

LOUISA BEAR

By G. A. WATERMULDER

LOUISA BEAR was a daughter of Alexander Payer, a highly respected and able member of the Winnebago tribe, with a strain of French blood which dated back to the early colonial period when the Winnebagos lived along the upper Mississippi valley. In the early years he was the official interpreter of the tribe.

Louisa was the second oldest child. She early, came in close contact with many of the main issues of the religious and community life of her tribe, and was thoroughly conversant with them. Schooling in those early days was but meager, and she had but two years of training in a rather poorly equipped reservation Government school; but she had a richly endowed nature, and soon became a self-made woman. She had an unusually strong, keen mind, and showed a rare comprehension of many subjects. Largely by her own efforts she learned to read most readily and discerningly, and enjoyed the best books and papers. She also learned to write, not only legibly, but interestingly. She kept up a wide correspondence with her numerous friends and would frequently pour out her soul to them. Some of these letters contain rare gems of thought.

She was also favored with as vigorous and powerful a constitution as is rarely seen. She had therefore strong tendencies for good and for evil. She had strong likes and dislikes. She had many fierce battles to fight. She would be a born leader in spite of herself. Leadership was thrust upon her.

In the old life these qualities would necessarily direct her into many devious ways, not only enjoying them herself, "but take pleasure in them that do them." Romans 1:32.

Years before our Mission was planted in Winnebago, she came in contact with other missionaries of the Friends and Presbyterian Boards. She showed a deep interest in the Christian Religion in those days, would begin to follow the Christian road, but only to fall back into deeper sin.

It is now about thirteen years ago that I first became acquainted with Louisa. It was at the time of the death of her aged father. I then visited the home for the first time and brought words of comfort and direction and offered a prayer. That first visit led to many others which brought her frequently to church. How vividly I remember her frequent sobs and expressions of heart longings for the better life. Finally came our wonderful Camp Meeting in 1909, some of the most wonderful meetings I ever attended. It was in August, 1909, that she surrendered her life to Jesus Christ, confessed Him before men, was baptized and received into the fellowship of the Winnebago Indian Church. In our church book I find registered her name and that of George Bear, her husband, whom she led to Christ; also that of Barkley Payer, her brother, Clara Payer Sun, her sister, and other names, like Henry Thomas—



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all coming that wonderful summer.

I count the conversion of Louisa Bear a marvelous miracle of grace, and the subsequent spiritual growth of her life, in which the finer and nobler qualities of character gradually developed, as a wonderful example of the striking contrast of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit. Gal. 5:19-23. She became more humble and childlike; she had her severe struggles—it could not be otherwise; a strong and powerful nature like hers would not easily surrender; but she had many a victory and could, from the deep experience of her big heart often say, “Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

She became a true and devoted friend. She understood our troubles like few on the reservation. She was loyal to the core. If loyalty is the soul of devotion, she possessed it.

She loved Christian people. She enjoyed their fellowship. She became a most faithful member of the church, seldom would she miss a meeting— Sunday School, Sunday services, prayer meeting, or missionary society. For many years she served as the secretary and treasurer of the last named organization, and was entrusted with its funds.

Her genuine devotion was especially manifested in her cheerful and generous giving. She was an adept in making the finest ribbon and bead work, which frequently brought her a goodly income. Of this she would give her tenth to the Lord. I remember very well when shortly after her conversion, her father died and left eighty acres of land to the family, which was at that time sold, a third going to the aged mother and the other two-thirds to the seven children. Her share amounted to about \$400.00. She came to me and said that she wanted to give a tenth of that heirship money to the Mission. After the land was sold and the money divided, she came and brought me \$10.00, saying that it was part of the money she had received from the sale of the land. Two weeks later she came again, very much disturbed in mind, and under deep conviction of wrong-doing, and said that like Sapphira of old, she had held back for selfish purposes a part of the tenth of her heirship money, and sobbingly handed me some bills and change, amounting to about \$30.00, making exactly a tenth of the part that belonged to the Lord. She however gave very unostentatiously. She never sounded the trumpet before her. She followed the Master’s injunction, “Let your alms be in secret and your Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

Louisa is no longer with us. The Lord called her to her Heavenly Home. She walked with the Lord and endured “as seeing Him who is invisible.”

Shortly before her death she had gone to Wisconsin to the other branch of the Winnebago tribe. She felt she ought to get away from her own people for a while, not knowing how long she would stay. About two weeks before her death we received a letter from her containing these words:

“Today I have been out in the forest alone. I happen to find some fir trees, so tall and stately. I stood there and looked up. I saw the vastness of the heavens, and these trees seemed to be forever pointing to the skies. I sat down and prayed. I felt so small there. My soul seemed to shrivel up alone in this place. And why was I up here? I should have been at Winnebago helping at the Mission. And now I have found myself, God has revealed my smallness; He has revealed everything to me. I feel so happy once more. I cannot tell you how and when I found this. God has come and lifted the veil. I feel so lowly, and am so humble. He has found me wanting, very short of the glory of God. Many a time I felt like flinging away everything, and live ‘to please myself, but something within me would say ‘stop, stop!’

Now I feel I could not wait to go to Winnebago. I want to be there and show myself that I am a Christian, and although my body is not well, my heart and soul is very happy.”

As by a strange premonition she came home to die. She wanted to see the friends and the church once more. And now on the little cemetery hill, next to that of her husband, George Bear, who also had walked with God, lies her body waiting for the resurrection morning. Near her grave is also that of a pioneer missionary, of the Presbyterian Church, Rev. William Findley, who gave sixteen years of his life to the Winnebagos, seeing but one convert come to Christ, but on his tombstone are graven the prophetic words--- “My words shall not return unto me void.”

“And herein is that saying true,” says the great Teacher, “One soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor; other men labored and ye are entered into their labors.”

We miss her much. She, “being dead, yet speaketh.”

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