

rightly challenge our admiration as he steps from planet to planet, and passes from star to star in the severe blackness of uttermost space, touching each object with his mathematical wand as he goes, reducing to orderly record its weight, its motion, its importance in the maintenance of the exact and preservative action of the illimitable universe. If we are confounded by the result which he places before us, how much more so is he. The scientist who knows the most is apt to be the humblest. It is the pretender who assumes not to be bewildered. The man who has closest communion with the works and ways of Omnipotence, is the one who most clearly understands that there is a limit to human knowledge, and that there is a point where all men fall at the feet of Faith. When he deals with the awful power which we call the force of gravitation, he feels the hand of God upon him. He does not come back to us from that majestic presence and say that he knows that the Bible is false, and that it cannot be the word of Him whose hand has been upon him. But with his hand on that Book, and his mind contemplating the inexpressible grandeur and confusing magnitude of the works of the Creator, and dwelling upon the intricacy, the power and the exact operations of the laws which preserve them, he utters that prayer most appropriate for us all, of whatever estate or condition: "Guide me, Oh thou great Jehovah!"

BEE-HUNTERS OF EARLY IOWA.

BY HON. A. R. FULTON.

MY own personal experience and observation in Iowa only extends back over a period of thirty-two years. Within that time, however, it has been my good fortune and pleasure to receive from the lips of many of the earlier settlers, detailed accounts of their pioneer adventures and experiences. Some of these incidents I noted down at the time, and preserved, with the thought that they might prove of interest to the successors of those who braved the perils of pioneer life. There

are those who may remember that, away back in the "forties," in the States further east, we used to read and hear of "Iowa honey," an article then as highly prized and as much sought for as the celebrated "California honey," has been with us at a later period. At that time, Iowa was literally a land of wild honey; nor has there since been anything in our experience to disprove her right to the claim of being the special habitat of the honey-bee. The great profusion of wild flowers, though they bloomed and blushed unseen by human eye, afforded a delicious pasturage for the myriads of swarms of honey-bees that were snugly housed through the winter months in the trunks of the tall trees of the forests bordering the water courses. During the autumn months a favorite pastime and source of profit among the pioneer adventurers was bee-hunting. By watching a single bee as it took its flight, laden with its rich burthen, the experienced bee-hunter could determine with certainty nearly the exact locality of its treasure-house. The bee-hunter had only to take the "course," and follow it in a direct line to the timber. Generally, before penetrating far into the forest, he could observe the converging lines of bees as they returned, laden with the sweets of the prairie, to the common line. Then it was only necessary to keep a sharp lookout for some hollow knot or opening, far up in some tall tree, to discover the depository of the precious treasure. After a brief search this was generally discovered, and known to a certainty by the thousands of little workers entering the hive or departing therefrom. Then it was only necessary for the hunter to mark the tree with his initials to insure its safety and protection as his own property, against any and all other claims, until the season arrived for securing the honey. If a "bee-tree" was found to be "marked," it was a rule, invariably observed as a matter of honor, to leave it unmolested.

The timber lands bordering on Skunk River (by the Indians called *Che-cau-que*) were especially noted as the paradise of the bee-hunters, and in advance of any permanent settlement of this country, parties of them often penetrated that region in quest of honey. Several incidents, the details

of which are in the possession of the writer, will serve to show something as to the nature of this primitive Iowa industry.

In October, 1835, one John Huff, who subsequently settled in Jefferson county, accompanied by a lad named Levi Johnson, went to the west side of Skunk River and encamped, a short distance above where the village of Rome, in Henry county, is now situated. At this latter point, at that time, there was a trading-house kept by one William McPherson, as the Sac and Fox Indians still occupied that region. The purpose of Mr. Huff and his young companion was to spend a month in bee-hunting. They continued to ramble through the heavy timber, skirting the river and its tributaries, until the middle of November, when they began preparations for returning to the Mississippi. Huff had collected eighty gallons of honey, and Johnson about forty, which was put into barrels manufactured by themselves at camp. The river now beginning to rise a little, they prepared a couple of canoes or *dug-outs*. Into these they loaded their freight, consisting of three barrels of honey, guns, axes, auger, with some other tools and camping utensils; also a small stock of provisions, including five dressed wild turkeys and some venison. Passengers and freight being aboard, they set out on their voyage for Illinois, being, so far as we know, the first craft manned by white men that ever navigated the waters of Skunk River from a point so far up as the place of the embarkation. With the two canoes lashed together, they glided along smoothly until about sundown, when they ran upon a "sawyer," which capsized the canoes, turning the contents into the river, with the exception of one barrel of honey, which, fitting so closely, remained fast in one of the canoes. All the rest of the freight went to the bottom in twelve feet of water. The canoes were drawn ashore, and the remaining barrel of honey rolled out. In his effort to save the property, Mr. Huff even lost his shoes. The weather was now becoming quite cold, and the situation was not a pleasant one, but those backwoodsmen of early Iowa were not unaccustomed to hardship.

Leaving canoes and honey, Mr. Huff set out for Burlington barefoot, where he obtained another pair of shoes, and

some grappling hooks to use in searching for the sunken freight. Young Johnson returned to his mother's, in the eastern part of Henry county. After an absence of about twelve days, they returned to the scene of their disaster to seek for the lost treasure. By means of the iron hooks the two barrels of honey were soon recovered, but the other articles were not so easily found. An Indian who was present agreed, for one dollar, to dive and get the gun. He went down once, but did not succeed. While he was warming himself for a second trial, Mr. Huff himself drew up the gun with the iron hook. The two axes, drawing-knife, and auger were found the next January by cutting a hole in the ice.

Without further disaster, Huff and Johnson succeeded in getting their cargo of honey to Carthage, Illinois, where they sold it for fifty cents a gallon. During the same season another party collected on the east side of Skunk River and along Big Creek, in Henry county, some fourteen barrels of honey, which they sold in Burlington.

Mr. Huff has himself declared to the writer, that, at that early day, in Iowa, honey-bees were so plentiful that it was difficult, on a warm day, for a man to keep them from flying into his mouth while eating a piece of honey. In the autumn of 1836, he found ten "bee trees" on a small branch near where Fairfield was subsequently located. He sent the product of this "find" to Carthage by one James Lanman, who sold it for \$22.75. During the same year a man named Ballard settled or encamped on this same small stream, and for a time followed the business of bee-hunting. The stream was afterward known as "Ballard's Branch." Ballard's camp was about two miles northeast of Fairfield, and his "claim" embraced the fine grove of timber in that vicinity. As soon, however, as the country began to settle up, he found his occupation gone, became discouraged, and went west.

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.