

A TYPICAL IOWA PIONEER COMMUNITY¹

I

We have come together on the scene where two generations of men have worked, struggled, and won, to pay tribute to them, to render, in some small measure, due homage. Although this period is short, it is an epitome of that history which mankind has been writing for untold thousands of years. It marks the presence of settled industry, intellectual and religious effort, and coöperation in maintaining civilization and the agencies which make it and men what they are.

But we do more than recall the men and the work of the past. We look confidently to the welfare, happiness, and progress, in both the present and the future, of those now here and those who are to succeed our forebears and ourselves upon these scenes.

The dedication, to public purposes, of a liberal portion of the rich soil of this township and county is, after all, only the continuance and extension of the policy inaugurated here from that day in 1843 when the first sturdy, high-spirited Vermont settler made his way far into the region and used his strength and enterprise to collect and furnish the materials for the rude building at the confluence of two rivers to be known as Fort Des Moines, on a spot destined soon to become the capital and later, the metropolis of a great State.

¹ An address delivered at the dedication of the Public Park at Carlisle, Warren County, Iowa, May 13, 1922, by George F. Parker.

II

It was only ten years earlier that the white man had gained the right to cross the Mississippi. Nor can we forget, as we are sometimes prone to do, that our people were the beneficiaries of that settled policy of defense started when the great charter of this West of ours became effective upon the passage, under the insistence of George Washington, of the Ordinance of 1787 which dedicated to settlement and to freedom the then existing, but unknown, unsurveyed, boundaries of the Northwest Territory, a policy which was extended to the possessions enlarged by the later purchase of Louisiana. From that time forward, the policy of neglect was abandoned and the helping hand of a new and great government was given to its people wherever, within the new boundaries, their men and women, impelled by adventure, desire to extend their country, or whatever other motive, were led or followed one another. Hitherto, in the process of our making, the settler had gone, upon his own motion, into a chosen part of the colonial wilderness, taking his own risks as to life, property, and association. Fort Des Moines was then only an earnest that, discounting these perils during which military government was so long feared by the Anglo-Saxon, the central government was ready to protect and defend those who were extending its conquests and its blessings.

Years before Carlisle was thought of, John D. Parmelee had gone up and down our small streams, had planned grist mills, picked sites and timber for sawmills, laid out rude roads, made fords, and was ready to draw by ox-team, over what was known as the Dragoon Trail, the materials which entered into the construction of the rude fortress which came to be known as Fort Des

Moines. It is fitting, too, that the land upon which this park stands, should, like its twin neighbor over the county line, bear, in its township, the name of Allen, the first captain under whose protecting aid these neighborhoods started on their way through the world.

III

This changed policy had a deeper significance than indicated at first sight, as an element in the development of the Union and the creation and diffusion of patriotic sentiment. In the peopling of the colonies, nothing was assured from the government whether of the mother country or the dependent colonies. Men did the best they could to defend each other, but the machine was local, feeble, and ill-balanced. The absence of fixed land laws; of established, recognized forms of defence; of relations, commercial or otherwise, with neighboring communities; and of facilities for travel or transport—all combined to make titles doubtful and common helpfulness next to impossible. But when the Federal government became a real, paramount power, ready and pledged to act for its citizens, when it preceded the settler to assure his claims to the soil upon which he chose to sit down; and when the man moving from one settlement, State, or county, to another carried with him the same ideas and institutions that he had hitherto enjoyed, the relations of men to government and government to men became at once more stable and the growth of attachment for surroundings and neighbors was more natural and clear. When, in addition, there was a completed fort in front so that they were not compelled to begin for themselves the building of frail, insecure stockades upon

wholly unfamiliar scenes, the relation of one district to another was changed.

The foundations of human attachments were at once so broadened and strengthened as to make it inevitable, in due time, that the larger patriotism should swallow up the smaller. Almost unconsciously, when the crisis came, the new confidence created in the rude settlements an understanding and a sentiment in favor of a united country. Men were likely to think long and earnestly before imperiling these new safeguards. While these developments long preceded the doctrines so well inculcated by Lincoln and Douglas who, in their turn, had followed Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay, it was soon clear that the Union was the one thing that must be perfected and maintained, whatever else might happen. One of these days, when we shall get away from skillfully made fictions, our people will realize that the Civil War was fought with this fundamental idea rather than as the outcome of some emotional movement, however philanthropic, for the abolition of slavery. It will then be seen that the latter was the incident, not the object. The sooner our generation and its successors find out these things the better will our history be understood.

As our neighborhood lay in a state of nature, it was not of much use until man came along to help in its completion. No adequate idea can be given by description of the magnificence of the scene presented by the physical characteristics, not only of the immediate neighborhood which only those privileged to view it could realize but in the whole of this wonderful valley of the Mississippi when first seen by the eye of civilized man, whose rudest, least sentimental settler could see from the beginning, not only what it then was in the rough, but could imagine what it would be when human effort had

been concentrated upon it. In some respects, it has performed much of its early promise, though it has still far to go before in obedience to the command, it is really subdued. Its geography, its geology, its fauna and flora have indeed been examined, though imperfectly, by the eye of science; but the spectacle of so great a wilderness, and that of its successor, the prairie, with its dimensions and possibilities, with so many qualities useful to man as well as beautiful in view of both reality and imagination, are not wholly appreciated. These lie as fairly within the scope of the student as does the story of human endeavor which has had the duty and the task of so changing the outward characteristics of this immense area as to make it almost unrecognizable. The recollections and stories of hardship, warfare, jealousy, and constant movement have been so much before us as to lead to the belief that they were something new in the history of mankind whereas they are only the incident to human restlessness.

IV

The origin and descent of the land on which your new park is situated is simple. Nicholas Beezley came here from Illinois late in 1847; and in February, 1848, he moved upon his new claim, where he built a hewed log house about 30 rods east and 15 rods south of the Stumbo homestead. On the 30th of October, when the land office opened, he formally entered the northwest quarter of Section 2, Township 77, Range 23—152 acres. Upon his death in 1851, it was inherited by his son, Jesse, then about nine years old. At the latter's death in December, 1861, it was bought by my father, Thomas W. Parker, who consolidated his farms, held both until

1866, and then sold the whole to William Stumbo, who had settled across both the North and Des Moines rivers, about three or four miles away, near the town of Dudley.

My personal relation to it came soon after we moved into the neighborhood in 1854. We settled first on an 80-acre farm just under a mile from the school house. But my father had a gift, not uncommon among pioneers: a positive genius for finding the choicest land for farms, and, being at the same time intelligent and ambitious, he exercised these qualities with an enterprise then unusual. You know the quality of the site here; if you will recall that larger, improved Fort Des Moines, a few miles to the westward, you will see another farm in which he used this high power of selection. That was the largest of his four Iowa farms, as the one you see here was the first. I have, therefore, the pride of a son in knowing that these gifts of his were so conspicuous that his successors, looking about for attractive places for public monuments, approved his judgment. These things please me the more because, in a boyish way, I was privileged to have some part in the hard and exacting work that helped to make each of these actual homes what it was, and to realize that, more than any man I have known among almost uncounted thousands, my father knew, from early experience and by instinct, how to bring out the qualities inherent in a prairie soil. His interest in everything of a public nature enabled him to do a conspicuous work in the neighborhoods in which he lived.

V

The log house was probably succeeded by a frame one as early as 1856 or 1857. Just before this time my father

had built his own log house further down the road, so that I began to pass the Beezley home on my way to school in the village. By this time Jesse, although he had grown to be a big boy of thirteen or fourteen would, with the friendliness incident to the country, wait for me and we, the great big awkward lad and the short-legged, sturdy child of eight, would trudge along together. At first, he was far ahead of me in studies; but, as often happened in our country schools, we finally came into the same classes in reading, spelling, and those other branches in which strict classification was next to impossible.

Thus, some years before the Civil War, which was to prove fatal to so many of our growing and most promising young fellows, we had become such close friends that, many a time, Jesse would intervene to protect his young friend from the stronger, more active boys who, then as now, often had a gift for making life a burden to the small, weak, or timid. Under such a plan many a smaller boy would find early admission into the various games of old cat, or rounders, the predecessors of baseball, or into bull pen, or Antony Over, even, on occasions, into marbles, while the running games, then the resort of all ages, were always so open that little opportunity and no desire remained for exclusion. There was then, as is always the case in a small neighborhood, a group of these dominating larger lads but, as in the long run boys always are inclined to be, they were generous in their welcome to smaller mates when they could fairly do their part. It was only natural that these big boys should at once volunteer for the war and, among them, if I remember aright, the earliest was my big friend and chum, Jesse Beezley. Certainly he was our first sacrifice to that always insatiable lust of war, for he

died in camp in December after our company had marched away from here. In reality, your park is, in the best sense, a monument to your soldiers in the Civil War period. If in time to come you shall erect a plain tablet bearing their names, that of the early owner of this land will lead all the rest.

VI

How well I, grown then to the mature age of thirteen, remember that marching away of our boys, on the 19th of August, 1861—a day always since marked in my calendar of red letter days. All the patriotic feelings as well as much of the hysteria of a nation had become aroused. Our immediate contingent of Company B, Tenth Iowa Infantry, numbered from forty to fifty men. Its Captain was Martin C. Randleman who had done good service in the Mexican War, ended fourteen years before, while the second lieutenant, Owen Adkins, had had a like experience. When they started from Carlisle, led by our newly improvised fife and drum corps, with its music strange to our ears, they had to march about three miles down to the Des Moines River at Dudley, which as the first of Uncle Jerry Church's Iowa town sites, had been drowned out, abandoned, and its few remaining houses removed to the safety of the Carlisle hills which in those days were far more formidable than the Seven Hills surrounding Rome became when, in due time, we learned something of the adventures of Romulus and Remus with the friendly, nourishing she-wolf.

If I should live a hundred or a thousand years, I could not see or take part in a more solemn and impressive ceremony. Here was assembled everybody from our part of the county, and many from across North River, young

and old, fathers and mothers, boys and girls. For the first time in their lives all were taking part in a military pageant, under the command of their own neighbors as officers. Slowly and sadly, the procession made its way to the ferry where the boys were to cross and march onward to the railroad, perhaps still a hundred miles distant, thence to their training-camp somewhere on the Mississippi, fifty miles further. When all were assembled, led by the ministers of each denomination, the class-leader, the elders, the Sunday-school superintendents and teachers, and followed by the pupils in every kind of school, each and all knelt by the stream-side to listen to public prayers. As by one impulse, these were succeeded by private devotions from each person, young and old. Few demonstrations could be more genuine or more solemn than this and probably none who took part in it ever forgot either its supreme dignity or its significance. This ceremony, natural as it was, united the people of the neighborhood in closer bonds than any law or formal covenant could have done. Nor was it merely an outburst of sentiment. From that time for four years every man and woman and child in the village and its surroundings carried into life the feelings there generated and expressed.

This interest in our little contingent of soldiers grew year by year. From the point of view of money, our people were poor but, like the hired hand who believed that he could care for his employer's daughter, because he was "chock full of day's works," so this universal gift was used to plough, sow and plant; to cultivate and garner the crops on the absent soldier's farm; to repair houses, provide wood and cut it ready for use; to do what they could for the wives—always known as war widows—and the children, lest any should suffer by the

absence of the father or son, the dependence of the helpless or the young in this work of making a new community. No more useful or positive demonstration of real charity was ever taught to these people who, struggling in the days of beginnings, by a common impulse, thus made themselves practical Christians. So, out of war and misfortune, there came to those humble men and women, pioneers who had separated themselves from the rest of the world, practical lessons in service that went far to neutralize or compensate for the hardship, violence, hatred, and wrong by which they were surrounded in the most terrific civil war known to history.

The sympathy aroused when casualty lists told of the killed or wounded was only premonitory of the joy that welcomed the end of the conflict and the return as individuals or in companies, of soldiers to their families and their civil duties. All these passions and emotions were shown here on the surroundings which to-day are filled with joy because of duty done by the successors of these men and women in the dedication here of a memorial intended to exemplify the public spirit developed among these pioneers and their successors on the farms and houses scattered all about them.

VII

In truth, we do more than celebrate the past: we are trying to anticipate the future in providing for the instruction and entertainment of the men, women, and children upon whom we must rely for thought and effort in the coming generations. I hope that, in doing this, we shall not fail, both by example and precept, to impress upon these people, as they come along, the idea that, as they have inherited great and good things, they

must maintain them; that it is not enough to lay out this choice piece of land as a playground for young and old, for resident and stranger, but it must be maintained and improved.

I should like to look forward to a public spirit like that, which under the working of time, memory, and effort, has brought forth this venture. It should insure the adoption of permanent, systematic movements for its maintenance and improvement. If each girl and woman, each boy and man—persons of all ages and employments—shall insist, as by a common impulse, upon coming here once every year to do something that is wanted and needed, to dig or enrich the ground, to plant a tree, to improve a road, to help in keeping fences and walls in order, this park will command a general use and inspire a pride that will make its way into every home within its influence. If every such person will make up his mind to fix and keep up a high standard of order, neatness, and cleanliness, the work can never lag or fail. While your park may seem small, you may all recall with pride that it is much larger in area, relatively to numbers, than like playgrounds in the great cities of the world and resolve that it shall be made a model, where discipline, pride, and a real personal interest shall be assured. It is well to have rules, it may be necessary to have guards, but the best rules are those inherent in the determination of all to do a part by keeping order, enforcing neatness upon himself, and respecting public property. The most effective guards should be those who use it day by day, year in and year out. In a few years, you will have here gardens that will be little less than miracles of beauty. Even in the grimmest season of the year, they will constantly recall, in anticipation, the spirit and sacrifice of your predecessors and give you

something to look at and study that will honor both those who provide and those who receive, as its existence already reflects credit upon those about you whose thought, industry, and sacrifice have made it possible.

It will, I am sure, become a place for real use. I expect to hear, ere long, that provision has been made for every kind of game that shall fit the place and the changing seasons. Baseball and football will, no doubt, remain the standard sports and I hope that your local victories may promote pride and the cultivation of skill, and your defeats teach you that patience and forbearance incident to the high compliment conveyed by the phrase "play the game"—that ought to be added to the commandments. You will probably soon naturalize, or revive, if you have not done so already, wrestling, hockey, basket ball, tennis, and croquet, provide for marbles, and introduce anew that interesting old game known as bowls whose enticements led Rip Van Winkle on into his immortal sleep and the happy resurrection which followed. I wish I could see you revive, as significant of the past, even if only for exhibition purposes, the extinct games that I knew in my boyish days and thus add to the variety which keeps life interesting. All of these games you will practice so well and so sedulously, as to demonstrate again how an outdoor active life brings content and tends to curb or restrain the restlessness to which we, as a people, are too prone. You will also have impressed upon young and old, the fact that the people which plays best is best equipped for work and for fighting, if for the preservation of ideas, institutions, and firesides, the latter shall become a necessity.

I look with confidence to your managers when it comes to making provisions for winter sports. Your situation will enable you to have a long and safe toboggan ending

at the river and running, according to my memory, for some little distance on the stream itself or along its banks. In our climate it is important to bear in mind that cold weather and snow hold our people in their toils during about five months of the year, when provision may be made for the use of the facilities of your park.

In like manner, if the Ol' Swimmin' Hole, just up the river from the bridge still persists, I hope that you can either annex it permanently or so use it as to preserve to future generations one of the great play spots of the childhood and youth of myself and my fellows. I was once firmly convinced that nowhere upon its surface did the earth contain a deeper bit of fresh water with so many attractions or that could afford more fun to real boys. Another of its great merits was the fact that, at least within my time, no boy was ever drowned in it.

VIII

On the whole, this early life of our people, passed as it was in God's Great Outdoors, was active and full of the most exacting of hard, manual labor; but it was wholesome and fairly happy. We had to contend with many and serious drawbacks; we often dealt with human weakness in its worst and most discouraging forms; we lived in the midst of an isolation, the extent of which was never known among active minded persons or classes or anywhere other than in the most highly-developed forms of stoicism or monasticism; we were the victims of a theology that bred intolerance and of a bigotry, a narrowness, and a selfishness that approached hypocrisy; we often suffered physical deprivations in the midst of a potentiality of plenty unknown to history; and yet out of all these conditions and in such an environment

we did not develop or promote more than the average proportion of scandal or of immorality, either open or hid, or of that pretension and self-righteousness that so weaken a people whether they have grown or settled upon a scene, or have come together from older surroundings.

I suppose we all think, as no doubt our forerunners saw, that the strength of these new communities would have been increased if we had drawn our population from more varied origins; if into our religion and education had entered more of the elements necessary for a larger intellectual and moral development; if we had been less truculent, somewhat less confident about our political forms of speech and action; rather less devoted to what we now know were impracticable and outworn conceptions; and a bit more critical of the men we trusted. We did need broader ideas, a recognition of the wholesomeness and the necessity of a better and larger culture, and more of the all round influence that go to make up the life of mankind. If we could have escaped somewhat earlier from that sombreness, which was often oppressive, the grayness that even then was so apparent to the thoughtful, our growth, on purely material lines, might, perhaps, have proceeded less rapidly, but also had an evenness that would have made us, at an earlier day, both more human and more Christian.

We should have known better how to absorb great contingents of foreigners, somewhat less sophisticated than ourselves, rather simpler in their outward show of human traits, people who had developed by a sort of mystic process some of the qualities in industry and in training that we have since had to acquire slowly, with awkwardness and its attendant pain. Perhaps if we had had more discipline, less truculence, less boasting

about size, we should have been less easy now as a prey for wily but ignorant politicians, for self-seekers and bigots in religion; for adventurers and pretenders in industry, for self-assumed leaders whose first resort in time of stress is to create a grandmotherly government and then advise everybody to run under its protecting apron. Many things might have been incorporated into our structure naturally that now come as the result of growing pains deferred so late that they must now be associated with fear and apprehension.

But whatever might have happened we are what we are and so must take ourselves as we find ourselves, and, like our fathers, make our way out as best we can. An advantage now is that we can the easier recognize and see our crudenesses; that we are somewhat less cocksure than our predecessors; that many things which they looked upon as ideas have come down in the scale of life until they are only notions; and that, above all things, we ought, with these new advantages, to be the better fitted to play a part in the great world and not limit ourselves to our own neighborhood gardens.

But, in any event, whatever remains to be done, whatever we try to do, we must never forget that the foundations were laid by those people whose work we to-day commemorate in this distinctive improvement—one probably unprecedented in a community of its size and numbers—in which, with all solemnity, we dedicate to-day this park as a public memorial.

IX.

This village of ours, set in beautiful and attractive surroundings, with its attendant neighborhood, was small, and, in its comparative relation to the rest of the world,

it has not changed. But it was typical. Its people were active, industrious, enterprising, God-fearing, helpful to each other, and only exacting in the demand that every man should, within his powers and opportunities, help himself. They were attached to the principles and policies that underlay our social and political ideas; were not the victims of a vague or open discontent; and were anxious to know about the world in which they lived—a world, which for them, as for others, must always, like charity, begin at home.

To one who is descending the slopes of life, it is a pleasure to look back upon association with the men and women of such a day, to recall their virtues, to overlook their faults, to smile at their foibles, to feel that they had the loves and hates, the jealousies and ambitions, the hopes and fears, that marked them as real human beings. After the lapse of many years they stand out before me with a distinctness that emphasizes the sentiment expressed by Charlotte Brontë' when, writing of Arnold of Rugby, she said: "One feels thankful to know that it has been permitted to any man to live such a life." In like manner, I think we should all be thankful that we have been permitted to live among these plain, unpretending people who, in our serene Iowa air, on our fertile soil, and among scenes whose attractive and primitive qualities we can recall, never overlooked or forgot their patriotic principles and their religion.

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