

The Autobiography of
Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard



Introduction by Caroline M. McIlvaine

107-112
#71

THE CITADEL PRESS
NEW YORK

The Autobiography of

movals; but he thought it extremely doubtful, the country being very hilly and covered with underbrush. I left it to Dufrain to decide, and as he chose to go, I started, with the young Indian to assist me. We had a terrible journey over hills and through thick undergrowth, and after three days of most severe toil reached our trading house, our invalid having borne the journey remarkably well.

The other party had only returned two days before, and all were anxious about us, and were about organizing an expedition to go in search of us. I was almost worn out from the hardships I had endured and from dragging my comrade.

Dufrain never left our cabin until we carried him to a canoe in the spring to start for Mackinaw. There was a light wind the day we started and the motion of the canoe caused vomiting, and before we could reach a harbor at White River he died, and we buried him in the bluff. He was very fond of card-playing during his life, and some Indians having camped on the bluffs where we buried him reported that at night they heard his voice calling out the name of the cards as he played them, "corno" (diamond), "cune" (heart), etc.; and though the river was a great resort for the Indians in the spring, where they used the peculiar white clay for washing their blankets, for years after they avoided it, believing it to be haunted.

106

Burton Saltontall Hubbard

KALAMAZOO RIVER.— COSA.— AN ACCIDENT.— A VISIT.— WOLF STORIES.— CROOKED CREEK.

We were among the very first of the traders to reach Mackinaw, and after making my returns to Mr. Stewart I was detailed for a time to the retail store. On Mr. Matthews' return from Montreal I was assigned to duty under him in the assorting and packing house, where the business was conducted in the same manner as previously described, and lasted until the last of July or first of August.

My third winter was spent on the Kalamazoo River, in Michigan, my trading house being on the north bank of the river, and opposite the present city of Kalamazoo, and for the first time I had full control of an "outfit."

My crew consisted of three Canadians, who were accustomed to trading at that post, and an Indian named Cosa, well and favorably known among the Indians for bravery and intelligence. He had years before abandoned hunting, preferring to engage for the winter with some one of the regular traders as an ordinary man or *voyageur*. He received one hundred dollars for his winter's service, which was considered a high price for so short a time, and was as much as two Canadians received for a whole year. But as he was perfectly familiar with the country, and well acquainted

107

The Autobiography of

with the Indians, had a good reputation as a trader, and furnished two horses of his own, besides the services of his wife, I was glad to secure him even at that price.

This post was a pleasant one, though the hunting grounds were very much scattered, which made constant watchfulness and activity necessary to secure the furs and dispose of goods. The winter was one of great hardship, and my men were constantly out collecting furs, and occasionally I myself made a trip. Cosa sometimes took his wife with him in place of a man—she riding on one of the horses.

One evening on their return they reported having come across a camp of Indians on a branch of the Paw-Paw River, who had an abundance of furs and peltries, but Cosa, being out of goods, could only get from them what they already owed.

One of the Indians was very sick, and his friends had sent for a famous Indian doctor, who Cosa said always introduced his curing ceremonies by a drunken carousal. Cosa thought that we might get their furs if we could reach them ahead of the St. Joseph traders (who were connected with an opposition company), but he considered a little whisky absolutely necessary to secure their trade. I asked him to return to their camp in the morning with goods only, but he said he was very tired. I told him that it was but a short day's journey;

108

Burdon Saltongtail Hubbard

that he could take his other horse that had been resting; to pack his goods, and that I would go with him, and leave his wife to keep house. He replied that it would be of no use without whisky, but that if I would take the small keg he would go. He really needed two or three days' rest, and had the reputation of being a stubborn, fearless fellow, this reputation being confirmed by his many scars, and I did not like to command him to go. Heretofore he had shown a good disposition, was obedient and willing, and seemed to take more interest in the expedition, and had a greater desire for good results, than any of the other men, and I did not like to anger him if it could be avoided. I sought a private opportunity of consulting his wife, who confirmed all he had said, remarking, however, that she feared her husband could not refrain from joining in the ceremonies and getting drunk with the others. Her views decided me to accede to Cosa's wishes, and I said to him: 'Now, Cosa, if we take the little keg and go to-morrow, will you promise to stick by me, and not taste a drop?' He promised, and that night two bales of merchandise, with the little two-gallon keg of highwines, watered one-third, were prepared; and at daylight in the morning the pony was brought from the woods, saddled and loaded, and we started, Cosa taking the lead.

I had also provided an empty one-gallon keg,

109

The Autobiography of

and when about dark we arrived within hearing of the camp, I told Cosa that we would fill our small keg, mixed with half water, and hide the other, so that the Indians thinking that was all we had would be the sooner satisfied. To this he assented, saying it was wise. Though the highwines had been diluted one-third it was still quite strong. Having no funnel, how to further mix it was a dilemma, but we soon found a way. We would draw a mouthful from the larger keg and spit it into the smaller, and then take a mouthful of water and transfer it in the same way, Cosa and I alternating in the operation. It would have been wiser had I done this alone; but I found it burned my mouth badly and so permitted him to aid me, and thus gave him a taste, though I hardly think he swallowed any at the time. The transfer having been made, we hid the larger keg and proceeded to the camp, and to our disappointment found that Bertrand men had been there the day before and secured all the furs and peltries except a few remnants.

Some of the Indians had gone for the medicine man, while others had gone to Bertrand for whisky, which had been promised them in the trade. I would have returned had it been possible, but the horse was tired out, and the night very dark, so we accepted comfortable quarters which were tendered us, Cosa promising not to disclose the fact of our having whisky. The secret got out, however, and

110

Burton Saltontall Hubbard

at early morn I was beset on every side, Cosa joining in the demand for the whisky.

There seemed to be no way but to sell a little, so I extorted a promise from Cosa to remain with me in the lodge and not to drink any, and commenced collecting what few furs they had in exchange for the whisky.

Cosa did not long keep his promise, but began to drink, and I saw the necessity of rehiding the larger keg before Cosa should reach the place. With the assistance of a squaw I changed the hiding place, first having refilled the smaller keg (which I again diluted), and hid it on the scaffold of the lodge I was in, and carefully covered it over. Cosa had told the other Indians I had more whisky, and joined them in urging me to give it to them, stating that if I did not they would go and take it; and being refused they went with him in search of it. Being disappointed in their attempts the Indians began to separate and go to their lodges, and soon all was quiet in the camp.

As my feet were wet I pulled off my moccasins and laid down in a wigwam with my feet to the fire. Cosa still importuning me for more drink, and I positively refusing, he, with two drunken companions, after a long search, succeeded in finding the concealed keg. The squaw who assisted me in hiding the "fire water" had watched them, and quickly informed me of their discovery. I ran out into

111

The Autobiography of

the snow barefooted, and succeeded in reaching the place before they could remove it from the scaffold. I told the two Indians that it was my property, and not theirs; that I should give them no more, and forbade them to touch it. They desisted, but Cosa, to show his independence, advanced to take the keg, when I seized him by the throat, threw him on his back, and placing my knees on his stomach, choked him so he could neither move nor speak, and held him thus until the squaw had removed the keg and again hidden it. I would not let him up until he promised me to lie down and sleep; for a time he refused to promise; but as I only released my grip upon his throat long enough for him to answer, and then tightened it with renewed vigor, he was soon glad to promise, when I allowed him to arise and conducted him to my own comfortable quarters, covered him up, and lay down by his side.

Cosa was considerably injured, and after becoming sober slept but little. I myself kept wide awake until daylight, when I arose, got the pony from the woods, loaded him, and as soon as we had eaten our breakfast we departed homeward, picking up the keg on the way. Cosa was very hoarse from his severe choking, and very much mortified and humbled, and begged me not to tell what had taken place when we reached home; he was afterward very faithful and attentive to his duties.

112

Burbon Saltongstall Hubbard

In the month of November I made a trip to Chicago, and had a very delightful visit of a week in Mr. Kinzie's family, received my clothing which I had left there on my previous visit, and returned to my post.

During the fall of this year I made a *cache* in the sandhills at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River, in which I concealed many valuables, and early in the month of March following I took one of the men and went in a canoe for the articles. We found everything safe and in good condition, and having loaded them into the canoe started home. The weather was very severe for the season, and the snow still deep, which made our camping very unpleasant, and the current being swift, we had much difficulty in ascending the rapids, at the foot of which we had made our night's camp. I had collected some fine mink, otter, and other furs at two Indian camps on the route, and these, added to the articles taken from the *cache*, made a very valuable load.

I took my position in the bow of the canoe, leaving my man to steer. We had passed the rapids, but were still in a very strong current, when we came to a fallen tree lying in the river which formed a partial eddy. In pushing around the tree the strong current struck the boat sidewise, caused it to careen, and I lost my balance. To prevent the canoe from upsetting I allowed myself to go overboard and swam down the river; the man quickly turn-

113