

The **P**ALIMPSEST

AUGUST 1923

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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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Iowa has not always
smiled on her dreamers, her
poets, her children with the divine
fire in their souls. And yet I
know that if the artist born in Iowa
could only be allowed such a
life of the soul as would
impel him to respect his Iowa
materials, and to ponder
them long enough and
deeply enough, every element
of great art would be
found here.

Herbert Quick

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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Restorer of Iowa Palimpsests

Lo, "a great prophet is risen up among us" who writes of folks — just Iowa folks! Herbert Quick, middle-aged and in the fullness of experience, has, in *Vandemark's Folly* and *The Hawkeye*, sent forth a message unto all the people, teaching them that the record of the generations of Iowa pioneers and frontiersmen who trailed their way over the Old Ridge Road to the Fort Dodge country and who erected the first shelters, scored the wonderful prairie sod, established townships, organized county government, and thus "set a-going" the society of the Commonwealth of Iowa, furnishes all the materials of great literature and every element of great art.

An artist and a scholar as well as a prophet and a teacher, Herbert Quick has with conscientious precision and with keen appreciation of their worth and dignity reconstructed and restored for us some of the palimpsest records of early Iowa — already

grown dim with the erasures of time and covered with the dust of decades.

Herbert Quick lays no claim to the title of historian or restorer of palimpsests, but modestly speaks of himself as "sitting in the wagon of history with my feet dangling down and facing the rear." And yet it is clear that he knows the road, and knows the people who have developed the country through which it winds from "things as raw and primitive as King Arthur's time" to a "region now as completely developed as England"—and all within the memory of men still living! He sees in this record a great achievement, and declares that "there never was such a thing in all the history of the world before."

The author himself and his two great books are at once the witness and the evidence of the beginning of things in Iowa—"the old, sweet, grand, beautiful things, the things which never can be again." Born in what he calls "the Ancient Greek period of mid-western life, when communities were set out as our farmers planted trees, by thrusting the twigs of cottonwood or willow or Lombardy poplar into the soil" where they were expected to grow, Herbert Quick remembers and understands the part played in the great drama of Iowa both by the generation of *Vandemark's Folly* who came "voluntarily" and by the generation of *The Hawkeye* who were "injected" into the body politic and "never saw anything else save the frontier, but who had spirits and

souls inherited from people who lived in the established societies of the East and of the South and of the Old World."

With masterful pen, with singular beauty of diction, often with epic rhythm and march, and again in the picturesque language of the period (for styles in speech, even in Iowa, come and go like the paper collar and the made-up bow tie), Herbert Quick restores the records of life in early Iowa with all the skill and fidelity of the classical scholar who reconstructs the original writings on old parchments by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts. And so we hail him as a restorer of Iowa palimpsests.

In *Vandemark's Folly* is reconstructed the glowing, throbbing story of the journey from the Dubuque Ferry, the gateway to the Land of Promise, over the Old Ridge Road, across the great green sea of the Iowa prairie—which was "the newest, strangest, most delightful, sternest, most wonderful thing in the world"—to "that holy wedlock which binds the farmer to the soil he tills." Then follows a faithful restoration of the record of that great experiment on the Iowa prairie of "building a democracy based on ponderous production" and of "keeping a people economically free while living an industrial and agricultural life and dependent on highways made by man instead of those created by nature."

Here in *Vandemark's Folly* is restored for all time the palimpsest of the prairie fire — the fire that came up from the west like a roaring tornado advancing in separate lines and columns and detachments like a burning army. One could see “the flames leap up, reach over, catch in front of the line, kindle a new fire, and again be overleaped by a new tongue of fire, so that the whole line became a belt of flames, and appeared to be rolling along in a huge billow of fire Sometimes a whole mile or so of the line disappeared as the fire burned down into lower ground; and then with a swirl of flame and smoke, the smoke luminous in the glare, it moved magnificently up into sight, rolling like a breaker of fire bursting on a reef of land, buried the hillside in flame, and then whirled on over the top, its streamers flapping against the horizon, snapping off shreds of flame into the air, as triumphantly as a human army taking an enemy fort!”

Here, too, in the same book is found a vivid record of the raging, howling, shrieking frontier blizzard, “the breath of which came with a roar and struck with a shiver”—but which can never come again for “every object that civilization and development have placed in the way of the wind prevents it.” Here is revealed one of the dangers in the life of the pioneer who, lost in two miles of snow between himself and the sun, plunges headlong into the drifts, flounders through them, and finally “cuffed and mauled by the storm” stumbles into a straw stack —

and safety — or sinks into the soft snow and is buried — a victim of the storm.

Is it possible for a people of a later day and a friendlier clime to comprehend the terrors of those winter storms of early Iowa? Herbert Quick's answer is contained in the pages of *Vandemark's Folly*:

"Then the snow, once lifted on the wings of the blast, became a part of the air, and remained in it. The atmosphere for hundreds of feet, for thousands of feet from the grassy surface of the prairie, was a moving cloud of snow, which fell only as the very tempest itself became over-burdened with it. As the storm continued, it always grew cold; for it was the North emptying itself into the South. . . .

"As the tumult grows hills are leveled, and hollows rise into hills. Every shed-roof is the edge of an oblique Niagara of snow; every angle the center of a whirlpool. If you are caught out in it, the Spirit of the Storm flies at you and loads your eyebrows and eyelashes and hair and beard with icicles and snow. As you look out into the white, the light through your bloodshot eyelids turns everything to crimson. Your feet lag, as the feathery whiteness comes almost to your knees. Your breath comes choked as with water. If you are out far away from shelter, God help you! You struggle along for a time, all the while fearing to believe that the storm which did not seem so very dangerous, is growing more violent, and that the daylight, which you thought would last

for hours yet, seems to be fading, and that night appears to be setting in earlier than usual. . . .

“You can not tell, when you try to look about you, what is sky and what is earth; for all is storm. You feel more and more tired. All at once, you find that the wind which was at your side a while ago, as you kept beating into it on your course toward help and shelter, is now at your back. Has the wind changed? No; it will blow for hours from the same quarter — perhaps for days! No; you have changed your course, and are beating off with the storm! This will never do: you rally, and again turn your cheek to the cutting blast: but you know that you are off your path; yet you wonder if you may not be going right — if the wind *has* changed; or if you have not turned to the left when you should have gone to the right.

“Loneliness, anxiety, weariness, uncertainty. An awful sense of helplessness takes possession of you. If it were daylight, you could pass around the deep drifts, even in this chaos; but now a drift looks the same as the prairie grass swept bare. You plunge headlong into it, flounder through it, creeping on hands and knees, with your face sometimes buried in the snow, get on your feet again, and struggle on.

“You know that the snow, finer than flour, is beating through your clothing. You are chilled, and shiver. Sometimes you stop for a while and with your hands over your eyes stand stooped with your back to the wind. You try to stamp your feet to

warm them, but the snow, soft and yielding, forbids this. You are so tired that you stop to rest in the midst of a great drift — you turn your face from the driving storm and wait. It seems so much easier than stumbling wearily on. Then comes the inrushing consciousness that to rest thus is to die. You rush on in a frenzy. You have long since ceased to think of what is your proper course,— you only know that you must struggle on. You attempt a shout; — ah, it seems so faint and distant even to yourself! No one else could hear it a rod in this raging, howling, shrieking storm, in which awful sounds come out of the air itself, and not alone from the things against which it beats. And there is no one else to hear.

“You gaze about with snow-smitten eyeballs for some possible light from a friendly window. Why, the sun itself could not pierce this moving earth-cloud of snow! Your feet are not so cold as they were. You can not feel them as you walk. You come to a hollow filled with soft snow. Perhaps there is the bed of a stream deep down below. You plunge into this hollow, and as you fall, turn your face from the storm. A strange and delicious sense of warmth and drowsiness steals over you; you sink lower, and feel the cold soft whiteness sifting over neck and cheek and forehead: but you do not care. The struggle is over; and—in the morning the sun glints coldly over a new landscape of gently undulating alabaster. Yonder is a little hillock which

marks the place where the blizzard overtook its prey. Sometime, when the warm March winds have thawed the snow, some gaunt wolf will snuff about this spot, and send up the long howl that calls the pack to the banquet."

Vandemark's Folly and *The Hawkeye* literally bulge with palimpsests of pioneer and frontier life in Iowa. Here are the records of the beginnings of political and social organization; of tragedies and comedies in that "strange drama we call self government;" of neighborhood meetings and blacksmith shop conferences where "the first prairie generation, bred of a line of foresters," solved their growing problems just as had the New England farmers on the Massachusetts frontier; of county politics in a later day with the "court house ring" in control and waxing fat on contracts for bridges that never were built and roads that were never improved.

There in *Vandemark's Folly* are reconstructed the parties and festivals of 1854 where the "John Aldens, the Priscillas, the Miles Standishes and the Dorothy Q's" of the frontier assembled in tight fitting corduroys and newly greased boots, in alpacos, delaines, figured lawns and calicoes, and "set a-going as great a society as the Pilgrim Fathers and Pilgrim Mothers: the society of the great commonwealth of Iowa." And here in *The Hawkeye* are the fashions that "made Beauty seductive in 1874"—hats which were "little affairs, brimless, not half large enough to cover their heads," and

dresses with skirts sweeping the grass and with bustles, basques, and polonaises.

Like old albums these books reveal types of the "leading citizens" in the frontier communities. Here, for example, is the real-estate dealer in his buckboard buggy measuring off the land by the revolving buggy wheel, extolling its virtues as he went, "no stumps, no stones, just the right amount of rainfall — the garden spot of the West . . . without a shadow of doubt the permanent county seat of the best county in Iowa, and that means the best in the known world!"

Here is the frontier doctor who lives above his own drug store, and who when called hurries down the stairs, sets his cases down on the sidewalk while he runs his buggy out of the shed and hitches up his horses, and then dashes off into the night, sometimes in time, sometimes too late to assist the "Mrs. Williams" or the "Mrs. Absalom Frosts" to usher into the world a future citizen of the Commonwealth of Iowa. Here is the pioneer preacher "laboring with his text, speaking in a halting manner, and once in a while bogging down in a dead stop out of which he could not pull himself without giving a sort of honk like a wild goose."

Here is the first lawyer, just out from Indiana by way of the Ohio and Mississippi, with his "long frock coat originally black, a white shirt, and a black cravat", with "his carpet bag and his law library", which, because "books are damned heavy" and law

books particularly so, consisted of *Blackstone's Commentaries*, *Chitty on Pleading*, the *Code of Iowa of 1851*, and "the *Session Laws* of the state so far as it had any session laws."

And here is the pioneer editor, "thick as thieves" with the county ring "as long as he had the county printing", whose "scurrilous paper" most people said "was never fit to enter a decent home, but which they always subscribed for and read as quick as it came!" Here is the story of love and courtship in the Neolithic period of Iowa culture when it was the accepted order "to git married early and stay married."

Such are the records of *Vandemark's Folly* and of *The Hawkeye*. In the pages of these books there is no attempt to glorify the extra legal methods sometimes resorted to in solving the perplexities and difficulties of frontier life, or to speak lightly of the hardships on the Iowa farm in the day of "bleak wastes, robber bands, and savage primitiveness;" there is no effort to minimize the perspiring job of the thrasher or the lame back and bleeding hands of the corn husker in a later day when the frontiersman "compromised on a half section" in "the Iowa style"; there is no ignoring the nightmare of the Iowa prairie farmer when "the prospect of money for the mortgage and the doctor's bill and the account at the store" was destroyed by the "rusting" of the wheat, or the sorrow of the Kate McConkeys who gave up their currant bushes and peonies to

try again as "Leaseholders"; there is no glossing over the old political party "way wise and broke nice", the "machine" scheming for the domination of the city which was to be, or the days of "easy money" for the "court-house ring" and the "regulars". And yet in the telling of these things by Herbert Quick there is none of the bitterness which is so often found in the tales of Hamlin Garland dealing with the people and lands to the east and west of the Iowa country; nor is there here any of that sneering cynicism with which Sinclair Lewis a generation later portrays life in the wheat country to the north. And because of the absence of the bitterness and the sneer *Vandemark's Folly* and *The Hawkeye* are nearer the truth and will live longer.

There is nothing finer in all the rapidly accumulating literature of mid-western America than Herbert Quick's tribute to the mothers of the frontiers in *The Hawkeye*:

"The mothers of the frontiers! They felt the oncoming of another day for their children. No life was so laborious, no situation so unpropitious, no poverty so deep that they did not through a divine gift of prophecy see beyond the gloom a better day for their children. In the smoky overheated kitchens, struggling to feed the 'gangs' of harvesters and thrashers, as they washed and mopped and baked and brewed and spun and wove and knit and boiled soap and mended and cut and basted and sewed and

strained milk and skimmed cream and churned and worked over butter, catching now and then an opportunity to read while rocking a child to sleep, drinking in once in a while a bit of poetry from the sky or the cloud or the flower; they were haloed like suns of progress for their families and for their nation, as they worked and planned and assumed for themselves a higher and higher culture of its sort — all for their children. We build monuments in the public square for the soldiers of our wars; but where is the monument for the Kate McConkeys who made possible so much of the good which is represented by the public square itself? Unless it is a monument not made with hands, in our hearts and souls, none can ever exist which can be in any way adequate."

Whether the characters and the episodes in *Vandemark's Folly* and in *The Hawkeye* are drawn from actual history or from imagination, whether the names are real or fictitious, matters not. Faithfully, conscientiously, and understandingly the author has used them with a marvelous wealth of detail to tell of the beginnings of a great Commonwealth, and his work must be regarded as a very real contribution to the literature of Iowa history. For these books tell the truth — "not the truth of statistics, not just information, but the living truth" about Iowa folks. They are great books! So broad in their human sympathies, so deep in their penetration of life's realities that they belong to a literature that is universal.

Something of the author's own experience and background for the writing of these books may be gleaned from *The Hawkeye* in the story of Fremont McConkey — the country boy whom Herbert Quick knew the best of all — the boy of the early Iowa farm with the poet's soul longing for self expression. Fed on a diet of "warmed-over English literature, which Americans who should have known better laid before him", and "taught by every one in speech and printed page that he is outside the realm of 'material' for literature", he dreamed of a day when he might know first-hand something of "Scottish moors" and "ruined abbeys", and of the wonderful world of "Dashing Charlie" and other glorious heroes with which the writers of the *New York Weekly* seemed so familiar.

Steeped in the beauty and wonder of the prairie, and with flashes of realization of the dramatic elements in the shifting, stirring episodes of its rapid transformation, Fremont McConkey had the growing conviction that he could write, if — *if*. But who would want to read about Iowa? If this were only a mountain country, or a stern and rock-bound coast, one might make a story of it! If it were only a land of clashing shields, or at least a place where judges wore robes! But what was there in Iowa or in the lives of Iowa people for a writer? Could romance be found on the prairies, in humble country homes, in fields of wheat and corn, in small towns, in township caucuses, or in county court-houses?

With an understanding heart and with the authority of one who has received the acclaims of popular favor as well as the approval of the critics, Herbert Quick answers the Fremont McConkeys — the dreamers and poets of Iowa with “the divine fire in their souls.” I KNOW THAT IF THE ARTIST BORN IN IOWA COULD ONLY BE ALLOWED SUCH A LIFE OF THE SOUL AS WOULD IMPEL HIM TO RESPECT HIS IOWA MATERIALS, AND TO PONDER THEM LONG ENOUGH AND DEEPLY ENOUGH, EVERY ELEMENT OF GREAT ART WOULD BE FOUND HERE.

In *Vandemark's Folly* Uncle Jacob Vandemark calls his story the “History of Vandemark Township”; and in *The Hawkeye* Fremont McConkey tells us that his story is “The History of Monterey County.” There are ninety-nine counties in Iowa and some sixteen hundred townships! What a field for the restorers of palimpsests and the writers of history! What a field for the “Gertrudes” who “went East to Vassar and joined the Daughters of the American Revolution!” What a field for the “Paul Holbrooks” just back from the State University with ideals of public service “and against the County Ring!” What a field for the schools and colleges! What a field for poets and dreamers!

Herbert Quick, prophet and restorer of Iowa palimpsests, has pointed the way!

BERTHA M. H. SHAMBAUGH

An Iowa Doone Band

About forty years ago there flourished, in the rugged, heavily-wooded fastnesses of the Iowa River in Hardin County, a daring and unscrupulous band of outlaws. Like the famous robber Doones in the tale of "Lorna Doone", these Iowa desperadoes terrorized the law-abiding people of the community by cunning thievery and bold disturbance of the peace. They held sway not so much by the enormity of their atrocities as by the fear of the crimes they might commit.

As the Doones of old England found security in a natural stronghold, so the Rainsbargers of pioneer Iowa made their headquarters in secluded gullies that were seldom visited by others than their clan. Their remote cabins, half concealed by the trees and the semi-gloom of the deep hollows, could be reached only by lonely byways that led through thick woods and along the edges of dark, sheer-cut ravines. Even to-day the dense underbrush grows so close to the road that it scrapes the sides of a passing vehicle, and the heavy gold of autumn sunlight that pours through the crimson sumach leaves quickly fades to muffling dusk in mid-afternoon. In the early eighties only the most daring men ever ventured upon a night ride through this section of the country.

A story is told of an Ackley doctor who was visited one stormy night by a stranger who begged him to attend a sick woman, requesting, however, that the doctor consent to follow him blindfolded. Persuaded by the man's distress, the doctor accompanied his guide to a squalid home where the family lived in apparent poverty. He refrained from asking for his services a charge which evidently could not be met, but the man paid him liberally from a large roll of soiled bills. A few days later, when the doctor returned to see his patient, searching out the cabin by an obscure path, he found the house deserted. Shortly afterward, a rumor was circulated that a band of stolen horses which had been secreted in the caves among the hills had just been sent down the river, and that the thieves with the proceeds of this sale had decamped.

In this secluded river country the scene of this story is laid. Ever since the Rainsbargers held sway there the inaccessible region has maintained its mysterious privacy. To this day the steep slopes, thickly wooded with oaks and scattered birch, and the winding river walled in by a heavy growth of cottonwoods and grapevine tangles, which formed the setting for a tragic incident in the big drama of the Middle West, remain unchanged — inescapably suggestive of the Rainsbarger bandits and the outlaw Doones.

The entire family of Rainsbargers — William, Finley, Frank, Nathan, and Emmanuel; and Wil-

liam's boys, George, Joe, and John — were all reputed to be fearless freebooters. Their reputation for high-handed misconduct invited accusation of every crime committed in the neighborhood — sometimes perhaps unjustly. They were charged with such malicious offenses as cutting off cows' tails and hamstringing horses. They were said to steal cattle and horses and dispose of them at markets down the river. Sometimes stock was poisoned or brazenly driven off before the eyes of the helpless owner. A farmer declared that one day as he was picking corn, Fin Rainsbarger drove into the field, loaded his wagon with corn, and calmly departed. The outlaws had learned that it was safe to rely upon their reputations to prevent resistance.

The most generally hated and feared of the Rainsbarger family was Fin. He was more than a robber. On a winter evening of 1866 in the town of Steamboat Rock he had stabbed and killed a man during a quarrel — the first murder committed in Hardin County. Those who witnessed the deed said that the victim, Charles Voiles, was intoxicated at the time, that he threatened Rainsbarger and his brother-in-law, Henry Johns, and finally struck a drunken blow. Like a flash, before anyone could intervene, the tawny-haired Rainsbarger drove a butcher knife into the man's heart. Convicted of manslaughter, in spite of the best efforts of his attorney, H. L. Huff, he was sentenced to the penitentiary for six years; but at the end of thirteen

months he was pardoned because it was claimed that he had acted in self-defense. Later he was known to have been associated with several notorious outlaws, among whom was Enoch Johnson, the renegade father-in-law of Frank Rainsbarger.

Some of the Rainsbargers, however, were said to be "hard-working men, who had never been arrested or indicted for any crime or misdemeanor". William was president of the school board in his township for a number of years. Probably other men of questionable character were guilty of some of the evil charged against the Rainsbargers, but the people of the community believed, and are still convinced, that the Rainsbargers were a family of criminals and villains who were chiefly responsible for the lawless reign of the eighties. The score of petty molestations attributed to them prepared the way for a reckoning when an offense audacious enough to arouse the whole community demanded amends. The public was ready and eager to convict the Rainsbargers as the embodiment of all the crime in Hardin County.

In the early eighties a counterfeiting scheme was instituted into which were drawn many people, both reputable and disreputable. Enoch Johnson became an active member of the gang. It was his business to transfer the money made in Steamboat Rock to a confederate outside the State. He was finally apprehended, however, with a box of the money in his possession, arrested by Federal officers,

and indicted by a grand jury of which Henry Johns was foreman. Frank Rainsbarger, at the entreaty of his wife, Nettie, went bail for the temporary release of his father-in-law.

There was little joy in Enoch Johnson's homecoming, however, for he discovered that his wife, Mag, had sold their household goods during his detention in jail. The two immediately quarrelled, and Johnson went to live with Frank and Nettie. He urged his son-in-law and Nathan Rainsbarger, who made his home with Frank, to take out insurance on his life. Mag Johnson was the beneficiary of more than one such policy already, Johnson carried some insurance in favor of Nettie, and Frank was induced to secure a five thousand dollar policy, payable jointly to himself and wife.

Of course Johnson was not the only counterfeiter in the county. As soon as he was indicted efforts were made to persuade him to turn state's evidence against his confederates. The identity of other parties to the fraud was a mystery but there was reason to suspect that the Rainsbargers were implicated more or less directly. It was hinted that perhaps a threat from Johnson to expose those as guilty as himself had been the most effective inducement for Frank to furnish bail. Yet the fact that Henry Johns, a relative of the Rainsbargers, took the lead in trying to expose the counterfeiters would seem to indicate that the Rainsbargers were not members of the bogus gang — but maybe Johns did

not know what he was about. There is also a story to the effect that while Johnson was at liberty on bail he quarrelled with the chief of the counterfeiters who, fearing disclosure of the scheme, promised Johnson that if he peached there would not be enough left of him to feed the crows.

On the evening of November 18, 1884, while driving from Steamboat Rock toward Gifford, Enoch Johnson was killed. When he was found, within a mile of Gifford, appearances indicated that there had been a breakdown which shattered his buggy and that afterward he had attempted to ride his horse but had been thrown and dragged for some distance. His body lay about a quarter of a mile from the buggy, the lines were wrapped around one leg, and his clothes were pulled over his head. There was blood on the horse's withers.

The following morning Mag Johnson arrived unexpectedly at the home of Frank and Nettie Rainsbarger. She had gone to Ackley the day before, where she spent the night at the Revere House with Joshua West. About noon she received a telegram from West stating that her husband had met with an accident and was dead. She showed neither surprise nor sorrow at the news.

At first the opinion prevailed that Johnson's death was accidental, but at the coroner's inquest several suspicious circumstances were revealed which pointed to foul play. Two days after Johnson was killed the sheriff, W. V. Willcox, and the coro-

ner, Dr. Myron Underwood, visited the scene of the tragedy and found where a single horse had been hitched at the head of a ravine about sixty-five rods from the broken buggy; a few feet away the grass was trampled down and spattered with blood; the buggy had not moved after the wheel broke down; and a post mortem examination revealed that the victim's head had been fractured on both sides, which could scarcely have been accomplished by a fall from his horse. The coroner's jury decided that "Enoch Johnson came to his death by blows inflicted upon the head by some blunt instrument in the hands of some person or persons unknown".

So the matter stood. No arrests were made and Frank and Nettie Rainsbarger took steps to obtain their life insurance. Several times during the following weeks Mag Johnson came to visit her daughter and, after repeated persuasion, took her to Eldora where they made affidavits, on the strength of which Frank and Nate Rainsbarger were arrested and charged with the murder of Enoch Johnson.

Shortly after the preliminary hearing, Henry Johns publicly declared his conviction that the two men were not guilty. He was sure that Johnson had been murdered to prevent him from exposing the gang of counterfeiters. "I will stay by you until you are cleared and the real culprits are brought to justice," he is reported to have promised Nate and Frank, "if it costs fifty thousand dollars." The prisoners were bound over to appear at the

next term of the district court which would convene late in April, 1885.

On the night of April 16th, while driving home from Abbott Station, Johns himself was shot and injured so that he died within three weeks. He recognized several of his assailants and made a sworn statement of their names before he died. This statement was filed, without having been made public, in the office of the county clerk at Eldora, but it was taken from the files and could never be found. Perhaps the complete solution of the whole mystery was thereby lost forever. It is significant that no one was ever indicted for the murder of Henry Johns. Though Governor William Larrabee, nearly four years afterward, offered a five hundred dollar reward for the conviction of the guilty persons the bounty was never claimed.

Meanwhile the Rainsbargers had secured a change of venue to Marshall County and Nate's trial was set for December 28th. Great excitement prevailed in Hardin County. Counterfeiting frauds were forgotten while the counterfeiters undertook to allay suspicion of themselves by joining noisily with the outraged citizens to revenge the murder of Johnson and Johns and to exterminate the criminal element in the county. To that end a vigilance society was organized and thereafter the exploits of the vigilantes rivaled the notoriety of the outlaws.

On the night of June 3rd Dr. Underwood, who as coroner had incurred the enmity of the Rains-

bargers, was attacked by three or four masked men on a lonely road near the Iowa River. Several shots were fired and one bullet passed through the doctor's coat. He returned the fire. Just then two buggies drove up. Surprised at the sudden arrival of reinforcements the desperadoes disappeared down a ravine. The next day warrants were issued for the arrest of Ed Johns and William, Fin, and Manse Rainsbarger. Johns could not be found, William Rainsbarger was released on bail, while Fin and Manse were locked in the Eldora jail.

Thoroughly incensed by the series of murders and assaults that had occurred, impatient with the delay and uncertainty of judicial proceedings, and determined to inspire terror among evildoers by a striking example of sure retribution, a mob, led no doubt by the vigilantes, gathered that night near Eldora, deliberately entered the town, battered open the jail with a huge tree trunk, and attacked the two Rainsbargers. They resisted desperately. Manse was shot in his cell but Fin fought his way through the door, only to die at the hands of the mob outside. Then the lynchers dispersed unmolested, leaving the bodies of the two men lying in the jail yard riddled with bullets — a gruesome sight for the eyes of the curious who came the next morning to see them.

The case charging William Rainsbarger and Ed Johns with the crime for which their alleged accomplices were lynched was finally dismissed in 1889

because there was not enough evidence against them to justify further prosecution. A sworn statement has since been made that the whole affair was planned and executed by the vigilance society, of which many prominent citizens were members, for the very purpose of arousing the public to rid the county of the Rainsbargers.

It was a little over a year after the murder of Enoch Johnson that Nate Rainsbarger was brought to trial. Of medium height and powerful physique, his hair black and abundant, and his eyes dark and piercing, he seemed none the worse for his long confinement as he sat with his attorneys calmly confronting the prosecution led by H. L. Huff, the man who had defended his brother against a charge of murder twenty years before.

The State began with the testimony of Dr. N. C. Morse, corroborated by Dr. Underwood, that the murdered man had died from wounds inflicted upon his head before he fell from the horse — wounds which might have been made by brass knuckles in the hands of a powerful man. A witness was found who had heard screams in the vicinity of the tragedy between eight and nine o'clock on the fatal evening. Others claimed to have seen Nate and Frank Rainsbarger, identified by the light of a bonfire, as they drove south through Eldora about an hour before the screams were heard on the Gifford road. One man asserted that he had overheard the Rainsbargers plotting to put Johnson out of the way.

Against this purely circumstantial evidence the defense undertook to prove an alibi. The Rainsbargers secured witnesses who had seen them in Cleves, about ten miles from Eldora, as late as seven o'clock on the day of the murder, and others, mostly relatives, who confirmed the declaration of Nate and Frank that after leaving Cleves they had collected some money from a neighbor for thrashing, had stopped at the Johns place, had later called on their brother Fin to get him to help husk corn, and had finally reached home after eleven o'clock. It was a plausible story but the prosecution immediately introduced testimony impeaching the reputation of the defense witnesses for truth and veracity.

Day after day, as the trial continued, sentiment against the defendant increased, and the popular opinion that the Rainsbargers were guilty became more and more firmly established. It was for Nettie Rainsbarger, sister-in-law of the accused, to contribute the most damaging evidence of all. Pretty, ladylike, and composed, she made a very favorable impression despite her ill repute as she described the dramatic events on the morning following the murder. "Mercy sakes, Nate, where did you get that blood?" she recalled having exclaimed. Nate grabbed the lapel of his coat, she related, and drew it over the blood spot. "It is not blood; it is water or horse slobbers", he said as he rushed out of the room. Later she found blood on her husband's overcoat and mittens: it stained her finger when

she touched the spots. Then she remembered that Frank had taken his brass knuckles when he started for Cleves the previous afternoon. When she accused the men of murdering her father they became very irritated and tried to make her believe that the horse had killed him.

The trial lasted fourteen days. On January 13, 1886, the jury returned a verdict of murder in the first degree and recommended a sentence of imprisonment for life.

During the months that followed while Frank and Nate lay in the Marshall County jail—the one awaiting trial and the other an appeal to the Supreme Court—various untoward events continued to agitate the people of Hardin County. Joe Rainsbarger was indicted and later he was convicted of malicious mischief in shooting out the eyes of cattle owned by a neighbor. While that case was pending he was arrested for shooting at a man. Released on five hundred dollars bail he was eventually convicted and served ten months in jail. In April his father and Ed Johns were indicted for the attack on Dr. Underwood, who had become State Senator in the meantime. During the summer the Eldora jail was again mobbed by the vigilantes, but this time the marshal succeeded in dispersing the mob. In September a man who stayed with Mrs. Fin Rainsbarger was chased out of the county for stealing a horse.

Frank Rainsbarger was put on trial for the mur-

der of Enoch Johnson in February, 1887, and was convicted on March 10th. Five days later he entered the penitentiary at Anamosa under a life sentence. While Frank's trial was in progress the Supreme Court reversed the decision by which Nate had been convicted, because Nettie Rainsbarger had been allowed to testify as to his bad character and the commission of crimes for which he was not on trial. He was retried in November, again convicted, and followed his brother into the penitentiary on December 10, 1887.

Meanwhile William, Joe, George, and John Rainsbarger were arrested for assaulting a man who had testified against Joe in a recent trial. They narrowly escaped being lynched and were taken to Marshalltown for protection. Two months later they were acquitted.

It was nearly twenty-eight years after Nate and Frank entered the penitentiary when the door of the prison swung open and the two men, white haired and prison-paled, once more breathed the air of freedom and walked into the sunlight not striped with the shadows of prison bars. For more than a quarter of a century they had borne the stigma of convicts, during all that time they had steadfastly maintained that they were tricked into prison to protect the real murderer, and by their good conduct they had convinced the prison officials of their innocence. As the years passed the desire to avenge the death of their mob-murdered brothers and to

punish the people responsible for their own imprisonment had grown upon them. Now, as old men, they were free. Not quite. Their liberty was contingent upon their not intimidating "by word or threat any of those who were instrumental in their conviction" or who had "opposed their release in past years." They have never violated that pledge. Frank found employment with a construction company in Ackley and Nate went to work in a Marshalltown factory.

This is Iowa's Doone story. In vivid contrast to the lawless, counterfeiting days, peace and order now prevail in Hardin County and the turbulence of the eighties is only a dim tradition. And yet, in a narrow valley between the folds of two hills, where the country road is steep and tortuous and the bridges are old and rickety, a forgotten relic of the horse-stealing days may still be seen. There, half concealed by the cottonwoods and underbrush, is an old dilapidated stable. The thatched roof over a small dugout slopes down from the side of the hill and is supported by two growing trees. The door hangs by its rusty padlock but swings free from the broken hinges, and inside an old-fashioned sofa, with the twisted springs protruding, and the shell of a blue water pail evidence the necessities of an outlaw stable guard.

JOCELYN WALLACE

Comment by the Editor

HISTORICAL FICTION

Historical fiction is a paradox on the face of it. History can not be fictitious or it ceases to be history. Yet probably no historian has ever succeeded in telling the whole truth. Some facts in the annals of mankind are unknown and thousands of others are necessarily suppressed—for lack of space if for no better reason. On the other hand the writers of fiction have seldom if ever succeeded in eliminating the elements of time and place. Perhaps an exception should be made of some of Poe's stories, but a novel without a setting is inconceivable. The fidelity with which the novelist portrays the historical background is to a large extent the measure of the reality of the tale, while disregard for the facts of time and place is the highway to fairy-land and fantasy.

Where is the boundary line between the realms of fact and fancy? It is not always easy to locate, but the best guide seems to be the purpose of the writer. The historian should be judged by historical standards, while the novelist may be permitted to "throw the graces of fiction over the sharp, hard facts that historians have labouriously gathered", as Gertrude Atherton admits she did in *The Conqueror*. A

novel should never be treated as history, for its object is not to teach facts but to picture life artistically. Fiction should be judged only as literature.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF NOVELISTS

While it would be absurd to depend upon the Waverley novels for a true conception of medieval England or to study the Civil War in *The Crisis*, there is no denying that such books have served to vitalize the times with which they deal. The manners and customs of people form the warp and woof of the literary fabric: the plot is only the pattern. The setting of a novel conscientiously drawn and characters portrayed true to type may contribute a clear understanding of folks and things as they were; but let the book be carelessly written and a false impression is made which history can never correct. The vivid imagery of a novel can not be erased at will and supplanted by the dimly remembered and unrelated facts of formal history.

It behooves the writers of fiction to have a care for the injustice they may do to the past and the harm they may cause in the present. Abbie Gardner Sharp maintained that the Spirit Lake Massacre might never have occurred if her mother had not obtained an erroneous notion of Indian character from reading "so much of James Fenimore Cooper down there in New York". If her faith in the honor of savages had been founded on facts she would not have prevailed on her husband to admit Inkpaduta's

Indians into the cabin on that fateful evening in March, 1857. Whether or not resistance would have materially altered the course of events is a question, but the incident is a striking illustration of the powerful influence of fiction.

THE REALISM OF HERBERT QUICK

Few novelists have been more faithful to facts than Herbert Quick in *The Hawkeye*. The characters are essentially true to type, the conversation is replete with half-forgotten colloquial expressions of the past generation, and the splendid descriptions are vivid because they are real. Some critics will say there are too many pages of color and complain of the leisurely digressions, but those who remember Iowa as it was in the seventies will revel in the reminiscent descriptions of thrashing and corn husking, of gopher snaring and prairie chicken shooting, and of Fourth of July celebrations in the days of horses and buggies. The novel is redolent of the prairies and the people of Iowa fifty years ago. Therein is the charm of the book.

Convinced of the elements of great art in Iowa materials, Mr. Quick has found it unnecessary to distort the facts for the sake of sensational circumstances or dramatic episodes. Many years ago he investigated the system of political "boodle" in Woodbury County and discovered, among other irregularities, that in "some cases the approaches to bridges were built and charged twice, once to the

road fund and once to the bridge fund. The man who did the work got one payment and the grafters got the other." Compare that commentary with this from *The Hawkeye*: "Paul read the statement of a man who had at the request of a county supervisor, put in duplicate bills for making approaches to bridges, one bill in each case against the bridge-fund for the supervisor and another against the road-fund for himself." The Monterey County "Ring" is no myth.

The terrific climax of the book, describing the lynching of Pitt and Bowie Bushyager, is a remarkably accurate account of what actually happened to Manse and Fin Rainsbarger in Eldora on the night of June 4, 1885. The Bushyagers of *The Hawkeye* are unmistakably the Rainsbargers of reality whose true history may be read in the story of "An Iowa Doone Band".

The Hawkeye is epical.

J. E. B.

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