

# ANNALS OF IOWA.

## EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

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### THE DES MOINES RIVER LAND TROUBLES.

No local question has ever arisen in our State which, first and last, has caused more public annoyance or real trouble, than that of the long-disputed land titles "up and along the valley of Des Moines." Just now these matters of controversy seem to be settled, and all persons interested are accepting the late decision of the Supreme Court of the United States as a finality. On all hands the hope is freely expressed that Congress may soon make a liberal indemnity to the deserving settlers whose titles failed. But before this vexed question passes wholly from sight, it has appeared meet to us that a brief history of the "River Land Troubles" should be published in these pages. Looking around for some fit person to write the narrative no one seemed better equipped for the work than Col. and ex-Senator C. H. Gatch, of Des Moines. True, he has acted as the attorney for the Grantees of the old Des Moines Navigation and Railroad Company. He is, however, not only an able and most honorable man, but the articles from his pen will be founded upon acts of Congress, and of the legislature of the Territory and State of Iowa, supplemented by decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States, and other public documents, all of which are accessible to the public. The history, therefore, if not official, will at every step be based upon official documents, which are not in any sense subjects of controversy or dispute. We believe that it will be eminently fair, and that it will be so accepted by all who retain an interest in the subject. As at present advised there will be two of these articles in addition to the one in this number of *THE ANNALS*.

We are very glad to be able to present our readers with a

fine portrait of Col. Gatch. He is "one who has done the State some service, and they know it." Nearing his 70th year, for he was born in 1825, we believe that even a historical magazine may speak of him as he deserves, without waiting for his translation to another sphere of existence. He served a term in the Ohio Senate prior to 1861. Entering the Union service as a Captain, and participating in several campaigns, he rose to the grade of Lieut.-Colonel. Settling at the Capital of this State some time after the war, he was chosen to the State Senate in 1885, and was re-elected in 1889, serving eight years. Of this body he became one of the most industrious and useful members. Among the measures with which he was conspicuously identified during this service, and which found their way into the statute books, were those for the improvement of the capitol grounds, the founding of the Historical Department, and an act reducing the number of peremptory jury challenges by defendants in criminal cases to the number allowed by the State. Among other measures introduced and advocated by him, which passed the Senate, but failed to become laws, some of them through want of attention rather than opposition in the House, were bills providing for a board of control of state institutions; for the imposition of a collateral inheritance tax; requiring corporations as a condition of their organization to pay a franchise tax; and his county option bill providing a method of dealing with the liquor question. He was also active and influential in preparing and in the advocacy of the revenue bill introduced as a committee bill by the Ways and Means committees of the two houses, which passed the Senate of the 24th General Assembly. But the bill considered by himself the most meritorious of any introduced by him during his legislative service, was one exempting the homestead from taxation to the value of one thousand dollars, which, though introduced at each of his four successive sessions, and earnestly advocated, failed each time of receiving the favorable consideration even of the Senate.

His record in the army, at the bar, and as a legislator, has

been useful, honorable and distinguished in the highest degree. Stepping down and out of public life has made little difference in the career of this useful and eminently Christian gentleman, for he is called upon daily to put his hand to some good work, either in the furtherance of measures of public improvement, charity or education. Without going further into biography this time, these facts present the highest attestations of his worth as a man, and the statesman-like character of his public services.

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### THE AMANA SOCIETY.

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From occasional notices in the newspapers it has been known for the life-time of a generation that there existed in Iowa county a religious community under the above name; but it was not until 1891 that any definite knowledge of these peculiar but most industrious and conscientious people became accessible to readers. In that year a pamphlet was published by our State University in which the history of this organization was most completely and admirably set forth. The title-page showed that it was written by William Rufus Perkins, A. M., Professor of History, and Barthinius L. Weeks, '91, of that institution.

This seemed to us by far the best piece of historical writing that had appeared in our State, and it was a matter of surprise that it did not attract more general attention, though it was fairly reviewed by *The New York Critic*; and sundry other papers. Within the limits of 100 pages, and printed in quite large type, the history of "The Amana Society" was so clearly presented as to leave nothing to be desired. This work was one that demanded much research, for the religious movement out of which the organization has grown, originated long ago, and the process of evolution through which it has passed has been not only slow, but the materials for its history have been obscure and difficult to find. It was, in fact, to a great extent, a gathering up and piecing together of "the short and simple annals of the poor." But the authors per-

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