

NARRATIVE OF SPOON DECORAH.¹IN AN INTERVIEW WITH THE EDITOR.²

I was born at my father's village near the Caffrey school-house at the mouth of the Baraboo River, a few years before the Tecumseh war. My father's name, among the French, was Zhuminaka [Fire-water], which I am told is from a French word having something to do with wine. His Winnebago name was Warrahwikoogah, or Bird Spirit. The

¹Spelled also: Day Korah, Dacorah, DeKaury, DeKauray, Day Kauray, and De Corrah; I have retained the orthography of the neighborhood.—Ed.

²At the home of Spoon, in the town of Big Flats, Adams county, some ten miles north of Friendship, March 29, 1887. Moses Paquette, of Black River Falls, acted as interpreter. Spoon, who died in a cranberry marsh northwest of Necedah, Oct. 13, 1899, was a tall, well-formed, manly-looking fellow, with a well-shaped head, pleasant, open features, and dignified demeanor—quite superior in appearance to the majority of Wisconsin Winnebagoes. He was living with his aged squaw in a reasonably neat small frame cottage, while his progeny, reaching to the fourth generation, were clustered about the patriarchal lodge in family wigwams. The old man told his story in a straightforward, dignified manner, his memory being occasionally jogged by Doctor Decorah, his nephew. The Doctor is a medicine-man, held in high esteem by the Decorah, or mixed-blood element of the Wisconsin Winnebagoes, who live chiefly upon homesteads in Adams, Marquette, and Jackson counties. Spoon took pride in exhibiting a well-thumbed and much-battered copy of vol. vi. of these *Collections*, presented to him by Dr. Draper in 1879. He regarded it as "big medicine," and it was his constant companion upon the hunt as well as at home.

To those familiar with the Indian character, it is not necessary to explain that much of the material in this interview, as well as that with Walking Cloud, *post*, was obtained by means of elaborate cross-questioning. Paquette is a faithful and intelligent interpreter, and in each case

Americans called him Grey-headed Decorah.¹ He was a brother² of One-eyed Decorah, or Big Canoe.

I remember hearing of the British attack on the American fort at Prairie du Chien [in 1814]. Some of our relatives joined in it. Their names I do not now remember; I am getting very old; my memory is not as good as it was. My father's party were at Little Green Lake at the time of

carefully rendered both questions and answers. The result I have formulated into two continuous narratives, following as closely as possible the Indian manner of speech; as here printed, they meet with Paquette's approval. It is not because of any fresh data herein contained, that these simple "talks" are awarded a place in the *Collections*; but they present the Indian view of several important historical events, thus giving us an insight into what Wisconsin savages themselves are thinking and talking about, in their camp-fire reminiscences of early experiences with the white man. The scraps of folk-lore which I was enabled to gather from these two Winnebago head-men are neither numerous nor important; but, such as they are, seem worth preserving. The Winnebagoes have been confronted with white men since Nicolet's visit, in 1634; two and a half centuries of such contact have almost entirely eliminated from their minds the prehistoric traditions of the tribe; their lodge tales of to-day have little to do with the myths of their forbears, and even when revived by the old men are hopelessly although unconsciously incrustated with a later growth, the result of missionary teaching. The bulk of the Winnebagoes have borrowed little else from the Christian instruction which has so long been lavished on them; of all Wisconsin Indians, they have been the least influenced in their religious belief.

See article, "Wisconsin Winnebagoes," in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xli., pp. 399 et seq.—Ed.

¹ Called also Schachipkaka (White War Eagle), and Old Decorah. He was the son of The Ladle, repeatedly mentioned in previous volumes of the *Collections*. He died at Peterwell, on the Wisconsin River, April 20, 1836, said to be 90 years of age. He had fought in the battle of the Thames, and against Saukuseky; and had been held as a hostage at Prairie du Chien for the delivery of Red Bird, in 1827. For sketches of the Decorah family and this exemplary individual member of it, see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, li., p. 178; lii., pp. 283-289; v., pp. 153, 155; vi., p. 224; vii., pp. 345, 347; also Mrs. Kinzie's *Winn. Den.* (1806), pp. 80, 486; and Gale's *Upper Mississippi* (1857), pp. 81, 82, 189.—Ed.

² Cousin, in fact. The Winnebagoes make no distinction, in common speech, between brother and cousin.—Ed.

the attack. My father was a peaceable man. He did not like to be at war with the whites. So our people did not go. I was only a boy, then. I think the first time I ever went to Green Bay, was when I was eight years old. I went to visit my aunts, who were living there. I went twice to see them.

During what the whites call the Winnebago War, at Prairie du Chien [in 1827], I was living with my people on Little Green Lake. There was among us no general hatred of the whites. Red Bird had some private revenge to satisfy, and murdered the white family at the prairie of his own accord. We were all very sorry. We had no sympathy with him. We felt that he was a bad Indian. He tried to get the rest of his tribe into trouble. I have heard of some white people who enjoy getting their neighbors into any trouble they have themselves got into. There was no feeling among the rest of the tribe, over Red Bird's conduct, except that of anger. We willingly gave him up to the whites.¹

During the Black Hawk War [1832], I lived at the Portage. When we heard of the trouble, I wanted very much to go and join the Americans. I knew the officers at Fort Winnebago, and was friendly to them. But my friends got around me and said that the Sacs were friends of the Winnebagoes. So I was persuaded not to go. In July, ten families of us started out on our summer's hunt, on the Roche-a-Cri River. We had got as far as Friendship, when Ochpiyoka (The Spaniard),² one of our friends, came into camp much excited and told us what had happened down in the Illinois country, saying that the Sacs were headed our way. We had gone out on our hunt in strong numbers. Knowing that the war was going on,

¹ See account of this uprising, in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, pp. 253 et seq. — Ed.

² "L'Espagnol, or the Spaniard, was a Menomonee chief, having his village almost opposite where Mauston is now situated." — *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, vii, p. 351. He fought under the British in 1812-15; at the attack on Mackinaw, he contested with Yellow Dog the credit of killing Major Holmes. — *Id.*, iii, p. 270. — Ed.

we feared that the Sacs might come into our territory. For there was some fear of the Sacs, all the while, although we had been told of their friendliness. They knew that some of our people were with the Americans. We felt that if the Sacs were driven into our hunting-grounds they might be revengeful, and then it would go hard with our hunting parties unless we were prepared for attack. So when The Spaniard came and told us that the Sacs were really headed our way, we were much afraid. He told us that the center of attack would be Portage. We had left many of our old people and women here. So we at once returned to Portage. The other hunting parties, to which runners had also been sent out, did so too. This was a few days before the battle on the Sauk bluffs [Wisconsin Heights].

Our party camped on the rise of ground just back of what is now the city end of the Wisconsin River bridge, in Portage. Nearly the whole tribe was camped about Portage. There were three large camps, on both sides of the river, about where the bridge now is. The principal chiefs in these camps were: Black Wolf,¹ his son Dandy,² Tahneekseeickseaga (Fond of Tobacco), White Eagle, White Crow,³ and Ahsheeshka (Broken Arm). Black Wolf was

¹ *Wau Bun*, p. 80. Black Wolf's village was on the west shore of Lake Winnebago, south of the site of Oshkosh. He served under the British in the War of 1812-15, being at the captures of Mackinaw and Prairie du Chien. He died at Portage, previous to 1843. — Ed.

² *Wau Bun*, p. 91.

³ *Kaukshakaka* (White Crow), a Winnebago chief, who had but one eye, and something of a reputation as an orator. His village, which comprised about 1,200 persons, housed in teepees covered with red-cedar bark, appears to have been situated about where is now the little village of Pheasant Branch, at the west end of Lake Mendota, Dane county; the paper City of the Four Lakes was to have occupied about the same ground, a few years after the Black Hawk War. Major Henry Dodge held a council with White Crow at the latter's village, May 25, 1832, and secured his promise to be friendly to the whites, or at least neutral. June 3, White Crow brought in the Hall girls to Blue Mounds, and restored them to Indian Agent Henry Gratiot, having been actuated by a reward offered for their recovery. He had purchased their release

the uncle of Gray Eagle's Eye, my present squaw; Dandy was her cousin; White Crow was a one-eyed chief, who had a village at the Four Lakes,—he died a few years after the Black Hawk war; Broken Arm fought under Tecumseh, and also died a few years after the Black Hawk War.¹

Pierre Paquette was the trader at the Portage, in those days. He was a large, powerful man. His squaw was a daughter of Joseph Cr lie. Our tribe had great respect for him. His mother was a Winnebago woman, and he was a good man in every way,—very friendly to our people. I was his friend, and he once gave me a pony. The white captains [Dodge and Henry] were in Portage when we got there; they had brought the news from White Beaver's [General Atkinson's] camp, that caused our return. Paquette was engaged by the white captains to take them

from the Sacs. That night, he attempted to stir the Indians at the Mound into a conspiracy against Dodge's militiamen, who were present at the transfer of the prisoners. But the Crow talked too freely, and the plot came to the ears of Dodge, who at once imprisoned the conspirator and five of his fellow chiefs, and marched them, June 4, across country to Morrison's Grove. White Crow was released, but two of the others were retained as hostages. June 30, he joined Dodge's squadron, with thirty of his braves, at First (Kegonsa) Lake, and essayed to guide them to Black Hawk's camp. It proved, however, that White Crow was endeavoring to lead the whites into a well-prepared snare at the Hustisford ford, on Rock River, where Black Hawk was prepared to demolish all comers. But this plot failed. White Crow was one of Pierre Paquette's party, to guide Majors Henry and Dodge from Ft. Winnebago to Black Hawk's camp. When it was found that Black Hawk had flown and was retreating to the Wisconsin, White Crow accompanied the whites on the chase. The fortunes of Black Hawk being now in the descendant, White Crow became a good friend of the victorious Americans, and won much credit by brave conduct in the battle of Wisconsin Heights, where it is recorded that he "fought like a white man, without cover." The Winnebagoes, who played fast and loose during the war, so long as the result seemed doubtful to them, were unanimously converted into enemies of the Sacs, when the defeat of the latter seemed well assured. White Crow's conduct was a fair sample of that of his fellow tribesmen. See also, *Wau Bun*, p. 31; *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, x., p. 253; and "Story of the Black Hawk War," in *Id.*, xii. — Ed.

¹ *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, x., pp. 185, 190. — Ed.

across the country to Black Hawk's camp, on the headwaters of the Rock River. Paquette wanted a party of Winnebagoes to go with him as guides. He sent Nahheesanchonka (Man Who Thinks Himself of Importance) into the camp to get volunteers. Nahheesanchonka told us that if we would go into the war we would make a name for ourselves, and get presents; also win the good opinion of White Beaver, and the Big Father at Washington. But there was still among us a strong feeling of friendliness toward the Sacs. This feeling was of friendly pity, not a desire to help them fight. So only six young men, none of them chiefs, went with Paquette as guides. Of these were Pawnee (Pania Blanc), Nahheesanchonka, Notsookega (Bear that Breaks up the Brush), Ahmegunka, and Tahnichseeka (The Smoker). As I think again, perhaps White Crow went with Paquette on this expedition, but of this I am not sure.¹ Anyway, White Crow fought on the American side, at the Sauk bluffs [July 21, 1832].

The return of Paquette's party, a week or so later, told us of the defeat at the Sauk bluffs. We heard that those Sacs who had escaped the white bullets had crossed the Wisconsin River in a body. There was now great excitement in our camp. We feared that Black Hawk, thinking us now to be his enemies, would turn up the river and attack us at Portage. Our sympathies were strongly with the whites. Our trading interests were with them, and we were bound to them by treaties. Yet we did not like to be fighting old neighbors like the Sacs. Some of our people wanted to move out of the way, but others wanted to stand ground against Black Hawk. And thus we argued the matter between ourselves, till the danger was passed. Black Hawk fled before White Beaver, on his way to the Bad Ax. Two men from our camp went as guides to White Beaver, on this chase. They were Nahreechsecochkeshica (Lame Ankle) and Mahheenibahka (Double Knife). These were the only guides that White Beaver had.

¹ All white narrators agree that he was with Paquette's party. — Ed.

It was only a day's trip with fast ponies between Portage and Prairie la Crosse. There was much traveling between the two places during all this great excitement. So we soon got news of the battle at the Bad Ax [Aug. 2, 1832].

We soon afterwards learned how Black Hawk came to be made a prisoner. You have explained to me what the white men have set down in their books about Black Hawk's capture. It is not as they say. He was not captured at the Dells of the Wisconsin River. He never was at the Dells, in his life. There was no reason for his going there. Now I shall tell you the story I have always heard from those who know; it is the way all our people tell it; it is the true story. During the battle of the Bad Ax, Black Hawk saw a steamer coming up the river, with white warriors on board. Being afraid he would be taken, he turned back into the woods. He ran away towards the north, intending, I have heard, to go to the Chippewa country. I do not know whom or how many he took with him. I never heard Big Canoe say, as to that. After the Bad Ax battle, Big Canoe went off on a hunting expedition, up to the head waters of the La Crosse River,—which we call Enookwasaneenah; or, the River of the Woman's Breasts, because of the pair of sloping bluffs near the mouth. A few of Big Canoe's hunters were out one day, when they saw some Sacs in hiding. The Winnebagoes were afraid, and hurried back to Big Canoe's camp. The camp was on the river, near where is now the white village of Bangor, below Sparta. The party reported that they thought the Sacs were Black Hawk and his companions. Nobody in the camp knew the Sac speech except Big Canoe, who said, "I will go and see him." After he got to the place told of by his young men, Big Canoe saw Black Hawk, and said to him: "I am a great friend to the whites, and if you will surrender to me peaceably I will deliver you to the captain at Prairie du Chien, and you shall not be harmed." Black Hawk consented, and went peaceably along. I never heard of the man named Chætar, who the white men say was with Big Canoe. Very likely

there may have been some one with him as a companion, but I never heard any name given. Big Canoe got Black Hawk's promise to go along. So he went with his prisoner to General Street, and delivered him up. And that is how it was. Any other story is nonsense.¹

I never saw White Beaver, but have always heard he was a big warrior among the whites. My father knew General Dodge very well, and he always claimed him as his brother, in talking with him,—which was a great honor; but General Dodge was a good friend to our people, and deserved to be well treated by them. I met the general twice, and spoke a few words with him each time. The first time was at Blue Mounds, during the Black Hawk War. He had come to the Mounds for supplies. After the war I met him there again.

I remember Karrymaunee, who was among those who signed the treaty of 1832.² He was then the head of the tribe. I saw him often, for one of his daughters was my first squaw. She was named Flight of Geese, and died on the Nebraska reservation two years ago. We had parted many years before. Karrymaunee was large and powerful,—fully six feet high, and very broad. He was a fine man, every way. We never selected any but fine men for our chiefs.

In 1840, we were all moved to Turkey River;³ but in the spring our party went to Iowa River, where Little Decorah had a village. We went down, soon afterwards, to Turkey River, to get our ammunition; but for some reason,—perhaps because we had moved to Iowa River without consent of the agent,—we could not get any. So my father and I came back to Wisconsin and met General Dodge at Blue Mounds. He spoke to us, and said that we were all certainly entitled to the annuities, even to the youngest child. But when

¹ Cf. *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, viii., p. 316; the narrative of Walking Cloud, *post*, p. 465, note; article, "Wisconsin Winnebagoes," in vol. xi.; and *Mag. West. Hist.*, v., p. 194.—Ed.

² *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, v., p. 181.—Ed.

³ *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xii., pp. 405, 406.—Ed.

we went back to the agency, we again failed to get the payment; we had neglected to have General Dodge put his words in writing.

We stayed out on the Iowa River for ten years. In 1848, the Big Father arranged for moving all the Winnebagoes to Sauk Rapids, Minnesota, in the Long Prairie agency. We had gone as far north as Winona on our way to Long Prairie, when our party became afraid, from the reports that reached us of the number of Sioux who were in the neighborhood of the new reservation. We wanted to stop. At Winona there were some white soldiers, whose captain told us we must go along peaceably with the rest of the tribe, or there would be trouble. We didn't pay much attention to this. We were enjoying ourselves in dancing, when the soldiers turned a cannon on us. It seems that the white captain thought our dance was a war dance. But we were peace Indians, and were merely determined not to go any farther towards the new home they had made for us; for the Sioux were not good neighbors. A soldier stood at the cannon, with a torch in his hand, and was going to touch it to the powder, when Big Wave, of White Eagle's band, went up and knocked the torch out of his hand. The soldiers were much excited, though they soon saw we meant no harm, but would not be fired on if we could help it.¹

I went up to the officer and told him that I did not like this treatment. I said I wanted to get back to Wisconsin. There was a good deal of talk, but finally H. M. Rice and H. L. Dousman, who were traders, following us up from Prairie du Chien, spoke for me. They gave me a paper, saying that I was a good Indian, and that my father lived on the Wisconsin River at Portage. So I crossed the Mississippi River in a borrowed canoe, swimming my pony behind. I left the canoe on the Wisconsin side, and went down to La Crosse on my pony, stopping on the way to hunt elk on the Black River. There I found a good many of my friends who had hid themselves so as

¹ Neill, *Hist. of Minn.* (4th ed., 1882), pp. 483, 487.—Ed.

not to be removed from their hunting grounds. Black Hawk¹ was the leader of this band. From La Crosse I went across the country to Portage, and have never since been troubled by the Big Father or his soldiers, about removing to west of the Mississippi River.

I have camped with my family on my hunting and fishing journeys, all along the Wisconsin River. I was at Elroy for several seasons, and have been near Friendship for a good many years. In 1878, I took up a homestead of 40 acres near Pike Lake, but was never there.² The forty-acre piece I now live on, I bought in 1883. It is in the northeast quarter of section 1, town 18, range 5, about ten miles north of Friendship. I have broken 20 acres, and the rest is scrub-oak woods. The soil is poor, and I make but little money, having many orphan children and grandchildren and one great-grandchild to support. I am getting old and feeble, and I cannot see to hunt any longer, although I do some trapping on the Roche-a-Cri River.³

You ask me to tell you of the traditions of my tribe, and some of the old chiefs I have known. My memory is getting very poor; but I will do the best I can. It has been told me, by my father and my uncles, that the Winnebagoes first lived below the Red Banks, on the east shore of Green Bay.⁴ There was a high bluff there, which enclosed a lake. They lived there a very long time. From there they moved to the Red Banks, and met at that place the first Frenchmen whom they ever saw. The Winnebagoes were in a very bad condition; they had nothing but bows and arrows with which to kill game. The French-

¹ Probably the Winnebago chief who signed the treaty of 1832, and whose descendants claim for him the honor, such as it is, of discovering the fugitive Sac leader of the same name. See Spoon's own account of this affair, *ante*, pp. 453-455; narrative of Walking Cloud, *post*; and *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xii., pp. 261, *note*, 430, 431. — Ed.

² See Paquette's comment on Winnebago homesteading, in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xii., pp. 418, 419. — Ed.

³ Spoon Decorah was declared by his friends to have been, in his prime, one of the crack hunters of the tribe. — Ed.

⁴ *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, ii., p. 491; iii., p. 203. — Ed.

men gave them guns, powder, blankets, kettles, and other goods. After that, my ancestors lived in better condition, and could kill all the game they needed. The Frenchmen were very good to our people, and bought all the furs they could get from them, at a good price. The Winnebagoes lived a long time at the Red Banks, and then moved to Lake Winnebago. They afterwards spread along the Upper Fox and the Wisconsin Rivers, and down to the Rock River, in the Illinois country.

Our people were always friendly with the French. They assisted them at the Fox River rapids, in getting their canoes over. I never heard that there was any trouble between the French and the Winnebagoes. My father told me the two nations were always at peace. When my tribe was at Lake Winnebago, in early days, they fought a good deal with other nations of Indians, — with the Sioux, the Pawnees, and the Osages; but they were always friendly with the Chippewas, Menomonees, and Pottawattomies.

I have heard my father say that his father often told him about certain white medicine-men in black gowns¹ being among our people; but I never heard the names of any of them. In my day, we have not been much troubled by white medicine-men, but have been allowed to keep to the religion of our fathers. Very few of my friends are Christians. Our spirits are the same spirits our fathers believed in.

Our people once owned the lead mines in Southwestern Wisconsin. I have seen Winnebagoes working in them, long before the Black Hawk War. There were a good many at work in this way, nearly all the time in summer. Some dug lead for their own use, but most of them got it out to trade off to other Indians for supplies of all sorts. They made lead-mining their regular work. Every fall and spring hunters would go down to the mines and get a stock of lead for bullets, sometimes giving goods for it and sometimes furs.² When the whites began to come

¹ Jesuit missionaries.— Ed.

² Cf. "Notes on Early Lead-Mining in the Fever-river Region," in this volume.— Ed.

among the mines, the Big Father¹ said to his Winnebago children: "I want this land and will have my own people to work it, and whenever you go out hunting come by this way, and you will be supplied with lead." But this agreement was never carried out by the Big Father or his agents. Never was a bar of lead or a bag of shot presented to us. This was a very great sorrow to our people. For many years there was much sorrowful talk among the Winnebagoes, at the manner in which the Big Father had treated them, with regard to the mines. No, we never saw any of our lead again, except what we paid dearly for; and we never will have any given to us, unless it be fired at us out of white men's guns, to kill us off.

Our old people talk much about Tecumseh. Some Winnebagoes once fought under him, but none of my relations ever did. Tecumseh's skin was bullet-proof. When he went into battle, he always wore a white deer-skin hunting shirt, around which was girt a strap. The bullets shot at him would go through his shirt, and fall harmless inside. When the weight of the bullets inside the shirt became too great, he would unstrap his belt and let them fall through to the ground. He was a brave man, as a man whom bullets could not wound would of course be; he never used a gun in battle, only a hatchet. Tecumseh had but one son. One day, when the great warrior had grown old and feeble, he called his son to him and said: "I am getting old. I want to leave you what has made me proof against bullets." Thereupon Tecumseh commenced to retch, and try to vomit. He repeated this several times and finally threw up a smooth, black stone, about three inches long. That stone was Tecumseh's soul.² Handing it to his son, he said: "I could not be killed by a bullet, but will die only of old age. This is to be your charm against bullets, also." And

¹ Meaning the president of the United States. — Ed.

² Spoon's language was, literally: "That part of Tecumseh which was to live after the rest of his body was dead." — Ed.

so his son swallowed it, that he, likewise, might never be killed by a bullet. And he never was.¹

Hootschope (Four Legs)² was one of the big chiefs of our tribe, when it was at Lake Winnebago. I have often heard of him as a great man and a mighty warrior. There are only two descendants of his, now living. One of these is a woman, named Good Cloud, who lives near Tomah; she has a son named Good Bear. The other descendant of Hootschope is a boy, Will Dandy, who goes to school at the Wittenberg mission on the Lake Shore railroad. Will Dandy has two cousins, also living at Wittenberg.

Black Wolf had a village on Lake Winnebago, near Fond du Lac, when I was a boy. He was a large man, much respected, and the war-chief of the tribe. He died at the Portage, many years ago.

Karrymaunee, of whom I have spoken before, has but one descendant now living; and he lives at Stevens Point. Little Elk, the uncle of Karrymaunee, was a big man, a wise man, an orator. Little Elk was a good Indian. I knew him well.

Waukoncauhaga (Snake Skin), whom the whites called Washington Decorah,³ had a village in early times, at the head waters of De Soto Creek, below La Crosse. He died at the Blue Earth agency many years ago,—perhaps 25 years ago, when the white men were fighting each other.⁴

Grizzly Bear was another chief whom I knew. He had a village in the neighborhood of Fox Lake. But that is so long ago, that I scarcely remember him.

¹The reader will not fail to notice this practical example of the curi-
osities of myth-making. Tecumseh was killed by a bullet at the Battle
of the Thames (Oct. 5, 1813), and did not die of old age; many Winneba-
goes from Wisconsin, friends of Spoon, saw him die, and yet here is a
Winnebago tale-teller who remembers only a mythical Tecumseh, who
resembles a Greek god. This Tecumseh myth is equaled by the Black
Hawk myths referred to *post*, p. 465, *note*.—Ed.

²Wis. Hist. Colls., x., p. 114, *note*.—Ed.

³Wis. Hist. Colls., ii., pp. 260, 262; v., pp. 156, 297, 307. In 1832 he was
reported to be 84 years of age.—Ed.

⁴During the War of Secession.—Ed.

Joseph Crélie and I were great friends. I knew him at Portage for many years, and used to visit him. With those whom he liked, he was very friendly; but he was a rough man with others. Crélie died when he was a very old man. I am a very old man,—98 years,—but Crélie was an older man than I.

I never saw the Winnebago prophet, who was the friend of the Sacs, but I have heard my people tell about him. His father was a Sac, and his mother a Winnebago woman. He had a village on the Rock River. During the Black Hawk War, he came over to the Winnebagoes and remained until the war was over, when he returned to the Sacs. I have never heard when or where he died.

The Spoon Decorah who signed the treaty of 1825, at Prairie du Chien, was not I. That one was my cousin, and a son of Big Canoe. I am the nephew of Big Canoe; and Doc Decorah the medicine man, who lives near me, is my nephew. Doc's father, who was named Bad-Spirit Killer, was my brother-in-law. Bad-Spirit Killer died of small-pox, when [in 1832-33] so many of our people were taken away by that disease. We were at Mauston, then, picking blueberries. Several of our party died.

I remember the different officers at Fort Winnebago; but only the names of one or two of them. They were all of them simply white captains to me. I do, however, remember the name of Captain Low. He was a good friend of the Indians; and a great friend of my father. He gave my father plenty of provisions, and whenever we had any fresh venison we always gave the captain some. I remember Major Twiggs, who was also a good man. He very often furnished us shot and powder to shoot geese with.

I am getting very old. My memory is poor. But what I have told you I know to be true. I wish you had come when I was younger. I could have told you much about my tribe. I could have told you more about the old chiefs and our traditions. When I was a boy we were proud of

¹ Spoon stoutly contended that this was his age, but a careful computation made him but 84.—Ed.

them. My father gave me good talk about our tribe. He liked to speak of those things. Now the Winnebagoes are poor. They have not so much pride. Very few of them care about the old times. Most of them care only for fire-water. We get a very poor living, now. Our farms have not good soil. The game is not as plenty as it was. The white traders cheat and rob us. They make our young men drunk. It would be better if we had an agent.¹ We think the Big Father does not care for us any longer, now that he has all our best land. Perhaps it will not be long before he will want the poor land we now live on. Then we must go to the reservation.² Life on the reservation is hard. The Winnebagoes in Wisconsin do not want to go there. They want to die on their own land. They like best the streams and woods where their fathers and uncles have always hunted and trapped. If we had an agent given us, we would do better. My people are like children, and need to be looked after. They want to be encouraged. I am too old to travel much; but some day I will go and see the captain at the Four Lakes.³ I will ask him to see the Big Father, and procure for us an agent who shall be a good man.⁴ We had better have no agent, than such as I hear they sometimes have on the reservation.

¹ In 1836, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs recommended to Congress the appointment of an agent for the Wisconsin Winnebagoes, but no action was taken. See remarks on this subject, in article, "Wisconsin Winnebagoes," in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xii.—Ed.

² In Dakota county, Nebr., where about half of the Winnebago tribe are now living.—Ed.

³ Meaning the governor of Wisconsin, at Madison. "Taychoperah" (literally, *four lakes*) is the old Winnebago name for the country round about Madison.—Ed.

⁴ In June, 1857, Spoon Decorah, Four Deer, and Doctor Decorah, with a half-breed interpreter, John la Ronde, of Portage, came to Madison upon this errand, but Governor Rusk was not in the city at the time, and they failed to see him. The party spent the day in the State Historical Society's rooms in the capitol, and then left for home. This was Spoon's last visit to Madison, for in the succeeding autumn he died.—Ed.