

Comment by the Editor

NOTES ON AN OLD GEOGRAPHY

In the year 1846 Jesse Olney published the fifty-second edition of his text book on geography. The title page informed the reader that it was *A Practical System of Modern Geography; or a View of the Present State of the World. Simplified and adapted to the Capacity of Youth*. This small volume was "illustrated by a new and enlarged atlas", but no copy of the 1846 *Atlas* has been located, an illustration, perhaps, of the fact that ordinary sized books stand a better chance of survival than do volumes too large to stand unobtrusively on the shelves.

The three hundred pages of this small *Geography* are crowded with information in small type, usually in the form of questions or questions and answers. Evidently geography was, at least partially, a memory exercise. There were also small wood cuts printed in black and white.

Due perhaps to slips in revision, the 1846 edition of Olney's *Geography* contains some confusing information concerning the status of Iowa and Wisconsin. In a report on the population, both are listed as "States"; in a study of the map

of the United States, both are listed as "Territories"; but in the descriptive sketches of States and Territories Wisconsin was placed among the States, while Iowa was listed as a Territory, as indeed it was at the time the *Geography* was printed. Wisconsin, however, did not enter the Union until 1848, almost two years after Iowa became a State. Possibly the editor assumed that the older Territory automatically became a State as soon as a new Territory was carved out from its area.

Three towns were listed in the descriptive sketch of Iowa — Iowa City, Burlington, and Dubuque. According to an editorial note Dubuque was to be pronounced "Du-book". The pupil in Iowa would have been confused by some of the questions to be answered from the map — "Which extends farthest south, Iowa, or this State?"; "In what direction from us is Iowa?"; and "How will you sail from Prairie du Chien to Iowa City?"

Incidentally the modern student would be interested in some of the world geography as it was one hundred years ago. What is now Argentina was Buenos Ayres, and Colombia was New Granada. Much more significant to the modern readers than to those of 1846 was the comment in small type concerning Persia (now Iran and

Iraq). "On the western part of the coast of the Caspian Sea, are fountains of *naphtha* or *pure rock oil*. The earth around them when dug to the depths of two or three inches readily takes fire on applying to it a live coal." Today those oil deposits threaten to be the "live coal" which may ignite a third world war. Since friction matches were already invented in 1846, one may ask why the live coal? Possibly no one had a match. At that time not even Mr. Olney considered the oil as anything more than a curiosity. Times *have* changed.

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