

The Autobiography of
Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard



Introduction by Caroline M. McIlvaine

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was drawn over the rough ground, and halted until some better means of travel could be devised. I sent back to Iroquois for two more men, which necessitated my camping for another night. On their arrival they constructed, with poles and blankets, a litter upon which they bore me safely and quite comfortably home.

I had a severe attack of inflammatory rheumatism, which confined me to the house for three or four weeks, and from which I did not fully recover for eighteen months. I doctored myself with poultices of elm and decoctions of various herbs.

About six weeks after my attack of rheumatism I prepared to abandon my trading house on the Iroquois and remove to Chicago, but was compelled to wait for a band of Indians who owed me for goods and who had not yet returned from their winter hunting grounds. While thus delayed two white men appeared with a pair of horses and a wagon loaded with corn, cornmeal, and whisky. Hearing that I was waiting for the Indians, they decided to wait also and trade them whisky for furs, blankets, or anything else of value which the Indians might possess. I was unable to walk without crutches, and scarcely able to leave my bunk. I knew that if the Indians were allowed to have the whisky, trouble would ensue, so I sent Noël Vasseur to their camp to ask one of the men to come and see me.

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He soon came, and I told him I did not like to have him sell whisky to the Indians, and that he had no right to do so, as he had no license from the Government to trade with Indians. He replied that he had as much right to trade as I had, and that he should do as he pleased. I warned him that the Indians would become drunk, and would then rob, and probably murder them, but he refused to listen to me, and returned to his camp.

I immediately stationed men to watch for the coming of the Indians, and was soon informed that Yellow Head and his band were at hand. When they arrived, I had a large kettle of corn soup and other food ready for them, and as soon as they had eaten, I took them into my council room, traded for their furs, collected what they owed me, and after giving each one a gill of whisky, dismissed them before the strangers had learned of their arrival. The Indians soon discovered the camp of the two men and commenced trading their blankets and the goods they had just bought from me for whisky. I sent word to the men to leave, and told them that as soon as the Indians got drunk they would rob them of all they had sold them, but they would not heed the message.

As I had anticipated, the Indians soon became drunk, and angry because they had nothing more to trade and could get no more to drink, and began to take back their blankets

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and goods. The white men became very much frightened, and came to me for assistance. I refused to interfere, but sent Vasseur and Jacques Jombeau to empty the remaining kegs of whisky, which they did. The Indians scooped up the whisky with their hands, and became more and more enraged, and finally assaulted Jombeau, and stabbed him in the back, though not severely. The Indians got back all they had sold, and the white men made their escape with the horses and wagon. The disturbance lasted all night.

The Indians came to my house and demanded more whisky, and were, of course, refused. They all laid down and fell asleep, except Yellow Head (a brother-in-law of Billy Caldwell), who came several times to me, coaxing and threatening me, but to no purpose. He finally said he would go to my store, break in and take as much as he wanted. I said, "Very well, go on," and he started for the store-house. I got up from my bunk, took my rifle and thrust it through the paper which served for window glass, and as he reached the store, I "drew a bead on him," and called to him to go on and break in. He changed his mind and walked away.

I again laid down, and in a few minutes he returned very angry, and walking up to my bunk drew a knife and attempted to stab me; but I was too quick for him, seized his arm, and lame as I was, jumped up, took the knife

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away, and pushed him out of the door, where I found some squaws who had been attracted by the disturbance. Outside the door was a large mortar with a heavy iron-wood pestle, which I used for pounding corn. I gave the knife to a squaw, and leaned on one crutch against the mortar with my hand on the pestle. Yellow Head felt in his leggins for another knife, when I said to the squaw, "Give the old woman a knife." She did so, but Yellow Head, looking at the pestle upon which my hand rested, and doubtless remembering the sudden manner in which I had before disarmed him, deemed "discretion the better part of valor," and silently departed with the squaws.

The day following I started for Chicago, leaving one of my men, Dominick Bray by name, in charge of the place, and to make a garden and plant vegetables for the following winter's use. Two or three days after my arrival in Chicago, Bray appeared with the story that Yellow Head had returned for revenge. Bray was lying in his bunk, when Yellow Head and two other Indians entered the house and leveled their rifles at him. He jumped up and ran by them out of the door, pulling it shut just as they fired, and the bullets struck the door through which he had escaped. Bray ran into the woods, caught a horse, and left for Chicago. The Indians pillaged the house and store, taking everything that had