AN EMINENT FOREIGNER'S VISIT TO THE DUTCH COLONIES OF IOWA IN 1873

TRANSLATED FROM THE DUTCH BY JACOB VAN DER ZEE

[The Rev. Dr. M. Cohen Stuart, delegate from The Netherlands to the sixth conference of the world's Evangelical Alliance, came to New York City in the month of September, 1873. After participating in the meetings of this Protestant congress, Mr. Stuart journeyed westward by way of Niagara Falls and received a hearty welcome among thousands of Hollanders in Michigan. Thence he continued to Chicago, and to Pella and Orange City[1] in Iowa, and returned eastward by way of the States of Minnesota and Wisconsin.

As a result of these travels, Rev. Stuart composed and published nearly seven hundred pages of impressions and reminiscences based directly on notations in his diary. Chapter XI of this excellent work: *Zes Maanden in Amerika* (Six Months in America), is devoted to the States of Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Only that portion which concerns life in Iowa is presented in the following pages.

That Mr. Stuart was a shrewd observer and a brilliant writer will be apparent to the average reader.[2] It is a fact that many of the unique details of American history have been preserved only in the writings of competent persons who came from abroad and looked at America's novel conditions from the foreigner's point of view. In this way there has come to be recorded in the languages of Europe much that an American contemporary would have considered trivial and commonplace, too modest perhaps or even too short-sighted to realize that later generations alone should be the judges of what is valuable and what is worthless in the occasional scraps of the history of social, religious, and political institutions.[3]— TRANSLATOR.]

Pella, November 21.

Once again we find ourselves at home, among fellow-countrymen and fellow-believers.

[1] Shortly after their arrival in the eastern States, Rev. and Mrs. Stuart received an urgent invitation from Mr. Henry Hospers of Orange City to visit the settlement of Hollanders in northwestern Iowa.

[2] As an illustration of the inquisitiveness of Yankee newspaper reporters, Mr. Stuart preserved the following bit of news about himself in the *New York Herald:* "The pastor is the son of a converted Jew, who, on his marriage with a descendant of a Scotch emigrant, added her name of Stuart to his own of Cohen, which signifies 'Priest'. Thus his children bear the royal Scottish name."

[3] De Tocqueville in 1832 wrote that he was convinced that "in fifty years

On Tuesday, the 17th, we left Chicago at a late evening hour. The entire family of our host: his son, the doctor, his son-in-law, de Boer, and their wives, accompanied us on the street cars and conducted us to the station of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy R. R., whence we were to depart by the night train.

This time, we were told, we should miss little by reason of the night journey, since the northern part of Illinois through which we should travel is a fairly monotonous stretch of level country. So we found room in a very beautiful "sleeping car" furnished more luxuriously than any I have ever seen.[4] In the middle of the coach in two apartments opposite one another, stood a handsome, comfortable writing-table and a pretty little organ, on which Dr. de Bey, a musician at heart, who plays the organ in his father's church on Sundays, allowed us to hear some notes before he left.[5] But we had no intention to avail ourselves of either of these two pieces of furniture. The quickly unfolded berth was more valuable to us then; and in my sleep I certainly did not feel that I was being pulled along in a flying carriage any more than one awake or asleep is conscious of the earth's turning upon its axis.

Next morning day has dawned long before I dress; and

it will be more difficult to collect authentic documents concerning the social conditions of the Americans at the present day than it is to find remains of the administration during the Middle Ages; and if the United States were ever invaded by barbarians it would be necessary to have recourse to the history of other nations in order to learn anything of the people which now inhabit them".

[4] In a footnote Mr. Stuart adds: "The 'Pullman's car' recently put into service on the line between Brussels and Cologne, which also appeared at some of our stations in Holland and rightly attracted very much attention, may be a fair specimen of the genus, but is no match for the handsomest ones to be seen in America."

[5] Rev. de Bey later became a resident of Orange City, Iowa, and died there recently at the age of ninety-four. His son, Dr. Albert de Bey, for many years a well-known physician and surgeon in northwestern Iowa, is a member of the State Board of Health.

I rise then to look at something which repays rising and looking. We are, so they say, at the most beautiful, the only truly beautiful point of the whole journey: Burlington, just on the boundary between Illinois and Iowa. This boundary consists of the Mississippi; and the little city, a flourishing place of business of nearly 16,000 souls, the center of various railroads, is built upon the banks of the river: East Burlington belongs to Illinois, West Burlington to Iowa. From the great railway bridge we enjoy a splendid view. Charming lies the little city: factories and stores far beneath on the low, green banks, somewhat like the "uiterwaarden" of our rivers, and above on the so-called "bluffs" (cliffs or steeps one hundred feet high, which rise like natural dikes a short distance from the river channel), the "residences" or more respectable houses are scattered in charming disorder. Between the towns descends the majestic Mississippi, deep and broad with a stream as clear as crystal, which assumes a sallow, yellow color farther south, when the river, broader and more sluggish, flows through the swamps of Louisiana into the Gulf of Mexico.

Greetings to thee, King of Rivers,[6] American Nile, mighty artery of the nation's heart and life! Springing from the icy lakes of northern Minnesota and, with its tributary the Missouri, from the snow-capped Rocky Mountains, this river traverses the entire continent, bringing fertility and sustenance to all, bears trading fleets upon its waters, mirrors a series of growing cities: Minneapolis, St. Paul, Dubuque, and Davenport, and after conveying treasures to St. Louis and New Orleans empties into the bosom of the Gulf of Mexico, opening to North America's fruitful prairies and valleys an outlet which will one day become the great trade route of the world!

[6] "This time without the slightest boasting," the visitor remarks, "the Americans may use their dearly beloved expression, 'the biggest in the world'."

Beyond Burlington we come into the domain of Iowa, the "settler" State, but recently organized and just developing. On 55,045 square miles, an area equivalent to that of England, one can count but 1,191,720 souls. About 1,900,000 acres, nearly all naturally fertile soil, have passed into the hands of railway corporations either as United States public lands or as "land grants". From both sources the farmer who wishes to cultivate the new soil may easily and cheaply obtain capital land for his fields. Railroads will gladly sell land for ready cash, even at low prices, and the State has established exceedingly favorable prices, an evidence of its wise care. In order to prevent the purchase of land for mere purposes of speculation, it has been stipulated that the land shall come only into the hands of persons who intend to bring it under cultivation. In accordance with the legal requirements of the so-called "preëmption rights" and the "Homestead Bill", an adult citizen of the State or a foreigner who has declared his intention to become naturalized can, by beginning the cultivation thirty days after application at the district land-office and by establishing his residence on the land within one year, acquire full title to 60 hectares [160 acres] at from $1.25 to $2.50 per acre payable in instalments if he so chooses.

"Iowa" is an Indian word and means "the beautiful land". It is reported that once upon a time when a number of Indians from the East beheld the green prairies across the Mississippi, they cried out in rapture: "Iowa! Iowa!" and that the name originated in this way. This much is certain: the Indians who formerly inhabited this region were called Iowas. As late as 1840, under their chief Mahaska or "White Hawk" and his squaw Rant-Che-Wai-Me —"Flying White Pigeon"— they formed a fairly formidable tribe. But they were attacked and conquered by other tribes, the Sacs and Foxes, under the renowned Blackhawk.

The black hawk appeared too strong for the white hawk. Now the greatness and glory of the famous Blackhawk (whom many inhabitants still remember) have also passed away, and the Indians who still remain in Iowa, mostly Sacs and Foxes, are to be found only upon the extreme western border near the Sioux River.[7]

The present State of Iowa . . . . consists almost entirely (nearly three-fourths of it is prairie) of hilly, gently undulating land, which as a whole varies little in altitude: from 600 to 1400 feet above sea-level. Even the valleys of rivers (which are fairly near their sources here) are high and therefore exceedingly fruitful. Upon the eastern and western borders of the State one sees the cliffs or so-called "bluffs", but rocks or mountains nowhere — nothing but the gently rounded curves of sloping and undulating earth. And trees, however luxuriantly they grow where they are attended to, are found in a state of nature only upon the river banks: ash and linden, beech and poplar, hickory and maple. The soil contains minerals: veins of lead and gypsum, and very extensive coal-beds near the rivers.[8]

But the real, the principal riches of the State is to be found in the fruitfulness of its soil. This comprises a capital valuation which it is still absolutely impossible to determine: the State only awaits the fructifying efforts of men to exploit her fertile soil and will reimburse all labor a thousand-fold. Wheat, oats, flax, vegetables, fruit — everything flourishes luxuriantly and abundantly upon the willing soil, while natural pastures are exceptionally fitted for stock-raising. The long "blue-joint" or prairie grass

[7] This statement is incorrect.

[8] The writer's foot-note reads as follows: "The Iowa coal, 'bituminous coal', possesses exceptional quality. Setting the combustible part of the coal at 100%, analysis shows: Silesia 80, Bohemia 81, Wigan (England) 87, and Iowa 90% of bitumen and carbonium. Only the famous anthracite coal of Pennsylvania stands higher in the scale, namely 96%."

grows almost as thick as sown grass, and wild grass — one speaks here of "wild" and "tame" grass — is even more nutritious.

But *the* real fruit of the soil: the land's blessing is "corn" or maize. I do not know what Iowa's coat-of-arms *is*, but it *should* be a well-filled ear of corn. What the pomegranate or bread-tree is to some countries, that and much more is the maize plant to Iowa: at once the staple product for trade and daily bread for the farmer and his family, food for human beings and for animals. No plant is more willing nor more prolific, no plant gives less trouble nor more reward. Indeed, the so-called "sod corn", the first corn planted and raised without toil upon the natural prairie sod, yields an average of from ten to fifteen bushels per acre, and later when the ground is carefully cultivated yields from forty to one hundred bushels. And it is well to think of something other than what we in Holland know by the name of "Turkish wheat", a good-for-nothing, weak, dwarfish species as compared with what people have here. Such robust stalks, heavy ears, beautiful kernels![9] For the settler himself corn produces the most healthful and palatable meal, which can be prepared in every kind of way; and that corn makes excellent feed for horses and mules, hogs and cattle, chickens and geese, even the non-expert can see by a single glance at the greedy way in which they eat it, and how well they fare on it. Besides, in the matter of harvesting, preservation, and transportation, there is no better plant than corn. Once ripe, the ear need not, as in the case of other grains, be immediately picked and stored. On its robust stalks, with its close-packed kernels, soldered fast to the cob as it were, protected also

[9] "As I write this, I have on the table near me an ear of maize, 29 centimeters long, entirely covered by nine closely-packed rows of kernels, each counting from 56 to 60, almost 500 large kernels on a single ear. And yet this ear is not considered one of the largest."

by a thick husk, the heavy ear defies all the inclemencies of wind and weather, rain and storm.

That this is a settler's country and farmer's region we can tell while riding on the train. For the most part it consists still of extensive, barren prairies, waiting for the hand of man, and here and there, more or less thinly scattered, small hamlets and farms. But the towns and groups of buildings which we see are characterized by an appearance of prosperity, such as is to be expected in a land of such fertility, in a State which enjoys the rare privilege of having no debt but a surplus in its treasury. Furthermore, all the towns or little cities resemble one another. When we stop at a very primitive station constructed of logs, we generally see a somewhat scattered group of neat, frame houses, among them a few, small, often pretty, churches with sharp-pointed steeples, and on some conspicuous site, commanding a view of the vicinity, a larger brick building, usually crowned with a tower or cupola, the "School" or "College" of the locality. The person who seeks variety or diversity of scenery must not go to America, least of all to the prairies of the West.

After a couple of hours of travel by rail we arrive at Ottumwa, where we have to change cars to the Des Moines Valley R. R. The reader may observe, at least if he is not a stranger to stock-exchange reports — and who in The Netherlands is?[10] — that we are gradually coming into the territory of those railroads whose names, formerly unheard and still unpronounceable to many, some years ago acquired a sad renown in Holland's money-market. Oh, if people had only had a little more knowledge of geography before investing their means so recklessly with those corporations! They would then have perceived how absolute-

[10] Market quotations of American stocks are to-day a source of great concern and excitement to thousands of people in The Netherlands — from the humble subject of average income to Her Majesty, Queen Wilhelmina.

ly impossible it was for capital expended on such roads (however honest the undertaking in itself might be) . . . . to yield interest at from 10 to 12, perhaps 15, per cent, depending on the expense rate.[11] Now one may console himself — if one is generous enough to find a consolation in it — that the money expended in the construction of those railroads will some day yield its dividends and profits, though not to the original money-lenders! The land, the property of the corporations, has an inherent, substantial value, which will remain imaginary only so long as man's reclaiming hand is absent. What this hand can accomplish here, we shall soon be taught to see.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when the "conductor" informed us that we were in Pella.[12] Here Dutch emigrants thirty years ago found a resting-place which they likened to the place of refuge of the first Christians during the Jewish war. The name is undoubtedly much more significant than the names of countless towns and cities in America: they scarcely represent any idea at all and appear to owe their existence only to some trifling incident or mere accident. In general the Indian names are a good deal more beautiful and poetical than those of European origin. A certain natural poetry the natives seem not to have lacked, a result perhaps of their nature-life on the boundless prairies.

However significant the name "Pella" might sound, for the moment at least the weather could remind us little of the Syrian Pella. A cold wind and heavy fall of snow

11 "I do not know at what high figure the eight percent Des Moines Valley was originally quoted in the markets of The Netherlands. At present I believe the capital valuation of the bonds amounts to just double the interest promised."

12 Pella has been the center of a settlement of Hollanders since the year 1847, when Rev. Henry P. Scholte and a band of several hundred emigrants founded homes upon America's western frontier. It is estimated that about twenty thousand Hollanders, by birth and descent, live within a radius of fifteen or twenty miles of Pella.

greeted us as we stepped out. But there was more to welcome us: an English minister, Thompson (the Dutch minister is away for a few days), and a few Dutch elders. They conduct us to an omnibus which carries us a considerable distance before we arrive in the little city. There we see ourselves taken to our hostess, a certain widow, Mrs. van Asch, who had asked to be allowed to entertain us since Rev. Winter was away from home.

And her hospitality — yes, it might well be called *Eastern,* unless one prefers to give it the name *Western* hospitality, something to which I feel very partial after my American experiences. This widow also keeps a snug "prophet's chamber" in readiness in her small but neat Dutch dwelling, and that she had more to give than "a handful of meal and a little oil" was soon to appear at dinner time. Up from a secret cellar-hatch in the floor of our dining-room, at the wink of our hostess to a handy, alert child of seventeen, an orphan whom she had affectionately adopted, all sorts of fine dainties arose. Into all the secrets of the American as well as the Dutch art of cooking the lady of the house appears completely initiated. According to the testimony of my wife she deserves the doctor's degree in both branches. Moreover, our dinner is spiced with very entertaining conversation with the Reverend gentleman who dined with us in our honor. He is a pleasant, entertaining man, brother of the minister at Peekskill in New York State, with whom we had already become acquainted to our great pleasure, and possesses, besides other virtues, what is a rare accomplishment for an American: the ability to speak pure Dutch fluently. Having associated much with Hollanders, he wanted to learn their language, and he has so far mastered it that he preaches in Dutch sometimes.

In the evening he takes me to the Dutch church, a spacious but very plain brick building, with a tower in front,

which still needs a steeple, but its interior is suitably arranged and properly heated. This awakens a sense of pleasure, for it is rough weather outside, as sometimes happens here. A keen, piercing wind drives the cutting snow into one's face, and plays freely around the building which stands by itself near the wide street, with broad open spaces on both sides. But within there is nothing to remind one of winter. Despite the unkind weather the church is "touchingly full", as I wrote in my diary. It did my heart good to speak to that assembly.

The next day it was biting cold. The thermometer registered just below zero (Fahrenheit) in the morning; and although the wind died down and the sun shone, icicles glistened and tiny crystals of ice sparkled in the sunlight, warning one not to challenge the outer air unarmed. We determine under such circumstances to receive and to pay some calls — among the latter to the aged Mrs. Bousquet, whom we had the pleasure to meet once before in Rotterdam — and to get a glimpse of the neighborhood in order to know the little city somewhat more intimately.

It has a quiet but cheerful and prosperous appearance. Around the large square and on the principal streets good, brick buildings are gradually supplanting the wooden ones. Among the most respectable belong, as in all cities of the West, the "stores" or shops; for these cities are the market-towns where the farmers of the surrounding country are accustomed to come to supply themselves with necessaries. The shops are, therefore, also stores, like the East Indian "tokos" where everything is to be obtained: from large threshing and seeding machines to ribbons and pins.

Our shopping has its dangerous side. We can't look at anything without having it offered and forced upon us — for nothing! In one shop the "store-keeper" says: "You shouldn't run about in your hat in this cold; here is a warm,

woolen cap.'' Scarcely have I reached home when another appears with a hat-box under his arm, and produces therefrom a motley-looking cap. I tell him that his fellow-tradesman has just given me a winter-cap. ''No,'' answers he, ''that one isn't warm enough, that *won't do* in this awful cold. Take my cap too!'' I had just seen this man's advertisement in *Pella's Weekblad* wherein one could read in the Dutch language (to which people are accustomed here): ''To tailors and shoemakers we sell at wholesale price.'' I said to him: ''In the following issue I shall no doubt read your advertisement: Ministers we supply free of charge.''

That our language, even in the Dutch colonies, must gradually lose some of its purity speaks for itself. A number of English words have thus been wholly incorporated into daily speech so that people would have difficulty understanding the equivalent Dutch word. ''Stove'' for *kachel,* ''lot'' for *perceel,* ''bill'' for *rekening,* are like Dutch-coined words and are in every respect like current legal tender, and the general practice of giving English verbs a Dutch ending has become quite legitimate, as ''dinneren'', ''supperen'', ''fixen'', ''enteren'', ''boarden''. More than once have I heard people say: ''Ik *groei* koren'' [from the English: I grow corn]. ''Mijn buurman *groeit* tarwe'' [My neighbor grows wheat]. A woman said to me: ''Ik heb acht kinderen *gerezen''* [I have raised eight children]. And not to multiply examples, I shall confine myself to three words borrowed from the vocabulary of Dutch ministers. I read the observation of one about a ''nieuwsgierig'' book [for ''curious'' he meant ''merkwaardig'']. Another writes to me of a usurer in his city and calls that man a ''dierbaar'' evil [for ''dear'' he meant ''duur'']. A third admonished his hearers — perhaps not entirely undeserved — against the desires of ''de flesch'' [''the bottle'', though he meant ''het vleesch'', the flesh]. Let me hope that I

myself was not guilty of similar heresies against the English language that evening when I appeared before a very large audience in Rev. Thompson's church.[13]

The following day, Thursday, the cold had decreased a little. The air was still and clear, so that we gladly accepted the invitation of a farmer, Mr. Muntingh, to inspect his farm. He came for us with his wagon. It was a pleasant ride of nearly an hour, through a broad, rolling country, which reminds one more or less of the beautiful stretches of Gelderland; but the fruitfulness of the rich lowlands of the Betuwe [of Holland] is characteristic of knolls here such as those of the Veluwe [a desert district of Holland], while the settlement is old enough to have wood and timber, something not usually to be found upon the prairies. Here and there in the distance appear farms with their barns and other buildings. In general they are not large, about 50 or 60 acres.

The superficial observer might think that the cheapness of the soil — although it has now risen considerably in value and price on account of cultivation — would cause large plantations to come into existence. But hindering this is the difficulty of very high wages: a reason why farmers cultivate their own lands with the aid of their sons or a single hired man, and indeed the soil does not become the worse for it. The master's own *hand* accomplishes still more than "the master's *eye*".

And even though the men who have settled here thus far have not yet become capitalists, with industry, thrift, and perseverance nearly all have achieved a fairly large measure of prosperity, and their own appearance as well as that of their houses supports this contention. Even their live stock — cattle and hogs — show that they fully enjoy the earth's fruits and that they are fed not only with hay and

[13] The Dutch churches of Pella belong partly to the Dutch Reformed Church and partly to the Christian Reformed Church. For about fifty years one of them has had services in the English language.

slop but with excellent, life-giving Indian corn of which gigantic ears, solidly filled, are shovelled in great heaps before them. The farm of Mr. Muntingh is surely one of the finest. From a small balcony on which the windows of an upper room open we obtain a long-distance view of the surrounding country with its gently rolling surface which at this time charms the eye, the fields and acres being cleared of every ornament. It is too cold outdoors, however, to stand still for any length of time — biting enough to teach me to appreciate the merits of my new motley-colored cap with ear-flaps, and to value doubly the taste of a good cup of Dutch coffee.

To find the Dutch element here once more, not only in a coffee-cup of the fatherland but also in the whole life and being of a people, is a pleasure to us. And fortunately they are still genuine Hollanders, more so indeed than many in the fatherland, even though the language has been somewhat forgotten. Though the form has changed, the good, substantial, pithy kernel has survived.

It is just as difficult for the Netherlander to lose his traits as it is for the Moor or camelopard. In this way especially he shows his extreme tenaciousness. He confirms also the old Latin proverb: "Coelum, non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt".[14] But he exemplifies just as much that other saying: "Omne bono viro solum patria".[15] Here he feels entirely at home, and although he likes to hear someone speak of his fatherland, he would not like to live there again. Indeed, to their domicile in this big country the people have much to thank: a substantialness, a feeling of power, a development, which society and life spontaneously produces here. The men have acquired a ripeness of experience, broadness of view, exactness of

[14] Those who cross the seas change their climate, not their nature.

[15] To the good man every country is a fatherland.

judgment, and practical readiness; and the women all possess something of the *lady*, a characteristic of every American woman no less in country districts than in the towns.

With regard to the Hollanders in America I have observed in general that the people on farms have far surpassed the immigrants in the large cities in progress and in prosperity. A ready explanation of this is to be found in our peculiar, plodding nature. In the cities, with their somewhat slower gait the Hollanders can scarcely compete with the extremely resourceful and alert Americans. There they fall into more or less straitened circumstances, progress more slowly, and are usually of less account. In the farming communities (where they form a small society by themselves, are left more to themselves, and support and aid one another), it is different. Besides, what people in Europe do not altogether unjustly call rusticity (in French a boor is called a *rustre*), as opposed to urban polish and good-breeding, is found least of all among the farmers here.

The last statement applies both to Holland in Michigan[16] and to Pella. In other respects the two colonies differ considerably. Their soil and climate, and therefore their entire life is different. At Holland sandy soil, timber, and water; hence more shipping and trade; here a fertile soil with flourishing agriculture. Even the ruling passion of the people is somewhat different, as I was repeatedly assured by persons well acquainted with both settlements, a fact which is partly explained by the different personalities of the founders: Scholte differed much from van Raalte. In Pella there is more show of outward prosperity: in Michigan there is more zeal for church and school. In the latter respect, however, there is not much cause for complaint at Pella, so we are told by the Rev. R. Winter who,

[16] Holland and Grand Rapids, Michigan, have attracted larger numbers of Dutch emigrants than Iowa.

having returned home, dines with us at the house of our hostess, out of whose cellar once more all sorts of excellent things appear upon the table. We are sorry that the time to leave approaches. But the appointments which I have made permit no postponement. My departure must remain irrevocably fixed for the following day.

Last evening a unique surprise awaited us. A singing and music society of Pella came to serenade us at candlelight, a token of honor which we had not figured on, least of all here in the far West.

In every way the warmest cordiality and friendliness was shown us on the last morning. Many persons came to visit us and gave us "souvenirs" to take along. Some also came to ask us to inspect a couple of work-shops or factories. I refused because I felt somewhat tired and had letters to write. How sorry I was afterwards when I heard that the invitation was really an innocent stratagem to get us into a photographer's studio to have our picture taken. I should so much have liked to own a photograph made in Pella!

Orange City, Ia. November 23.

For a couple of days now we have, really for the first time, been introduced to the pioneer's life. Here we are in the midst of an entirely new country, new even in this New World, in a colony established only two years. We are privileged to see a settlement in a state of origin and first growth. As a matter of fact this colony is sprung from Pella.[17] These settlements in America remind one of the famous baobab tree whose full-grown branches bend down, become rooted in the earth and grow as new trees around the old mother-trunk. The wide-awake spirit of enterprise shown by the reclaiming farmer is handed on from father

[17] The Sioux County colony, established in 1870, to-day consists of about 15,000 Hollanders.

to son; and when all the land in one neighborhood has been bought up and put under cultivation, the atmosphere becomes too close for a new generation which then goes to seek a virgin soil elsewhere and to conquer a new country with spade and plow.

Such is the story here. A wide-awake, enterprising man, H. Hospers, became the father of this colony. He united with Rev. S. Bolks, a worthy, old minister, one of the first settlers,[18] who was to aid him with his ripe experience and spiritual influence, and — the youthful settlement shot up from the fertile prairie soil, luxuriant and powerful, to become what we now see it is.

It is no wonder that Mr. Hospers[19] was "angstig" (anxious) — as it is called in American-Dutch — to have us visit his new city; and it will excite even less surprise when I say that we had no thought of refusing but eagerly seized the rare opportunity to see a community in the "Far West" in its childhood. But I must return to the regular course of my narrative.

Friday we left Pella at three o'clock in the afternoon. After many a warm and vigorous hand-shake with trusty friends who later waved us a parting good-bye, we steam away past the pretty "College" and the parsonage of our friend Thompson, and see the little city disappear behind us. We leave it with regret, but yet enriched with a good and happy remembrance, and with the pleasant consciousness of having made and left friends there too, who shall forget us as little as we them.

One of them, to our momentary pleasure, we need not leave behind. Mr. J. P. Bousquet is to accompany us to Orange City, a truly delightful companion on the long journey. We pass through the Des Moines Valley, usually

[18] Rev. Seine Bolks was one of the pioneer settlers of Overysel, Michigan, in 1849, and was called to preach at Orange City in 1872.

[19] See footnote 1.

at a considerable distance from the river. In the afternoon we arrive in the city by that name, the State Capital, a growing little place of nearly 13,000 inhabitants, which is bent upon being very much more respectable later on. Now a capitol or government building is being built for $3,000,000. From there the journey is continued by way of Chicago, a small place which has only the *name* in common with the wonder-city of Illinois, and we reach Fort Dodge at nine o'clock in the evening, where we spend the night.

The journey itself offers little worth seeing: a constant succession of undulating fields, "rolling grounds". At first, along the road, we see prairie fires, especially noticeable in the dark, sometimes three or four on the horizon at once. These fires are started in order to clear away the prairie-grass or layer of sod, or to consume the roots and stalks of dead plants, and to fertilize the soil with ashes. I fancy that anyone who has read a brilliantly poetical account of a prairie fire and seen it likened to "a rolling sea of fire, miles in extent, sweeping forward on its destructive course, driving before it whole herds of wild buffaloes, deer, and antelopes, dashing along helter-skelter in desperate terror," shall feel disappointed when he gets to see nothing more than low-lying flames, advancing slowly over the surface of a field bounded by furrows in order to prevent the fire from spreading too far.

The sight does not impress one much, at least near by, and I am not surprised that a certain traveler avenged the disenchantment of his high-strained expectations with the disdainful exclamation: "A spectacle to be hissed at!" Of animals driven on in terror, not a sign here! Indeed buffaloes and deer have long since disappeared, and almost the only living inhabitants of these fields are the so-called prairie-dogs, a sort of large marmot, called dogs from their peculiar bark,— pretty, sociable little creatures which live

together in small mounds, and upon the approach of danger creep into their subterranean passages; or the prairie-chickens, which know how to get away fast enough when the fire approaches. All this does not gainsay the fact that on a still night, observed from a distance, these prairie fires, with ruddy glow reflected from the dark sky, present a unique picture, and lend to the broad stretches of undulating prairie a sort of grand wildness.

Otherwise, as I said, little variation. Now and then a boy throws on our laps a slip of paper with some alluring advertisement or other, of "Capital New Books" or "Attractive New Books", or of "the delicious and only genuine Crystal Maple", or "Caramels, nutritious and healthful, may now be obtained of the News-agent on this train", with the remark: "You will like them". Or a man maimed in the war (it is the first begging that I have met with on this side of the Ocean) brings us a ballad: "The Soldier's Lamentation", a sad but not entirely poetical elegy.

We for our part gave way to no lamentation when we finally reached our destination. Just as little did we shout for joy when we saw the hotel to which we were taken after our arrival at Fort Dodge. It is a large but hollow and unsociable building, which very much resembles an enormous shed. But we have little right to expect more in a small place of 2000 inhabitants, in the midst of a world still half-peopled; and the best we can do is not to stay up long in the bare, ill-lighted bed-room, the more so since we are to be called the next morning terribly early, at a quarter to four o'clock, to be ready in time to continue the journey.

Luckily, the next morning — really long *before* it was morning — we did not miss roll-call. By candlelight we hastily made our toilet for the journey, no less hastily we partook of a "wheat-cake" with tea in the "bar-room",

and then wrapped up as warmly as possible. With our friend Bousquet and Mr. Hospers (who had arrived the previous evening from the other direction to conduct us to his colony) we took seats in the omnibus, a large vehicle with canvas, flapping in the morning wind, fastened from the top along the sides. It was absolutely dark in the little town, and no one will be surprised if I retain nothing but a dim recollection of Fort Dodge.

It was a pretty long ride to the station of the St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad. If there has been a prodigal expenditure of money on this railway, it surely was not spent on the station constructed of rough timber, as plain and primitive a structure as can be imagined, whose great merit consists in being in absolute harmony with the surrounding country. We have still a while to tarry; but at last the shrieking whistle is heard, and — there he comes, appearing out of the darkness of night, "the fierce salamander, who vomits fire from his belly, and rattles over the earth". A minute's stop — and we are lifted up, enter our "car", throw aside mantle and overcoat with our small amount of baggage, and warm our benumbed fingers near a glowing stove.

Verily, one must have visited America, especially such wild, lonely regions, to realize fully the value of the railroad, to feel the full significance of the invention of our nineteenth century, and to reverence it as the symbol of progress and civilization. Even the prosperous but quiet town or little city of some corner of Holland, when at last it sees the approach of the iron road which brings connections with the big world outside and pulls it out of its lonely isolation, can feel rejuvenated and renewed. But in order to see and feel entirely from one's own experience what the railroad is, brings, accomplishes, one must be suddenly transplanted (like ourselves) at a cold hour of

early morning from a crude log house, lonely in the midst of a dark wilderness, to a swift-rushing railway chamber, spacious and sociable, with its easy, well-cushioned chairs, near a stove with a cheerful, rosy glow. As by a stroke of magic one seems transferred from the inhospitable wilderness to the world of human beings, to civilized society.[20]

I understand better than ever why Americans are enthusiastic over railroads. The old Romans, it is well said, conquered and subdued barbarians more perhaps by means of roads than with armies. Americans, too, are conquering with railroads. The railroad train is the battering-ram, paving the way for civilization, which shall people and till the wilderness and transform the prairies which have lain fallow for centuries into the fields for which God has created them.

Here the whole country is still practically wild, as we see when day begins to dawn. Now and then we stop for a moment and see a station of logs or boards, more primitive even than the one we left this morning, or a lone farm, and — once more we are speeding over interminable prairies with not a sign of habitation. Always, invariably the same view, with a single exception, as when we steam past a large body of water, Storm Lake, or when at noon we arrive at the village of Cherokee, on the banks of the Little Sioux River, a prosperous town which had hardly four log houses two years ago — now, opposite a fine church, stands a large "College" building with broad wings and neat tower. Most of the houses which line the road are extremely prim-

[20] Mr. Stuart subjoined this footnote: "In those American railway coaches one sees all sorts of things which one should not expect to find or look for in the European cars. Among them we discover Bibles and 'Hymnbooks' on book-shelves, and against one of the walls a few saws and axes. Upon asking what purpose the latter serve, we are informed that they may be of use to the passengers, if an accident should happen and the coach should be overturned, to chop or saw a way out through the woodwork. The axes can also be used in case of an attack by Indians. All sorts of excellent precautions, but not entirely tranquillizing to any one who has at all a lively imagination!"

itive. Above a front of unplaned boards, nailed against the sides of rough logs, a board with large letters and sometimes with a showy superscription announces the existence of a hotel or a shop such as certainly no foreigner would expect to find there.

At three o'clock in the afternoon we arrive at Le Mars station, where we must get off. We find there, besides a couple of carriages which are ready to convey us and our baggage eighteen miles farther to Orange City, a few gentlemen of whose probable coming Mr. Hospers had told me. They formed a deputation from Sioux City, and came in the name of the Mayor and Council of that city to press me with an invitation to see an Indian camp situated in their vicinity. How I should like to have accepted that invitation![21] Alas, that I had to refuse! I perceived that such a digression would require at least three full days, and I had no time to give away. To lose such a unique opportunity, however, grieved me terribly. I know that I shall always regret my action. If I shall ever again be allowed to undertake such a distant journey, I shall not tie myself down so closely to definite engagements.

But the time came for us to continue our journey to Orange City, if we were to arrive there before dark. In Mr. Hospers' "buggy", open in front, drawn by a team of spirited horses, we started on our way. *Road* is — to be

[21] "That their invitation was serious," wrote Mr. Stuart, "I gathered from a newspaper in which I found a short article under the headline: 'An Eminent Foreigner's Visit to Our County', which contained the following: 'We are informed that a well-known clergyman from Holland with his lady is expected for a few days in the new Dutch settlement of Orange City. We suggest that he should be urgently invited, whilst staying in the neighborhood, to visit our City, as a guest whom we would be honored to entertain.' Never have I felt so strongly as in America how the importance of a thing — or of a person — can change and increase by exporting alone. The farther I got from home, the bigger I seemed to *grow*. Fortunate is the person who has a certain amount of self-consciousness and knows his own worth or lack of worth, independently of external circumstances."

honest — mere euphemism here, a figurative expression, a sort of poetic license; as for a highway, there was none or just a trail. The boundless prairie lay spread out before us, and driver and horses knew their course. It was a ride not without its peculiar enjoyment. True: it was bitterly cold in the wind which swept unobstructed from the North. I could only imagine how very different things must be in summer when the thick, soft carpet of dark green grass appears dotted with flowers of all colors; but even so, despite the barrenness, wildness, and monotony of the scene, yea by reason of these, there is something grand and awe-inspiring in the landscape.

Nothing impedes or interrupts the view, whithersoever one looks. No hill or rock, not even a house or tree, not a single sharp line. Nothing, absolutely nothing but the vast, broad prairie! And yet it is very different from the single horizontal line which describes our low, level meadows in Holland:[22] an endless succession of irregular, undulating slopes which seem to extend one's circle of vision indefinitely. There is an inexpressible charm, something solemn, mysterious in the nature of the landscape which speaks to the imagination and even to the heart. It awakens a consciousness such as that aroused by a view of the ocean; yes, in a certain sense it is even stronger here. There, in boundless space is the unending monotony of restless water; here, over the vast but motionless waves, petrified as it were, reigns a deep, solemn stillness, emblematic of peace and immortality, but also of fresh, free, invincible power.

Indeed, there is poetry in the picture, and I realize now why the Arab waxes enthusiastic over the desert; I understand now why the poetical soul of such a person as Miss

22 "A certain painter once sketched a Dutch landscape with a single stroke of the brush: one straight, horizontal line. Fortunately we in our country have colors and tints for lines. The first painters of nature and landscapes after the days of the Renaissance were Hollanders."

Currer Bell loves the monotonous heath of North-England more than the most picturesque landscape; I can almost explain what people here say of a settler of the prairies, who complained of being stifled when he caught sight in the distance of smoke rising from the chimney of a "neighbor" who had located twenty miles away!

However, we do not yet feel like that. Our love for the wilderness had not been put to a severe or lengthy test, and yet, I shall frankly confess it, despite all our poetical contemplations, for which it was indeed really a bit too cold, for the moment we had enough of the wilderness. Man is by nature, after all, a social animal. With unfeigned pleasure we saw, towards the end of our long ride (for it had gradually become quite dark) the gleam of a little lamp here and there which told of human life, and at last our neighing horses come to a stand-still; a door opens, and — we are given a most friendly welcome into a sociable household.

Such a journey through the cold night wind of the prairies is a good way to make one feel (as one does not likely think of it under other circumstances) what a blessing it is to find a *roof* and the pleasure of a hearty, hospitable reception. And here it is a warm reception in every way. Near the companionable, singing tea-kettle, surrounded by the family of our host, in the midst of which the friendly, worthy dominee Bolks, no less sociable, sits smoking his fatherland's pipe, we at once feel ourselves at home; and afterward when the young people gather about the organ and sing us a few four-part songs, it is hard for us to realize that we are in the heart of a newly-occupied prairie country.

We were all the more surprised on awaking and looking around the next morning. It was Sunday, and a Sunday which I shall not very easily forget. What a quiet, almost

holy Sabbath stillness broods over that scene! A fresh, but not cold, morning breeze greets us and the sun casts its friendly rays over that boundless space. Orange City is situated upon somewhat rising ground, and the broad, open landscape extends in all directions. "The world looks big when you approach the Missouri", I had read somewhere, and it is true. Such vast space, and such stillness, seriousness, and peace! How well does the fresh, youthful, simple life of the little colony harmonize with quiet, pure, virgin Nature! About us the little settlers' town with its widely-scattered wooden houses, and beyond, here and there, at a great distance, a little blue cloud of smoke rising from the green field of this or that farm hidden in the folds of the undulating prairie.

But see, gradually there comes a stir! Miles away we see them approaching from all directions, this morning's people on their way to church: here a light buggy or an open wagon, yonder a slow-moving ox cart, or a horseman, also a single amazon, a stout, young farmer's daughter who comes galloping over the fields, a delightful sight to see. But whether they come fast or slow, they arrive in time: those who must travel long distances are seldom late.

We too betake ourselves to the large "public square", as the place is proudly called, where the settlers already imagine they see noble buildings but which is now nothing more than a sketch, an open plot of land surrounded by a few small dwellings and four rows of trees which can stand in *our* shadows. But just now we see a big stir there. Horses and oxen, unhitched, are tied to posts or allowed to graze, and men and women form groups here and there in front of blacksmith shop and church.

Of that church entertain no lofty expectation! It is indeed the most unsightly structure in which I have ever preached. Imagine a small rectangular building of boards,

perhaps ten metres long and five metres wide, with a stove in the center and benches around it. That is the school.—Perpendicular to this school-room at one end, like the upper part of the capital letter T, there is a shed with a few rough, unplaned boards on supports to serve as pews, and against the back wall opposite the entrance stand a chair and table for the minister. This shed and the school-room together form the church. During the week on school-days, the partition between the two rooms is closed, but on Sunday for church services boards are removed from the upper part and the church is then ready to receive an audience.

To be sure this is something quite different from a stately gothic cathedral or the beautiful marble church edifices of New York, but it appeals no less to the emotions; yes, I even dare assert, it is no less picturesque to the eye. It reminds me of Schwartz's picture of the barn where the Pilgrim Fathers in America first worshipped God. Would that my friend Bosboom, who understands so well the charm of light and brown and knows how to put feeling and even poetry into a stable or a landscape, would that he were here for a short quarter of an hour to catch the ray of light which the pale winter's sun causes to play through the little open side-window against the dark wainscot and upon so many quiet and pious upturned faces; or would that Rochussen could reproduce that audience with a few of his ingenious, characteristic figures: men with quiet power and strength written in their bearing and upon their faces, and women some of whom were nursing children, with hands clasped in prayer which was none the less real although they embraced that which was to them most precious on earth. I have seldom if ever been more inspired by an audience than the one in the midst of which I was permitted to stand that morning, and if I returned any of the inspiration which those hearers unconsciously gave to

me, that Sunday morning on the prairies was not entirely lost for eternity.

In the afternoon I preached a second time. They did not need to ask me twice. I then served as the messenger of good tidings. A respectable donation had just been made by the Synod to permit them to begin the construction of a church edifice. For its part the congregation will not be behindhand in offering its contributions, and it will probably not be long before the people may rejoice in the possession of their own church.

Another sociable evening we spend in interesting conversation, mostly of course on the subject of colonies and colonization, in the house of the minister, of whose wife we take our leave. He himself intends to get up tomorrow to take us to the station.

St. Paul, Minnesota, Nov. 25.

Early Monday morning we left Orange City with a peculiar feeling of melancholy. Not only had it done us good to be there, but it was also the westernmost point which we reached, just half-way across the continent, in northwestern Iowa, near the Dakota border, the extreme frontier as it were of civilized life. Our course was now to be northward to see something of that Minnesota whose name we had so frequently heard in the fatherland.

It was early Monday morning when we had to get ready. At half-past five we sat at breakfast and one hour later we were on the wagon which was to convey us, under the guidance of Messrs. Hospers and Bolks, with our friend Bousquet, to the station of the St. Paul & Sioux City Railroad, this time a different station, nearer than the one at which we arrived Saturday. If Le Mars is eighteen miles distant, East Orange[23] is not more than a forty-five minute

[23] The town of East Orange is now Alton, about three miles east of Orange City, the seat of justice of Sioux County.

ride from Orange City. There we bade good-bye to our host, departing at 7:25 on the train to the Northeast. We were soon to be reminded of him, for the next station was named after him: Hospers. But really we shall think of him and his colony often enough without such reminders.