

The **P**ALIMPSEST

JANUARY 1923

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THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

The PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

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The Siege of Corinth

The reader of history is usually informed that on such a day General So-and-so moved on such a road, or in such a direction, and occupied such a point with so many men, with the view of accomplishing some certain stated purpose. This clear, precise, and definite view of the matter is not taken by the rank and file who march in the general's army. A commanding general has no time to arrange and exhibit plans with explanatory comments, for the enlightenment of his army. It would be very injudicious for him to do so if he could. Officers and soldiers are nearly always in utmost ignorance of what is about to be attempted (unless a charge is impending, on which occasion they are, or should be, informed), but it is their business to fall in at the tap of the drum, and march where glory or disaster awaits them. No matter how wise the captains or lieutenants look, they know no more about what is in contemplation

than the men do. Even the colonel — whose orders are more imperial and more certain to be carried out than the political schemes of a king or president — even that autocrat, five times out of ten, is ignorant of where he is going or what he is going for. Our colonel, the redoubtable Alexander Chambers, never seemed to care, but mounted his horse, gave his commands, and led the way like a human machine — as a colonel should do.

The real advance of Halleck's army upon Corinth began on April 29, 1862. My private journal describes our first move.

“On Tuesday noon I arrived in camp from a toilsome detail. I had barely time to swallow a dinner before the drums beat to fall in line. Orders had come to move without tents or knapsacks, and with a day's rations in our haversacks. Of our own volition we also left our blankets and overcoats behind us, in order to be free of incumbrance and ready for the fray. The brigade moved in a body, and our course was apparently in the direction of the enemy's stronghold.

“The afternoon was hot. Our line of march was sometimes rough, and at other times lay through pleasant places. For a while we would pass through cool and shady woods, filled with the odors of flowers, shrubbery, and sweet blossoms, and then emerge into a clearing that formed the homestead of some hardy farmer, whose log cabin, dogs, and half-terrified children seemed a mute protest against the bar-

barity of war. Pushing down a few yards of his rail fence, we would march on through green meadows and fragrant orchards. Many little homes, half concealed by foliage, excited our envy. If we grew enthusiastic over the natural beauties around us, some swamp was sure to obstruct our way. 'Forward!' would be the word, and forward our column would move through water and mud knee deep, amid the shouting of the officers and the swearing of the men. At the end of every hour we would halt five or ten minutes to rest.

"At about dusk several regiments of Union cavalry passed us, galloping to the rear. In reply to inquiries as to where they had been, one trooper yelled: 'To the Land of Nod, where's there's forty devils and no God.' With more courtesy, an officer reined in and said they had been raiding on the enemy's flank, and had burnt two railroad bridges and also captured a locomotive.

"After dark the march was more difficult than ever. We floundered through swamps and through brush and every sort of jungle, and the Recording Angel must have had a severe night's work of it, to judge by the multiplicity of oaths we showered around. At ten o'clock the welcome order to halt was given. After forming a line of battle, and receiving strict instructions to build no fires, we stacked arms and slept on the ground without covering or bedding of any description.

"At daylight we rose, and with some disregard of

orders, built a long line of blazing bonfires. After drying ourselves, and feeding on crackers and bacon, we fell into line and moved still further towards Corinth. We had proceeded only about a mile when we came to a halt and faced about, intelligence having been officially sent that some point we had been ordered to drive the enemy from had been already occupied by Union troops. The news was not gratefully heard, and with loud grumbling we started back, reaching camp in the afternoon, much worn by the expedition.

“May 1st we broke camp, taking tents and equipage with us, and after traversing a delightful region, came to our present location — a few miles south of the State line of Tennessee, and on the sacred soil of Mississippi. I am sitting in a cool grove, the boughs of which are filled with feathered songsters. In front of me flows a limpid brook, and on a little eminence beyond are twelve pieces of artillery, frowning in the direction of Corinth.”

The next morning we pushed on again over excellent roads till we came to the hamlet of Monterey, from which the enemy had been shelled. Fragments of old tents, knapsacks, clothing of all kinds, commissary stores, and a little of everything imaginable, were flung around promiscuously. Along the route we had come, we found the grain fields trampled, fences torn down, farms deserted, houses riddled with cannon shot or shell, and dead horses lying about everywhere, for there had been much cavalry fighting. For the first time we saw a field of cotton,

and more than ever realized we were in Dixie. A citizen yet lingering around the wreck of Monterey, told me that after the battle of Shiloh, the Confederates who came flying by his home were in utter panic; that discipline and organization were gone, and that "it was every devil for himself to get to Corinth."

On the afternoon of May 3d we heard heavy cannonading ahead. I sat on a fence and counted fifty-five guns, fired about as fast as I could count them. We afterwards learned that the enemy had been driven out of Farmington. The next day we moved forward two miles, and occupied a heavy line of works, with troops in line of battle on either side of us. There a slight military misfortune befell me. A corporal struck me a blow in the face. For retorting with the butt of a musket, I was arrested on the charge — as the boys phrased it — of "smiting an inferior officer." After passing a night in the guard-tent, I was ordered to my company for duty.

Thus far we had not encountered the enemy, although expecting to at any hour, as skirmishing and fighting were going on continually. On the 16th we pressed his lines for the first time, while making another advance, and skirmishers deployed in force at the front of our brigade. A lively fight ensued immediately, without formalities, and leaden "epistles to the Corinthians" flew thick and fast. In about an hour, with the assistance of a little grape and canister, the woods were cleared of Confederates, and, advancing to a position that seemed satisfactory, we halted and threw up a line of works.

That night our regiment performed "grand guard" duty for the first time. We marched into the woods a little to the rear of the skirmish line, and remained there all night, in one body, in readiness to repulse any heavy attack the enemy might make. A few men from each company did sentry duty, in order to give alarm in case of danger, and the others, with accoutrements on, were allowed to lie on the ground and sleep. I happened to be one of those on guard. Extremely tired, and not being well accustomed to marching as yet, in the warm, close atmosphere of a dense wood, we found it difficult to keep awake. Resorting to various expedients, I fell at last to wooing the muses, and evolved the following:

ODE TO THE PLANET MARS

Red star of War! while armies sleep,
To march to slaughter at the dawn,
'Tis mine a faithful watch to keep,
Lest suddenly the foe come on.

I peer into the gloomy wood,
Alarmed at some portentous sound,
Then gaze on thee, red orb of blood,
Whose beams a warring world confound.

O, from among the stars retire,
Elsewhere send forth thy rays malign,
Thou baleful globe of restless fire,
Man's blood is poured for thee like wine.

The next afternoon I strolled along our lines to view the stirring operations in progress. Mounting a breastwork, I walked on the top of it for more than a mile, and was told by an officer that to his personal knowledge, it extended three miles beyond that point. It was occupied by troops, of course, with batteries at intervals.

I had no sooner returned from this ramble than the pickets and skirmishers of our part of the line were driven in by the Confederates, with much shooting, and many piercing variations of the famous "rebel yell". The drums rolled and the troops fell in everywhere; the pickets were promptly reinforced and the enemy was driven back. Our brigade was ordered to pack up, send tents, wagons, and baggage to the rear, and be ready to move at a moment's notice.

In the afternoon the skirmish line was again driven in, and rebel batteries opened on our bivouac, pelting us in a lively manner. Most of the missiles were shells. Our batteries responded, and for a time it sounded as though the battle we had been so long expecting was really about to commence. A regiment of infantry went on the double-quick down into the woods, and after some heavy volleys of musketry, we heard that one of the enemy's batteries had been captured. General Morgan L. Smith's brigade had a sharp fight that day also, somewhere on the line beyond us. All day long, and through most of the night, the booming of cannon and rattle of small

arms was heard along the front of the army, which must have been a distance of ten or fifteen miles.

On the next day a heavy thunder storm swept over the camps and lines of both armies. Peals of thunder echoed and bellowed through the wide woods, as though in rivalry of the noise of cannonading.

Our part of the line was close to Corinth then — so close that when the universal uproar quieted some we could hear the whistling of locomotives and the rumbling of trains. Deserters came stealing across to our picket lines daily, to surrender. They told a uniform tale of miserable rations, half-rations, impressments, and military executions. A general conscription act was being enforced with great severity, and, as Grant afterwards tersely expressed it, the Confederate government was robbing the cradle and the grave to fill its armies. Grey-haired men and half-grown boys were alike dragged from home to become food for powder. These deserters also said a scarcity of water was causing sickness and many deaths in Beauregard's camps. Not only was water scarce, but foul water had to be used, greatly injuring the health of the troops.

Water was also scarce in the Union camps, at the front of our division at least, and on May 21st a bloody engagement occurred for the possession of a creek that lay between the rival skirmish lines. A party of the enemy stole through the woods to obtain water, and found a lot of our pickets at the creek. A fight ensued, both sides being reinforced, and after

obstinate combat our men held possession of the creek. A few hours afterwards the enemy shelled our camps, picket reserves, and skirmish lines viciously; our batteries replied with spirit, and some heavy volleys of musketry indicated that another fight for water had probably commenced. All day long the skirmishers of the two armies blazed away at one another, the firing at times almost rising to the dignity of a battle. Frequently artillery was brought into action to prevent the pickets of one side from driving their adversaries back upon the main body. The opposing armies lay like two sullen monsters slowly gathering strength for an impending death struggle.

At this time the weather was delightful, for the line of battle ran through a forest apparently boundless. The troops — in our vicinity at least — had fully stripped for action, being without tents, wagons, or baggage, well supplied with ammunition, and ready to fight at a minute's notice. Our sleeping apartments consisted mainly of rustic bowers formed of the boughs and branches of trees. Not unfrequently the recumbent warrior was roused from gentle dreams of lady love or home by cold contact with an intruding snake or lizard. Though snakes abounded in the South and often shared a soldier's bed, I never heard of anyone being bitten. A general impression prevailed that snakes would not bite a sleeping man.

The twenty-sixth of May found us in the reserve,

the army having made another lunge forward (and covered its front with earthworks), leaving our brigade a trifle to the rear. Everything being placid around us, the colonel had excuse for his favorite pastime. He trotted us out to the drill ground and gave us three hours of company drill in the forenoon and four hours of battalion drill in the afternoon, which we thought sufficient in view of the balmy weather.

On May 28th our regiment had its first formal military burial. We had buried plenty of men, but not in regulation style. A comrade having died, the colonel improved the opportunity to show us how the government desired to have us buried. The body was laid out in uniform on a stretcher, and borne through camp to the melancholy rolling of muffled drums. An escort marched with arms reversed. The bottom of the grave having first been strewn with green boughs and green leaves, the body was rolled in a blanket and respectfully lowered to place. Over it other leaves and boughs were strewn. In a gentle manner earth was spilled in till the corpse was covered, then the grave was filled up. The firing squad discharged three volleys over the grave, and the detail marched back to quarters to the sound of lively music.

At daylight on the morning of May 30th our regiment passed the outer intrenchments of the army. Leaving five companies on reserve, the rest of us deployed in the woods and relieved part of the troops

on the skirmish line. Soon after sunrise extraordinary explosions, apparently within the enemy's lines, excited universal attention. The roar was not like cannonading precisely, nor very much like thunder. We had never heard the like of it before. An officer said it was the firing of mortars by some of Pope's troops. We were in thick woods. No Confederates had yet been seen. Indeed, we had received no instructions to hunt for them, though we thought they could be readily found if wanted. These heavy explosions, however, suggested the possibility that Corinth was being evacuated — that the enemy was blowing up his powder magazines.

After a brief consultation, the commanding officer of that part of the picket line ordered Lieutenant Thomas Purcell, of our company, and our fourth corporal to go forward and ascertain if any Confederate sharpshooters were in front of us. I had permission to go also. Cocking our muskets and holding them in readiness to fire, the corporal and I advanced with the lieutenant. We stealthily threaded our way through an intervening wood and reached the edge of a clearing. After looking about carefully in every direction, and seeing no signs of the enemy, we decided to cross the clearing. On the other side of it was a little grove where we feared we might be captured or killed, but on entering it we found no one there. It occupied the crest of a slight eminence. The quietness around rendered us bolder, and we passed on through the grove.

At the opposite border, we came in full view of Beauregard's breastworks, forts, and intrenchments, stretching away for miles on either side. They appeared utterly deserted. Not a flag or soldier was visible anywhere. In front of us was an abatis of fallen trees, beyond which ran a line of rifle trenches for sharpshooters, but we could see nobody over there. The corporal was sent back to report what he knew, and to say that Corinth was evacuated without a doubt.

The lieutenant and I then made a bold march for the rifle pits, and finding them unoccupied, became perfectly satisfied that the Confederate army was gone. There might be stragglers or a rear guard of skirmishers on the high hill, but in some excitement we continued on till we reached the main breastwork of Beauregard's line. It was of earth, twelve feet high at that point, and had embrasures, at intervals, for heavy artillery. Mounting the work, we took off our hats and gave three cheers for the Union army. As far as the eye could see were the formidable works of the foe, but in them we saw no defenders.

We had not been there many minutes before the space between our picket line and the rebel fortifications was dotted with scouts and skirmishers who had heard the tidings and ran across to see for themselves. Cheer after cheer went up from little groups, then the skirmish line caught the contagion, and thence it spread to the line of battle, which made the woods ring with triumphal cheers. Bands followed

quickly with victorious music; here and there a regiment moved across to plant its flag on the walls of the famous stronghold; and thousands of troops were soon in eager but vain pursuit of the foe.

CLINT PARKHURST

The Iowa Thespians

Amusements during the thirties in the outpost settlement of Dubuque, or in any of the border towns, were none too plentiful. True, the Lafayette Circus Company of New York had performed for several nights to large audiences in Dubuque, a menagerie of wild animals had been exhibited at settlements along the Mississippi River, and a few strolling mimics, singers, and gymnasts had displayed their skill in the dining rooms of the taverns at Davenport, Bloomington (Muscatine), and Burlington, but for the most part the tragic muse was unwooded in the Iowa country.

Partly to relieve the monotony of the long winter evenings and partly to satisfy natural dramatic inclinations, a group of young men in Dubuque organized the Iowa Thespian Association early in 1838. The lure of the footlights and the desire to tread the boards in sock and buskin have always possessed fascination. The formation of this band of players — probably the first amateur dramatic company on Iowa soil — was prompted by the same charm of the stage that to-day attracts members into the Drama League and invigorates the Little Theatre movement.

The Thespian Association was fortunate in selecting a place for their theater that was already well

and favorably known in the community. The Shakespeare Coffee House and Free Admission News Room, maintained by Charles Corkery in a two-story building near the corner of Main and Second streets, had been opened a short time before. The *Iowa News* for November 15, 1837, carried his opening announcement which called the attention of the public to the attractions of the place. Patrons were to enjoy free use of legislative and congressional proceedings and newspapers from all parts of the Union, Canada, and Texas, as well as ready access to a superior and well selected assortment of wines, liquors, and cordials at the bar "cash up". The large upstairs room of this popular building was selected by the Thespians as the scene of their theatricals and was given the appropriate name of Shakespeare Hall.

The young men proceeded to rearrange the room in a comfortable style well adapted to their needs. A stage was built across one corner at an elevation of three or four feet above the floor. The body of the hall was filled with rows of seats, and the Thespian artist spread lurid colors on the scenery and the front drop.

When the sun had disappeared behind the high bluffs to the West and darkness had fallen upon the frozen Mississippi the amateur actors met in Shakespeare Hall to rehearse their plays and songs. The crackling oak logs in the huge fireplace and the semi-circle of sputtering candle footlights created an

atmosphere that incited them to noble efforts. Nor did they hesitate to attempt the heaviest rôles in the leading plays of the day — such as the thrilling historical drama, “England’s Iron Days”, and the notable success, “Pizarro”, by August F. F. von Kotzebue, which had been the most popular play in England for a decade or more.

An item in the *Iowa News* for February 3, 1838, reported that some of the parts in the early productions of the Association “were admirably played, and all the plays were well received and applauded. Several national and sentimental songs were sung, in a beautiful strain, by a young gentleman possessed of musical powers which if cultivated, bid fair to rival the best vocalists of the day.” Shakespeare Hall was recommended to the lovers of mirth as a place well calculated to drive dull care away during a long winter evening.

The most pretentious offering of the Iowa Thespians during the first season of their existence was a patriotic thriller in five acts, entitled “The Glory of Columbia her Yeomanry” by William Dunlap, the father of the American drama. It had been written for a Fourth of July production by its manager-author and had been played at the Park Theatre in New York for the first time in 1803. Under the capable leadership and direction of Thomas C. Fassett, A. J. Anderson, and George L. Nightingale the large cast became letter perfect in their lines and proficient in the stage business of the play. At the

same time other members of the Thespians practiced a number of songs for the afterpiece, without which no theatrical performance was complete in those days.

The following advertisement, one column wide and two inches long, appeared in the *Iowa News* on February 24, 1838, announcing the event of the season to the people of Dubuque.

THEATRICAL

THE IOWA THESPIAN ASSOCIATION

WILL PERFORM


On Monday night, the 26th inst., in DuBuque at the Shakspeare House, the much admired play of

THE GLORY OF COLUMBIA

(By WILLIAM DUNLAP, Esq.)

And conclude with a variety of Songs, Duets, Trios.

N. B. Children under 10 years of age not admitted.

 Tickets to be had at the bar of the Shakspeare.

The performance attracted an appreciative audience that filled the hall to overflowing, and many were denied admission for lack of room. Great was the satisfaction and loud the applause of the early patrons of the drama as the curtain fell upon the successive acts of the patriotic play. No doubt the enthusiastic and noisy appreciation mounted also with each visit between acts to the hospitable bar

below. In fact, the play proved so popular that the Iowa Thespians were obliged to repeat it on the next Saturday night, March 3, 1838. At this performance they inserted as an added attraction for the after-piece the laughable farce, "Gretna Green".

All in all, the first season of the Iowa Thespian Association proved more successful than the sanguine hopes of its founders had anticipated and plans were made for a longer and more elaborate dramatic season the following winter.

The second year of the organization was made noteworthy by the visit of the McKenzie-Jefferson company, the first troupe of professional actors with a metropolitan reputation to visit the newly created Territory of Iowa. The group included Alexander McKenzie and his wife, Joseph Jefferson, his wife, daughter, and son, Joseph (Rip), then a boy of ten, Germon, Leicester, Burke, Warren, Sankey, Wright, Stafford, and Mesdames Germon and Ingersoll.

They had come on a barnstorming trip by the lake route to open a new theater in the town of Chicago, then a place of some two thousand people. It was the first lap of a roving trip through the West and South. The Jeffersons and their troupe "passed Indians, and glided by small villages, destined some day to become great cities." On the way to Dubuque "the company's scenery dropped into the Mississippi River, while forest and castle ran away in streaks of color across the canvas. Jefferson III nothing daunted, went courageously to work, re-

painting the smeared landscapes." On another occasion "these travellers got into trouble, where a lawyer had to be called in. They employed a gaunt and awkward looking man — none other than Abraham Lincoln — to aid them in their difficulties." For a time "the father of 'Rip' turned sign-painter for the nonce." Again the Jefferson family went "down-stream on a raft, with scenery serving as sails, whole fields and balustrades flung to the breeze." Sometimes barns "were fitted up as theatres; candles spilled wax around, and shed a dim, flickering light on a squalid room. Not frills and fancies, but rough, healthy democracy greeted them every where."

That part of the trip which took the company overland from Chicago to Galena, thence up the frozen Mississippi to Dubuque, is best described by Joseph Jefferson in his delightful autobiography.

"After a short season in Chicago, with the varying success which in those days always attended the drama, the company went to Galena for a short season, traveling in open wagons over the prairie. Our seats were the trunks that contained the ward-robe — those old-fashioned hair trunks of a mottled and spotted character made from the skins of defunct circus horses: 'To what base uses we may return!' These smooth hair trunks, with geometrical problems in brass tacks ornamenting their surface, would have made slippery seats even on a macadamized road, so one may imagine the difficulty we had in

holding on while jolting over a rough prairie. Nothing short of a severe pressure on the brass tacks and a convulsive grip of the handles could have kept us in position; and whenever a treacherous handle gave way our company was for the time being just one member short. As we were not an express mail-train, of course we were allowed more than twenty minutes for refreshments. The only difficulty was the refreshments. We stopped at farm-houses on the way for this uncertain necessity, and they were far apart. If the roads were heavy and the horses jaded, those actors who had tender hearts and tough limbs jumped out and walked to ease the poor brutes. Often I have seen my father trudging along ahead of the wagon, smoking his pipe, and I have no doubt thinking of the large fortune he was going to make in the next town, now and then looking back with his light blue eyes, giving my mother a cheerful nod which plainly said: 'I'm all right. This is splendid; nothing could be finer.' If it rained he was glad it was not snowing; if it snowed he was thankful it was not raining. This contented nature was his only inheritance; but it was better than a fortune made in Galena or anywhere else, for nothing could rob him of it.

"We travelled from Galena to Dubuque on the frozen river in sleighs — smoother work than the roughly rutted roads of the prairie; but it was a perilous journey, for a warm spell had set in and made the ice sloppy and unsafe. We would some-

times hear it crack and see it bend under our horses' feet: now a long-drawn breath of relief as we passed some dangerous spot, then a convulsive grasping of our nearest companion as the ice groaned and shook beneath us. Well, the passengers arrived safe, but, horror to relate! the sleigh containing the baggage, private and public, with the scenery and properties, green curtain and drop, broke through the ice and tumbled into the Mississippi. My poor mother was in tears, but my father was in high spirits at his good luck, as he called it—because there was a sand-bar where the sleigh went in! So the things were saved at last, though in a forlorn condition. The opening had to be delayed in order to dry the wardrobe and smooth the scenery.

“The halls of the hotel were strung with clothes-lines, and the costumes of all nations festooned the doors of the bedrooms, so that when an unsuspecting boarder came out suddenly into the entry he was likely to run his head into a damp ‘Roman’ shirt, or perhaps have the legs of a soaking pair of red tights dangling around his neck. Mildew filled the air. The gilded pasteboard helmets fared the worst. They had succumbed to the softening influences of the Mississippi, and were as battered and out of shape as if they had gone through the pass of Thermopylae. Limp leggins of scale armor hung wet and dejected from the lines; low-spirited cocked hats were piled up in a corner; rough-dried court coats stretched their arms out as if in the agony of drown-

ing, as though they would say, 'Help me, Cassius, or I sink.' Theatrical scenery at its best looks pale and shabby in the daytime, but a well-worn set after a six-hours' bath in a river presents the most woe-begone appearance that can well be imagined; the sky and water of the marine had so mingled with each other that the horizon line had quite disappeared. My father had painted the scenery, and he was not a little crestfallen as he looked upon the ruins: a wood scene had amalgamated with a Roman street painted on the back of it, and had so run into stains and winding streaks that he said it looked like a large map of South America; and, pointing out the Andes with his cane, he humorously traced the Amazon to its source. Of course this mishap on the river delayed the opening for a week. In the mean time the scenery had to be repainted and the wardrobe put in order: many of the things were ruined, and the helmets defied repair."

When the damage resulting from the river mishap had been repaired as far as was possible the company began an eleven day run at Shakespeare Hall. They presented the popular plays of the season — the comedies, "Honeymoon", "How to Rule a Wife", and "The Waterman"; and the classics, "Othello", "Charles II", "Rob Roy", "McGregor", and "Richard III". Germon's singing of the "Lass o' Gowrie" and Burke's dancing the "Sailor's Hornpipe" were favorite parts of the afterpiece performances while the acting of juvenile parts by

young Joseph Jefferson and his sister was a revelation to the frontier audience. Leicester as a tragedian and Germon as a villain became favorites of the theatergoers, while Joseph Jefferson, Sr., the comedian, could always bring roars of laughter. Crowded halls greeted the actors when the curtain rose every evening at 6:30 o'clock, and for three hours and a half the townspeople and visitors at the taverns reveled in tragedy and comedy. Even the property man who replaced the burned down candle footlights between the big show and the afterpiece received his share of applause. Adults paid one dollar to see a performance, children fifty cents.

The engagement at Dubuque was one of the most successful experienced by the company on its western tour, both from the financial aspect and from the standpoint of appreciation. Well pleased with their first visit to Iowa, the troupe left the lead-mine town to visit other places down the Mississippi.

The Iowa Thespian Association and Shakespeare Hall had paved the way for the professionals. Without the general interest in the drama which had been fostered and developed, the famous Joseph Jefferson might have been received no more enthusiastically in Dubuque than he had been in Chicago.

Although the first two seasons of the Iowa Thespians had indicated that an amateur stock company in the rapidly growing town of Dubuque filled a community demand, interest waned in a few years and the organization disbanded. No longer could a guest

best talent at the schoolhouse "Literary" and who had sat enthralled when they attended an occasional performance by some travelling troupe in the Bedford opera house, thought that they would stage some plays. They were confident of success. Couldn't they recite the poems and dialogues in McGuffey's *Sixth Reader* as well as the actor folk they had seen in town? Couldn't they build a stage in the front part of the schoolhouse?

The idea fired the imagination and a meeting was held one night in December at the home of Frances Titus to perfect the plans. The would-be actors assembled in the parlor, a square room equipped with severely plain furniture and a rag carpet. On the oval-topped walnut center table a large oil lamp threw its rays into the eager faces of these devotees of the drama.

There was handsome Frank Crossen who had a fondness for the rôle of a villain. James Dougherty and Huston Cox leaned toward character parts, and Sen Campbell was willing to try any rôle. Jolly Roe Rubart delighted in comedy, while Ellis Titus preferred to attempt juvenile characters. Then there was pretty May Hiatt, the teacher at Pleasant Hill, stately Ida Rubart, and vivacious Vira Titus for the feminine parts of the contemplated productions.

Each agreed to accept a part, to learn the lines, and to assist in the details of production. Enthusiasm waxed jubilant as they discussed the merits of the farce, "Turn Him Out", which one of the group

had brought to the meeting. Pans of pop corn and bowls of cracked hickory nuts were consumed as the young folks talked of the time and place of holding rehearsals, and the oak chunks in the cast-iron stove had burned to glowing coals before the visitors donned overshoes, heavy coats, and mufflers to depart for home in their bobsleds.

Rehearsals were held at the homes of the players until about a week before the time set for the public performance. Then evening meetings took place at the schoolhouse, still warm from the big fire left in the stove by the teacher when she departed after school closed for the afternoon.

A few days before the date of the show the boys of the club hauled a load of planks from town for the stage, which they erected across the front end of the schoolroom. A wire stretched from one side-wall to the other held the dark cambric curtain which had been made by the girls and fastened to small rings so that the two halves could be pulled aside. The handy mechanic of the group built side panels for the stage out of pine strips and covered these with white paper on which he drew windows and baseboards with charcoal. Openings were left for entrances on both sides, the front wall of the schoolroom served as the back wall of the stage, and with this arrangement the actors had a playing space about twelve feet wide, six feet deep, and two feet above the floor.

The hall, which extended entirely across the front of the building, was transformed into dressing

rooms. There the actors concealed themselves while the patrons paid their ten cents admission and climbed over the stage to reach the double seats then in vogue in country schools. No performance could begin until the audience had assembled, for the improvised theater boasted no entrance except the one over the stage. There was always a scramble for the long recitation bench which constituted the first row of seats.

The mirror reflectors on the kerosene lamps in swinging brackets along the walls were turned so that the light was directed upon the stage. No footlights were used. Furniture, rugs, and curtains for the set were brought from home by the actors themselves.

What did it matter if occasionally someone forgot his lines in an exciting climax — the prompter was ready with the missing cue. And who cared if the villain's mustache and black beard, loosened by perspiration, threatened to drop off before the end of the act? The audience appreciated such a mishap as much or more than a flawless performance. If the pistol failed to go off the first time the trigger was pulled and the intended victim shouted, "I'm shot!" before the shot was fired, the crowd howled with delight. To the credit of the Pleasant Hill Dramatic Club be it said, however, that such miscues were the exception. The careful rehearsals of the enthusiastic young actors produced better plays than the average of amateur performances. Old-

timers still remember the four-act drama, "Better Than Gold", and the three-act comedy, "The Flower of the Family", while the participants themselves revel in the memory of the fun of rehearsals and the thrills of the final performance.

During two winters the club produced one-act sketches and longer plays. Their object was not mercenary: they engaged in the enterprise solely for their own amusement and the entertainment of the community. With the proceeds they paid for the curtain, rented the planks for the stage, had their picture taken by the town photographer, enjoyed an occasional oyster party, and divided the balance among the members.

It was not long, however, before some of the members married and moved to distant farms. Others left the homesteads to engage in business in town, or, like their parents two decades before, set out for the West. The Dramatic Club was disbanded, but the events of the winters of 1886 and 1887 at Pleasant Hill remain as cherished memories.

BRUCE E. MAHAN

Comment by the Editor

THE ART OF HISTORY

The historian, in some respects, is as much of an artist as the poet or sculptor. His materials are essentially the same, for he too depicts the spirit of man and carves from the solid mass of human events an image of the times.

History is a "Tower of Experience, which Time has built amidst the endless fields of bygone ages." It is a various structure, composed of infinite details. The archeozoic rocks form its foundation, while the story of life is the superstructure. It contains the joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, thoughts and deeds of all mankind. Nor is the trivial conduct of the least of these to be ignored, for the career of each is the experience of the race.

It is for the historian to vitalize the past. Let him people again the land and sea, the cities and farms and highways with the men and women of yesterday. Let him tell of their goings and comings, of their manners, amusements, apparel, and customs no less than their vices and glorious exploits. The pageant should be viewed in perspective. Let the apparent confusion and discord be symphonized into the harmonious trend of events.

The dictionary declares that history is devoid of romance. If that is true then history portrays

falsely the course of human affairs, for comedy and tragedy, adventure, love, and character building are the substance of every-day life. The story of each frontier village and latter-day city, the affairs of any rural countryside, the lives of men and women both great and humble—the history of Iowa—abounds in romance. Here is the stuff of which fiction is made, and the historian may revel in the knowledge that fact is as thrilling as fancy.

If the past is to live the writer of history must take note of the romance that governs the facts. He must perceive and appraise with the skill of an artist, for he writes the drama of truth. He may catch the high lights, but he must not distort them. It is a difficult task. It involves clear thought, steady purpose, broad comprehension, quick imagination, and the capacity to impart the vision to others.

J. E. B.

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