

A MASONIC FRONTIER STORY.

In the year 1855 I was employed in the United States mail service between Independence, Missouri, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, and in the month of August, on our return trip, and after traveling some 400 miles, we drove into the camp of Mr. Preston Beck, of Santa Fe. Of course we mail boys knew Mr. Beck, and he would have us camp with him for breakfast, and as we all sat around the camp fire Mr. Beck related a thrilling event that had happened to him a few days previous.

Preston Beck was of the firm of Beck & Johnston, large dealers in general merchandize in Santa Fe, and every spring Mr. Beck would go to Kansas City with some twenty-six waggons to haul the goods to Santa Fe, the waggons being the property of the firm. On this occasion he had been to the "States," as we called it in those days, and traveled at the head of his train, moving slowly along up the Arkansas river. One morning the savages, or redskins as they were called, rushed upon him, not giving him any warning whatever. They at once demanded a surrender of his ambulance and mules, and he refused.

At that moment the Indians gave one of their demoniacal yells, and the dreadful howlings of the brutes sent a terrifying shock through his entire body, and at that instant he killed one of the redmen with his trusty revolver, which he always kept handy on such occasions. But at the same moment the Indians rushed on Mr. Beck and shot his mules down that were hitched to his ambulance. After the mules were killed the savages seized and bound him, and they forced him to go with them to the headquarters of the chief. On the way they subjected him to the humiliation and mortification of his pride beyond his endurance, and when they arrived at headquarters they divested him of his wearing apparel and bound him to the stake, and he was encircled with dry willow brush and grass covered with buffalo fat, so as to make

it burn quickly. At that moment, and as a last resort he gave the sign of a Master Mason, for he said he was almost certain that the Comanche chief had received the signs of Masonry at Washington sometime previous.

The moment he gave the sign, the chief, mounted on his fine steed so as to be above the excited animated mob of red rascals (for at that time there were at least 7,000 warriors), raised himself as high he could in his stirrups, and in the vernacular of the Comache tongue, he made a strong appeal to his people to desist, at the same time sprang from his war pony and ran in where Mr. Beck was and embraced him, and raised his face toward heaven and exclaimed in his own tongue something, and also in Spanish, that the prisoner should be at once released. As Mr. Beck, was well versed in the Spanish language, this sent such a thrill of joy through him that he almost fainted.

He was invested with what he had been divested, and all things were put in shape for the resume of his journey on the road to Santa Fe. The chief besides guaranteeing Mr. Beck against any further molestation from the Camanches, gave him a fine pair of United States mules, and wished him a safe journey.

In the year 1853 the president ordered the commanding officer of New Mexico to send under escort with an officer of the army about seven of the chieftains of different tribes to Washington, for the purpose of showing them the sights and the size of the great United States of America, and a Mr. Joel Collins was employed as the interpreter of the Spanish language to accompany them, as the Indians all spoke that language. After being introduced to the president, Franklin Pierce, the government dined and wineed them till they got so corpulent that they could not get around very well, and they went to Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston, and returned to their homes via Cincinnati, Louisville and St. Louis.