MATTHEW BRAYTON

THE INDIAN CAPTIVE

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The Indian Captive / A narrative of the adventures and sufferings of Matthew Brayton in his thirty-four years of captivity among the Indians of north-western America:

Содержание

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PREFACE

The following brief narrative of the unparalleled adventures of MATTHEW BRAYTON is compiled for the satisfaction of those who wished to preserve a memorial of his romantic history.

Extraordinary as the incidents may appear, there is abundant proof of their entire truth. Living witnesses bear testimony to the circumstances of the mysterious loss of the hero, and his identity is established by incontrovertible proofs. Numerous

circumstances also confirm the account given by him of his adventures during the thirty-four years spent among the Indians.

CHAPTER I
THE LOST CHILD

That portion of North-western Ohio, situated to the South-east of the Black Swamp, was but sparsely settled at the close of the first quarter of the present century. The hardy pioneers who had left their New England homes to open up the Western wilds, here and there built their modest dwellings and tilled the few acres won from the dense forest and luxuriant prairie. The dusky aborigines, driven from all other parts of Ohio, clung tenaciously to this comparatively neglected spot, and the smoke from the log hut of the settler rose within sight of the Indian wigwam. The two races were at peace with each other, for neither cared to convert a passive neighbor into an active enemy. The Indians had realized their inability to drive back the constantly advancing wave of civilization, and the white settlers had no desire to provoke the savage retaliations of their dusky neighbors unless compelled by necessity to do so.

In the neighborhood of the junction between the Sandusky and Tymochte rivers, in Wyandot county, a remnant of the once powerful Wyandot tribe still remained. One of their villages was at Upper Sandusky, and another at Springville, in Seneca county. A small band of Senecas were also located in the neighborhood, and some scattered Ottawas had their wigwams on Blanchard's

Fork, a few miles to the west of the Wyandot settlements. An Indian trail led from Upper Sandusky to Springville, and thence, through the Black Swamp, to Perrysburg. At the latter place it crossed the Maumee, and reached the shore of the Detroit river opposite Malden, in Canada. Some of the Indians living in the North-west of Ohio had sided with the British in the war of 1812, and these annually crossed over to Malden to receive their presents of guns, ammunition and blankets. The Canadian Indians sometimes visited their dusky brethren in Ohio, and thus the trail was frequently traversed.

Among the settlers who had located themselves in the neighborhood of the Wyandot villages was Elijah Brayton, a thrifty farmer from New England, who had established himself near the Tymochte river in what is now Crawford township, Wyandot county. In the year 1825, Mr. Brayton was thirty-nine years of age, and his family consisted of his wife and their six children, William, Harriet, Lucy, Matthew, Mary and Peter. In that year Mr. Brayton was busy erecting a mill on the Tymochte, and towards the fall of the year he went to Chillicothe for the purpose of bringing up the mill-stones. The journey at that time was long and tedious, and the home affairs were entrusted in his absence to Mrs. Brayton and the eldest son William, then a lad of sixteen.

On the 20th of September, 1825, William Brayton, with his younger brother Matthew, then nearly seven and a half years old, started out to hunt up some stray cattle. They proceeded for two

or three miles in the direction of the spot where William Brayton at present lives, but found no traces of the missing cattle. Here they met a neighbor named Hart, who was also looking for stray cattle. Matthew had become tired, and declared his inability to proceed any farther. After a short consultation it was agreed that William Brayton and Hart should proceed in search of the cattle, and that Matthew should take the path which led to the house of Mr. Baker, about sixty rods distant, where he could amuse himself with his young playmates until the return of William. The two set out on their cattle hunting expedition, leaving little Matthew to pursue his way along the narrow and ill-defined path.

At the close of the day's search, William Brayton called at Mr. Baker's house for his little brother. To his astonishment he learned that Matthew had not been seen by any of the family. He then turned his steps homeward, thinking that Matthew had changed his mind and gone home, but on arriving there no tidings of the missing boy met him. The alarm and apprehension that filled the breast of the mother may be conceived. A thousand fearful thoughts flitted through her mind in rapid succession. But no time was lost in useless grieving. The men and women who braved the dangers of frontier life were quick to think and prompt to act. A little party turned out at once to search for the missing boy and restore him, if possible, to the anxious household. From the spot where the brothers had parted, the path to Mr. Baker's house was narrowly searched, and the marks of the child's feet were clearly discernible. At no great distance

from the commencement of the path it was intersected by a track made by some logs recently drawn from the woods. At this point the traces showed that Matthew had stopped in doubt. They also showed that he had finally taken the log track in mistake for the regular path. Up that track his little footsteps were traced for some distance, but, after awhile, they became fainter, and at last disappeared altogether. The woods on the margin of the track were searched in vain for traces of his feet.

The Indian trail, before spoken of, crossed the log track near where the footsteps became invisible, and it was possible that he had taken that trail; but his footmarks – if he had really followed that path – had been obliterated by the feet of passing Indians.

The party sorrowfully returned from their unsuccessful search, and met the anxious mother with heavy hearts. The night that followed was one of sleepless agony to Mrs. Brayton. To what suffering, or dreadful fate her little boy might be subjected, it was impossible to conjecture, but the dark night and the lonely woods were fraught with dangers to him and with terror to her. The absence of the father at this critical juncture on so long and distant a journey, aggravated the troubles and distress of the time.

Morning broke at last, and never was daylight more eagerly welcomed. With the first dawn of light, messengers set out in all directions for assistance, and soon the woods were astir with searching parties. The Indian villages were examined, but the Wyandots professed entire ignorance as to the movements of the missing boy, and joined with much zeal in the search. The

relations between the Braytons and the Wyandots had been of the most friendly character, and there seemed to be no possible reason for their interfering with the peace of that family. They stated, however, that a party of Canadian Indians had passed up the trail on the day that the boy disappeared, but could not say whether he had been carried off by that party or not. Another night came, and again the sorrowful mother met the dejected hunters at her door and received no consolation. At daybreak the parties again set out to search new tracts of country, but all without avail. Mr. Bowe, still remembered in the neighborhood, acted as store keeper of the party, and filled the bags of the searchers with meal as they returned from their long expeditions. The settlers for many miles around turned out in the exciting hunt. Days lengthened into weeks, and then it became evident that all farther search was useless. Every foot of territory for miles around had been examined and no trace of the lost child could be discovered. He could scarcely have wandered off and perished by starvation or wild beasts, for in either case some trace would have been left. The only inference remaining was that he had been snatched up by the party of Canadian Indians and carried off into hopeless slavery, if not to meet a horrible death. Pursuit now was useless, had the boy been thus carried off, and the search was reluctantly abandoned.

Meantime Mr. Brayton had returned from his journey, and the sad affliction that had befallen his house, fell with crushing weight on his heart. For the sake of his wife and remaining

children he bore up nobly, but his distress was keen, and every straw of hope that floated by was eagerly clutched at. From time to time came vague rumors of the boy having been seen in different directions, and the faintest hope of success sufficed to send off the bereaved father or some trusty messenger to follow up the clue, but always without success. The last information that assumed the appearance of probability was received in 1829, from a man who had been traveling among the Indian tribes of Illinois, and who asserted that he had seen among the Indians of that country a white child whose age and appearance corresponded generally with that of the missing Matthew Brayton. Without an hour's delay Mr. Brayton wrote to General Cass, then Indian Commissioner, but his answer crushed out the last remnant of hope. The letter bade the anxious father to renounce all hope based on such a rumor, for there was no such white child among the Indians of Illinois. On what authority the General based his assertion, cannot be said, but it is more than probable that in this he was mistaken.

The weary years passed on but brought no comfort to the stricken household. As all strong impressions fade in the course of time, so faded away the memory of the loss from the minds of men. But deep in the hearts of the parents remained the image of the lost boy, and the thrilling scenes and emotions connected with the search of him recurred again and again long after others had nearly forgotten the incidents. The father never forgot him. His "lost Matthew" was ever in his heart, and his name was

often on his tongue. The oldest brother, William, could not forget him, for the mother's reproaches, silent or spoken, for his neglect in sending so young a boy alone on such a path, sank deep into his heart. And could the mother that bore him forget the missing lamb of the fold? The paling cheek, the wasting form, the decaying strength told how deep the love, how bitter the anguish of the mother for her lost son. If she were but sure of his fate, – if but one rag of his clothes, but a particle of his body, had remained to assure her that her darling had perished by wild beasts, or been slain by still wilder men, it would at least have given rest to her weary heart; but this torturing mystery was too great to be borne. So the years dragged slowly onward, and each succeeding anniversary of her boy's loss drove the sharp grief still deeper into her heart, until sixteen years after the loss, she tired of this world, and the peaceful turf closed over her sorrows. In her last thoughts the memory of the lost boy had a place. She died of a broken heart.

Matthew Brayton was born April 7th, 1818, and was therefore seven years, five months and thirteen days old at the time of his loss.

CHAPTER II
MATTHEW BRAYTON'S NARRATIVE

Stolen by Indians and traded from Tribe to Tribe – Siouxs – Sioux Dog Dance – Sold to the Snakes – Digger Indians – Fight with the Diggers – Utah – Quarrels with the Blackfeet – Flat Heads – Snakes join Utahs, Crees, and Flat Heads – Join with Copper Heads.

The first seven or eight years of my captivity among the Indians were so full of changes that I cannot distinctly remember the events that occurred, and I am compelled to trust to the accounts given me by the members of the various tribes who were cognizant of the circumstances. From their statements I learn that I was taken from Ohio by a party of Canadian Indians, and by them borne to their village in Canada. The only motive alleged to me for the theft was that the party who stole me had a difference with some white families in Ohio, and that I was taken out of revenge. Among these Indians I remained secreted for some time, the tribe fearing to let me be seen by white men lest I should be taken away.

From all that I can learn, I remained some six or seven months with this tribe, and was then sold to a party of Pottawottomies, who took me across to Michigan. The compensation obtained for

me by the Canadian tribe consisted of three and a half gallons of whiskey. With my new owners I remained about half a year, when the Pottawottomies either being afraid to keep me any longer, or having an unappeasable thirst for whiskey, traded me off to the Paw-Paws for five and a half gallons of firewater. I could not say how long I remained in Michigan with this tribe, but I was at length transferred to the Winnebagoes of Illinois, my value having increased with my age to the amount of seven and a half gallons of whiskey. I did not remain long with this tribe, but was sold to the Wisconsin Chippewas for nine and a half gallons of whiskey, and with them remained one year. From the Chippewas I passed into the hands of the Siouxs in Minnesota, and remained with them nearly three years. During my stay with the Siouxs I visited the site of what now forms the city of St. Paul. In that vicinity there were then seven shanties or huts, made of poles and sticks set up endways. Two or three French and Dutch, with some Indians then occupied the place.

About the ninth year of my captivity among the Indians, the band of Siouxs to which I belonged made an expedition westward. In the course of their hunt they came on a tribe of Snake Indians. The Snakes and Siouxs were generally at war, but there was peace between these two parties. Some differences that had occurred between the bands were settled at the meeting, and the Siouxs celebrated the fact by a great Dog-Dance.

This dance is peculiar to the Siouxs, and I never saw it at any other time. The manner of doing it was this: – A party of

warriors squat around in a circle, smoking and talking. A dog is then taken and its legs tied, after which it is thrown into the circle of warriors. One of the "medicine men" kills the animal with his tomahawk, cuts open its side and takes out its liver, which is cut into strips and hung on a pole nearly the height of a man. The warriors spring to their feet and commence dancing around it; all the while smacking their lips and making grimaces as if they were anxious to have a taste of the delicious meat. In a short time one of the dancers makes a grab at the liver and bites off a piece, which he chews and swallows as he dances. Then the others follow his example until all the liver is eaten. If any of the pieces should drop, the "medicine man" picks it up and carries it in the palm of his hand for the dancers to eat, after doing which they lick his hand. As soon as the liver is all eaten, the warriors sit down as before, and wait to see if another dog is thrown in. As long as any one gives a dog, they are compelled to eat its liver raw and warm, and no one is allowed to handle it except the "medicine man." Women are forbidden to join in this dance. The Siouxs think that those who thus eat the liver of the dog will possess that animal's bravery and sagacity.

Before the meeting was over, the Snakes took a great fancy to me, and in order to celebrate their new made truce the Siouxs offered to trade me to the Snakes for eleven gallons of whiskey, which was done, and I was once more transferred to new masters.

My new owners made me change my dress and paint to conform to their style, and I was adopted into the tribe. An Indian

who had lost a son in battle took me into his family, and from that time forth I was told to consider him as my father, and his squaw as my mother. But although thus made one of themselves, the Indians did not fail to treat me with considerable harshness, and I was compelled to do some of the severe drudgery usually imposed on women.

The Snakes at that time hunted in Iowa, but in about a year after my joining them they had repeated quarrels with other tribes, and with the whites. For a few months they remained in Missouri, but eventually packed up and struck the trail for the west side of the Rocky Mountains. Our tribe hunted through Utah for a while, but quarreled with the tribes already in that country, and therefore we once more pushed west, and crossing the mountains that divided us from California, entered that country. Here we lived, for about five years, generally at peace, but having occasional skirmishes with the Digger Indians.

These Indians are a wretched and degenerate race, cowardly, treacherous, filthy and indolent. Instead of living by hunting, as was the case with our tribe, and nearly all the others east of the California Mountains, these obtained a scanty subsistence by digging for roots. The women do the digging whilst the men stay in the lodges or are playing at some game. I have seen hundreds of the women at a time out in this employment. They carry on their backs heavy baskets of the shape of old fashioned straw beehives, and in their hands long sticks with which to dig the roots. Early in the morning they go out and keep at work

until evening, when they return with their baskets full of roots. Sometimes they procure enough not only for their present eating, but to lay up for winter use.

The men among the Digger Indians wear very long hair, but that of the women is cut short. Both are nearly naked, and filthy in the extreme. Most of them are tatooed, the women especially displaying in general a large number of designs on their person. They do this merely for ornament, and not for the purpose of showing a difference in rank as is the case in most tribes where the custom exists.

Their houses or lodges are very simple. In the summer they put a number of bushes together in the shape of a cone, and into this they creep for shelter from the sun by day, and to sleep by night. These lodges or tents are more designed to keep off the rays of the sun than for shelter from inclement weather. For the cold and wet seasons the Diggers in the northern part of California have a different kind of dwelling. They dig a pit several feet deep, of the size of the proposed lodge. Then they drive poles into the earth around the edge of the pit, and bend them over so that they will meet at the top, where they are fastened together, making a covering over the pit. They then cover the whole building with earth to the thickness of several inches, or even a foot, leaving a small hole at the top to serve as a chimney. Another hole is made at the side, large enough to admit the body. When they wish to sleep they build a fire in the center of the lodge, then creep in feet foremost and lie in that position to the fire.

The Diggers have a curious way of marrying. When a man takes a fancy to a girl and wants her as his squaw, he speaks to her parents and talks to her a little. Then he lies down with her, and if she lies still they are considered man and wife; but if she gets up and runs away, the courtship is at an end, and the man never tries to get her again. A Digger man can have as many wives as he chooses, but the woman can only have one husband.

When a Digger dies they burn him, with all his implements, and have a great mourning during the ceremony. They believe that when a man dies his spirit goes to the East, and keeps going until it comes to a great water. A large boat is there to take him over. All the good get safely across and go to a very large house where they eat, drink, and gamble, until they are tired, when they go off among the trees. The bad people who go in the boat reach the middle of the water, when the bottom falls out, and they are lost forever.

Whilst in California we frequently visited what is now San Francisco, but which was then a small village of a dozen houses, known by the Spaniards as "Yerba Buena." A few French and Spanish traders were the only white residents, and to those we carried down bear meat, buffalo robes, and furs of various kinds, together with small bits of gold found in the mountains, receiving in exchange blankets and "snakyeye," or whiskey. These trips were made several times during the year, but were finally terminated by the occurrence that resulted in our leaving that part of the country. A large party of Diggers surprised a

small hunting party of Snakes and took from them their ponies. A number of warriors were sent out from our tribe to demand them back, but the Diggers had surrendered the ponies to the Spaniards, and now asked their protection from the vengeance of the Snakes. The Spaniards granted their request, and warned our party off. As soon as the news arrived at the Snake village, there was a general excitement, and all who were able to bear arms at once took the war path. The Diggers fled, but were tracked to the coast, where they were supported by several Spaniards. We attacked their camp at daybreak, and a desperate fight ensued. The Diggers are generally lazy and cowardly, but their numbers far exceeded ours, and they were assisted by white men. In the end we were victors, and our party mercilessly tomahawked and scalped all within their reach. Nearly a hundred and fifty scalps were borne off in triumph by the Snakes, and among the trophies were the scalps of some white men.

The result of this fight was a general movement of the whites on the one hand and the California tribes on the other, to drive us out of the country. For a time our tribe stood its ground, but at length it became evident that we could not remain peaceably in that region, so we once more turned our faces eastward and re-crossed the mountains to Utah.

During our stay in this Territory, which did not exceed six or seven moons, our principal encampment was on the banks of the Great Salt Lake, near the present site of Salt Lake City. At that time not a white man lived in that vast wilderness, though not

many years afterwards a large city sprang up where our wigwams had formerly stood.

Once more our tribe became restless and dissatisfied with their location, and we changed our hunting ground to Oregon, remaining there about two years. Here we came into collision with the Blackfeet Indians, one of the most ferocious and cruel tribes in existence. They are always at war with the tribes around them and make long journeys for the purpose of attacking some other nation. Several skirmishes took place between our bands and those of the Blackfeet, in which sometimes one and sometimes the other would be successful. In order to defend ourselves from the attacks of the Blackfeet, our tribe made an alliance with the Flat Heads. These are a very singular race who strap boards on the heads of their children so as to change their shape. There are two kinds of Flat Heads, those who have the head flattened from the forehead back, making the head look like a wedge with the sharp edge in front, whilst the others have the sides flattened so as to have the point of the wedge upwards. The party allied with us were of the former kind. A part of the Utahs also joined us about this time, as did the Crees.

Our associated tribes kept going farther north, not finding any place to settle owing to the constant attacks of the Indians through whose territories we passed. With the Bloods and the Blackfeet we had repeated fights until we got above their country, beyond the territory of the United States and into the country of the Copper Head Indians, who roamed over a vast extent of

territory extending to the Esquimaux on the North.

Our associated tribes united in the North with the Copper Heads, and here the whole lived in undisputed possession from that time to the present.

CHAPTER III
MATTHEW BRAYTON'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED

Government of Snake and Copper Head Tribes – Women worked hard – Marriage Laws – Children taught the use of weapons early – Funeral ceremonies of the Copper Heads – Their Religion.

The Snakes and Copper Heads are ruled over by one General Chief, or *Inkupudia*, who remains in power for life unless deposed by the vote of all the tribes. Since the union of the tribes there has been but one General Chief, now (in 1860) eighty years of age, named *O-wash-kah-ke-naw*. He reigns supreme to a certain extent and appoints sub-chiefs to govern the different tribes. These sub-chiefs are appointed for a period of time and not for life. The General Chief makes known his laws or decrees for the government of the tribes in various matters, and it is the duty of the sub-chiefs to communicate these decrees to the tribes under their charge. The laws in relation to stealing are very strict. Any one proved to have stolen from a person belonging to the associated tribes is condemned to death, and is generally burned at the stake. It is looked upon as very disgraceful for an Indian to tell a lie to his fellows.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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