

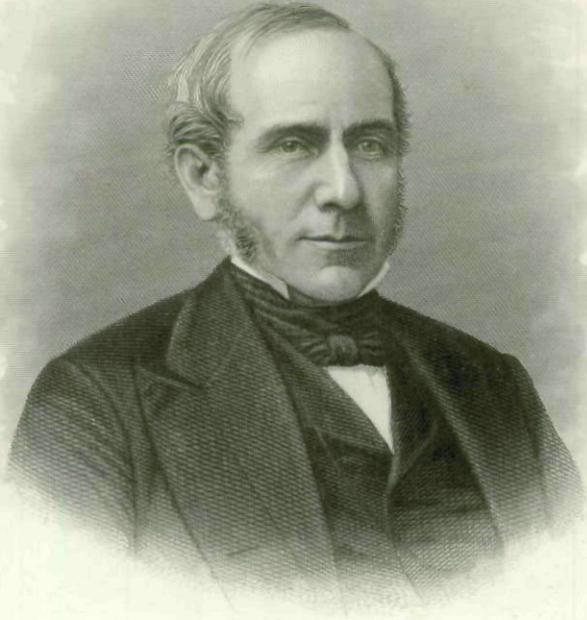
heroic volunteer soldier, who carried to his grave the scars of many battles; a conscientious and influential legislator, who left his impress on the laws of our State; a state officer of rare efficiency, whose name was a synonym for integrity; a pure and upright man of whom in life and death only good could be spoken.

VAN CALDWELL.

BY THE LATE HON. GEORGE G. WRIGHT.

Solicited to give my impressions of some of those prominent in Territorial times—not especially in political circles, but plain men and entitled to deserved praise for their work in the development of our commonwealth, I have selected for this brief paper my long-time and esteemed friend whose name appears at the head of this article.

Van Caldwell was¹ born in Ohio county, Virginia, March 5, 1799, and died at his home on the Des Moines River in Davis county, October 8, 1856. He was the son of John and Sarah (Mulligan) Caldwell—the former a native of Scotland, the latter of Ireland. So it will be seen that he was of as pure Scotch-Irish stock as any Wallace, Scott or Cassady, or of any one either of Ulster or elsewhere. And sure I am that neither Scotland, Ireland, Virginia, or any land, need be ashamed of him or feel otherwise than complimented by the blood of this man who was a very nobleman in appearance and deportment—for he was six feet, two and one-half inches in height, turned the scales approximately at two hundred pounds, had a carriage to his last days as straight as an Indian, perfect in his proportions, with an air of manhood and inexpressible dignity which denoted the truest nobility of nature. In any assembly he commanded attention, and with strangers and friends alike that involuntary respect which such a bearing inevitably and always exacts. With him often in political



Geo. G. Wright

HON. GEORGE G. WRIGHT.

and other assemblies, traveling over our new lands in early days on horseback and by other methods, at the cabins of the early settlers and primitive hotels, I knew him well, and may be allowed to say that few if any men had a more commanding figure, or one better calculated to impress those with whom he was brought into contact, than this Virginia mountaineer.

Coming to Iowa in 1836, he first settled in Bentonsport, in Van Buren county, but in a few months removed to a farm two miles north of that place. Within a year he "tackled the wagon of the wilderness" and with his family and worldly goods went farther into the country acquired by the "Black Hawk purchase," and settled on the "claim" which was his home to the time of his death. He, however, soon met with difficulties in this new land in finding that he in common with many other adventurous spirits was within that part of the "purchase" still reserved to the Sac and Fox Indians. The settlers were therefore ordered by the Government under the guidance and compulsion of the regular troops, to leave the reservation; and all did leave, I believe, except our friend, who was permitted to remain under the following circumstances:

The Indian Agency, under the charge of that grand old Virginian, Joseph M. Street, was located near what is now Agency City. Those connected therewith needed a mill to grind their grain and provide them with needed lumber; and to meet these wants a mill was erected on Soap Creek south of the Des Moines River. As the river had to be crossed to reach the mill from the Agency, and hence, when there was water enough in Soap Creek to run the mill the river was not fordable, it was arranged by the agent, under the authority of the War Department, that the subject of this sketch could remain upon his "claim" if he would establish a ferry across the river. Under this contract he provided a ferry, being the only one in that region for years, and thus he held his "claim" and enabled the Agency

and other people to reach the place where they obtained, as they could not at any other, at least some of the necessaries of life. And this instance, by the way, serves to illustrate, as many others might, the resourceful nature of the man, the hold he always had upon those in authority and their confidence in his ability and worth.

In politics he was the most earnest and enthusiastic Whig of the Henry Clay school, that I ever knew. And though a Virginian he was as thorough and enthusiastic in his devotion to the new organization, before his death, in the campaign of 1856, as any anti-slavery man in Iowa. I need not add that had he lived he would have been a Republican without guile and among those most loyal and patriotic in the support of the Government during the struggle which involved the nation's life in 1861-65. He was emphatically of that old school who never would see anything good in "Jackson Democracy," but felt he was doing his highest duty when opposing their candidates and policies. This passing incident will serve to illustrate his intense political enthusiasm. In April, 1854, I think it was, the Whig candidate for State Superintendent was overwhelmingly defeated, but one county (Henry) giving him a majority. Stopping at Caldwell's house soon after to spend the night, he met me in his usual hospitable manner and almost at once said: "Well, they beat us again, but by ginger if a dog from Henry County should come along I would feed him on peaches and cream for a month." He never sought office, nor as far as I know held any; and yet he was a most prominent figure in our political conventions and a very valuable aid to his friends in any cause he espoused.

His name was but another for hospitality throughout the Des Moines Valley, and indeed the entire State. Those of all classes and conditions, if entitled to respect, whatever their politics or religion, and whether rich or poor, always found in his humble home a welcome. Governors Robert Lucas, John Chambers, James Clarke, Stephen Hempstead,

J. W. Grimes, R. P. Lowe and J. H. Gear; Judges Charles Mason, Joseph Williams, J. C. Hall, J. C. Knapp, Cyrus Olney, Samuel F. Miller, S. C. Hastings, T. W. Claggett, Edward Johnstone, H. H. Trimble, H. B. Hendershott, W. H. Seevers—distinguished lawyers, such as Chas. Negus, Alfred Rich, H. T. Reid, C. W. Slagle, Henry Starr, W. D. Browning—ministers, such as Samuel Clark, Milton Jamison, Daniel Lane, M. F. Shinn—prominent state officials, represented by such men as Shepherd Leffler, Jesse B. Browne, G. W. Teas, W. H. Wallace, I. N. Lewis, S. B. Shelledy, W. W. Chapman, Bernhart Henn, Gen. S. R. Curtis—these and scores of others, among the most prominent as politicians and otherwise in the Territory and State, spent many enjoyable hours with him at that home on the Des Moines River, where he was never so happy as when surrounded by them or like friends; and none happier than they when resting, it may be, upon freely furnished beds upon the floor and enjoying his hospitable if not most sumptuous table. So keenly did he enjoy these and other friends that I doubt if he ever felt well treated if they passed his house whether in summer's heat or winter's cold without a call, and utterly regardless of the hour, night or day. Then, too, when I add that no man however poor was ever turned from his house needing food or lodging, or raiment even, if within his power to supply his wants, we can measure somewhat his generosity and hospitality. One result was that he never accumulated much of this world's goods; but he did have a supreme consciousness of doing his duty, and if he died leaving fewer dollars than some others, he nevertheless led a happy and blameless life and left a name which his children and friends can ever cherish with the greatest pride and satisfaction.

Of his family, though there were others—and all an honor to his name—I have time only to mention Samuel T., a successful merchant and banker at Eddyville, and

who twice represented, and with distinction, Wapello county, in our state legislature; another Benjamin F., for years a prominent business man in Wheeling, Va., and lately mayor of that city—the third Henry C., known to all the people of Iowa, for years a leading lawyer of our State, a member of our legislature, distinguished in military service during the late war, United States District Judge, and now as Circuit Judge of the Eighth Judicial Federal Circuit. If he was blessed in his home he surely was in his noble and successful children. And in this connection I remark that few worshipped their children with a sincerer devotion, and this was returned with interest most usurious and constantly compounded. And well they might for he had the brains to know the right and the honesty to do it. Of him it may be said he had “courage without whistling for it and joy without shouting to bring it.” He was one of those who believed that the only religion which can “save a man is that which makes him a good man.” And I believe he tried to so live as to be honest with his neighbors and his God, “and hence did not need a big income to make him happy.”

Thus lived and died Van Caldwell, one of the best and highest types of Iowa's pioneers. It is true he was not learned as of the schools, but he was strong in vigorous common sense. Though not polished as society goes, he had a face so genial, and a natural courtliness of manner, which, with his imposing presence made him ever welcome in the cultured circle or the most promiscuous or mixed assemblies. Such men helped make Iowa what it is in all its greatness and glory. Give us of this class now and for all time, and years will but add to her splendor. Blessed with such men fifty years since, so we are, as I believe now, and as I hope will be for all time. Confident of this, let us hope as the past is secure, so of the future no one need be afraid.

DES MOINES, IOWA, 1895.



Eng^d by J.C. Buttre, N.Y.

H. C. Caldwell

HENRY CLAY CALDWELL.

2nd Col. of the 3^d Iowa Cavalry

[Judge of the District Court for the District of Arkansas.]

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