just were stores. It hap-

pened that Gustaf came in this latter group, as he had just fifteen cents in his pocket when he arrived at the fort. Nevertheless, he did possess a resourceful wife and she undertook to do the washing for the soldiers and in that way Gustaf became a customer of Mr. Cowing and they became friends of the enduring kind of pioneer days.

Ingrid's dresses had known hard wear the last years—when there had been no money for replenishing the wardrobe, and she was in need of almost everything. Knowledge of this came to the soldiers some way and they donated a cape to her. It was one of the circular army capes and as Ingrid needed a skirt most of all, she wore it as a skirt. She never forgot the debt of gratitude which she owed to their kindness.

The Time of Adjustment

The only surveying done in the territory was range lines, six miles apart, which served as a distinction between the wilderness and the first trace of settlement. This country had been the hunting ground of the Indians for many generations back; perhaps, even since those distant times of the retreat of the last ice sheet which left deep hollows filled with its water and which bequeathed to Minnesota her ten thousand lakes. Now the first members of a new people had come to wrest this land from them. The Indian resisted but moved on slowly.

Two families had preceded this new group. They were the Blackwells and the Van Loons, who were the first settlers in all that part of Douglas County. There did live a trapper some seven miles from the fort but as he had left the South to evade war service, he lived a very secluded life, until other settlers moved in about him. He lived in a little shack built into the bank of a lake.

The government allowed each settler a quarter section of land, with the privilege of buying more. It is unnecessary to add that Gustaf got no more than the allotted quarter and in fact all the first settlers found that as much as they could handle, both as regards means and the work to be done on new land, where timber enters in, with extra work of clearing the land.

Gustaf selected his land some fifteen miles southwest of the fort and the other men took theirs two miles to either side of this. All three houses could not be built that summer and as a solution to the problem they decided that Fahlin's and the bachelor's would be built first and that Gustaf and his family would live with the bachelor the first winter. All of the men were to work as one unit. Gustaf giving his time now and the others helping him the following spring. In order to give them some shelter during the time when the cabins were being built, they decided to build a small shack on the Fahlin place first and all would live there together. The Blackwells offered them lodging while they were making the shack. This was an initiation of the true coöperative spirit which characterized pioneer days in Douglas County. When they all came together and counted noses, there were found to be eight children and seven grown-ups; fifteen in all. It proved a glorious celebration for the youngsters but no vacation for the mothers.

The three men got a thrill to thus begin their work by building a house in common. It marked the real beginning of homemaking for them in this new country which offered them

a chance to live and work and hope. In a week the shack was ready and, after expressing their thankfulness to their new-found friends, they gathered up their children and cows and moved over there.

The shack was very small and served as sleeping place only as the two long walls had beds built to them. These really were shelves upon which they spread dry grass and on this went bedding, children and all, much as sardines in a box. They lived out-of-doors, cooking by campfires and using stumps and logs for chairs. Only the most necessary things were unpacked as all was kept in readiness to flee, should the Indians come. Though they had not seen an Indian, the fear of him haunted them at all times. If the dog barked at night, there was no more sleep that night and they watched for any sign of his coming. The cry of the loon caused them much worry until they learned that it was a bird whose call was most mournful and wierd.

Not long after moving to the shack, they had their first Indian scare. They were gathered for their noon-day meal when they saw an Indian on horse-back coming over the hill.

"It must be a scout gathering information," said Gustaf. "We had better get the guns ready. You women go inside with the children and take the dog also or they may steal him."

Amelia grabbed the dog and the women took their flock inside, while the men stood on guard and the Indian came on slowly. As he came down the hill he was lost from view behind the trees, and the men waited to see what his next move would be. As he came out again Gustaf said:

"There he comes; he looks friendly enough. What! do I see right? Oh, it's one of the soldiers from the fort," and he laughed a hearty though nervous laugh. The men hurriedly laid aside the guns and as the women heard the merriment, they came out to see the reason and they all greeted the soldier kindly. He had been sent out to see how they were getting along and if all was safe. He was asked to join them at dinner and they had a pleasant visit together.

This was an eventful summer for the newcomers. They had drifted into primitive conditions and little by little they became a part of them. Nature supplied all their wants and they became familiar with her ways. Her supplies became theirs by free choice. There was food, building material, water, beauty, and a sublime serenity. As no Indian had crossed their path, their fear of the red man had submerged into the far recesses of their consciousness, which gave to them freedom and energy for the work before them.

Though Gustaf's place was out of the building program, still he went there at times. He had broken sod in one place and had cut hay for the winter and other minor details. One day he

said to Ingrid, "If you cut up some potatoes by the time I get back, I will take them over to our place and plant them late this afternoon. They will make some growth before cold weather comes."

When he returned the potatoes were ready and Ingrid said, "Not many to be sure but it will prove the worth of the land and even a small crop will be a help."

Gustaf hurried away and when he reached the place he was warm and threw off his coat and went to work. He lifted a piece of sod and pushed a piece of potato underneath, then dropped the sod and tramped it down with the foot. In that way he soon had the little patch planted and he picked up his coat to start back. As he raised the coat to put it on, he saw to his dismay that the grasshoppers had eaten two big holes in it. Perhaps that was their way of reprimanding an intruder into their domain. Or was it curiosity, that elusive gift of Nature, with which she has endowed all her children from insects to man? A rare morsel it must have been to their primitive taste but to Gustaf it was tragedy as that was his only coat which was not a succession of patches. When he reached the camp he held the coat up before Ingrid.

"I never saw such impudent grasshoppers," he said. "See what they did. Have you anything that you can use as a patch that will match the coat?"

"The idea of you letting the grasshoppers eat your coat right off your back."

"Not so; I had thrown it off as I was warm."

"Oh, you spread a feast before them and invited them to help themselves, did you? Perhaps I have a patch that color or near to it; but I shall have to rip some stitching out of some old garment to get thread to sew it on. I have no thread and it costs ten cents for a tiny spool and we don't have money for that now that we must have flour soon. But I can mend it somehow."

"Well, that was a lengthy answer but all the same I hope we get a lot of potatoes. That is the first time that I ever planted anything under sod and I just wonder if the young shoots can get through those heavy clods. Now it's done and we will see."

When the women were gathering up things after dinner one day, they noticed smoke in the distance and one of them called to the men, "Look at that smoke over there; what can it be?"

"That looks like a prairie fire. I wonder if the Indians are trying to kill us out that way."

The men came down from the building and Ingrid said, "What shall we do?"

"We must get ready to fight it. They say those fires come awful fast. Get the buckets and fill them with water and then we will take gunny sacks and wet them and beat out the fire when it comes near the shack and the wagons."

"I wonder where the oxen are?" inquired Ingrid.

"I'll bring them over here, so everything will be together,"

Gustaf answered.

By that time the fire was coming near and time was at a premium. Mr. Fahlin was ill and not able to fight fire and was asked to look after the children. He took them into the shack and told them that they must be very quiet so that if the Indians came they would not hear them. Soon the two men and two women were at the edge of the field fighting hard. After it was over they came over to the shack and gathered around the wagons to see if the Indians would come. They made hurried preparations so as to be ready on short notice but the fire died out about the edges of the burned area and all was quiet and calm as before.

"I got worried about you women with the fire all around you and your skirts seemed right over the fire at times," remarked Gustaf.

"It got awful hot at times; I was nearly encircled once. I hope we never have a fire again," said Ingrid. She turned to Amelia, saying, "Were you good and did you obey 'Uncle' Fahlin?" Amelia came close to her mother and almost whispered when she replied,

"Yes, we were awful quiet so that the Indians would not hear us and Uncle Fahlin told us stories while we waited for you, Mother."

The two cabins were ready in the fall and then Gustaf and his family moved with the bachelor to his place. The group had become as one family and it seemed strange to part company. Having lived in the open all summer it was confining to be inside and they left the doors unhung so as to give more freedom and air, until cold weather made it necessary to have closed doors.

When the families parted they set aside Sundays as visiting days, taking turn at entertaining. They observed the Sabbath by reading the scripture lesson for the day from the books they had brought along from Sweden or Chicago. After that the children had the opportunity to renew their play and the women visited while they prepared the dinner and the men told each other what their traps had made for them during the week. Mink pelts brought \$3.50 a piece, muskrat skins were ten cents each, while fox and beaver were higher in price.

The dinner might be a sumptuous affair, depending upon the luck of the huntsman. There was possibility of a venison

steak or roast coon or rabbit; again it could be a roast goose or roast ducks; and should all these fail, there was always the possibility of a fine pike from the lake. Gustaf's potatoes had brought good returns for the amount planted, the dairy was not altogether dry at any time, and the bakery still operated; that is, if there was flour on hand. There were times when the food supply was very scant but that first winter there was never a shortage of meats or fish.

The winter passed peacefully and no Indians had come into that part of the country. Again their fear of the red man had abated and they felt secure in their new places. There grew an abundance of maple trees in the woods about them and this gave Gustaf the idea of making maple syrup. When the sap began to flow he tapped two hundred trees. He built a fireplace from stone and over this he reduced the sap by boiling it first in a wide shallow pan, and then in a large iron kettle over a camp fire. Some of the syrup Ingrid boiled to the consistency of sugar over the kitchen stove. These articles sold readily to the soldiers at the fort and brought them a small income. Then, too, it provided sweets for their own table.

At one time when Gustaf was carrying two buckets of sap to the fire, he was startled by a tremendous whoop from behind him. It was a complete surprise as everything was calm about him. He set the buckets down and turned around when he was confronted by two Sioux who carried guns and muskrats. Gustaf was unarmed and he realized the danger of his situation. When they noticed Gustaf's fear, they threw down the guns and advanced to where he stood and tried to converse with him. But as they realized that this availed nothing, they went to the fire, where they skinned the muskrats, held them up to the fire to broil and when a part was done they ate it and broiled some more and ate that; and so they continued until the meal was finished when they went their way, treading as noiselessly as they had done in coming.