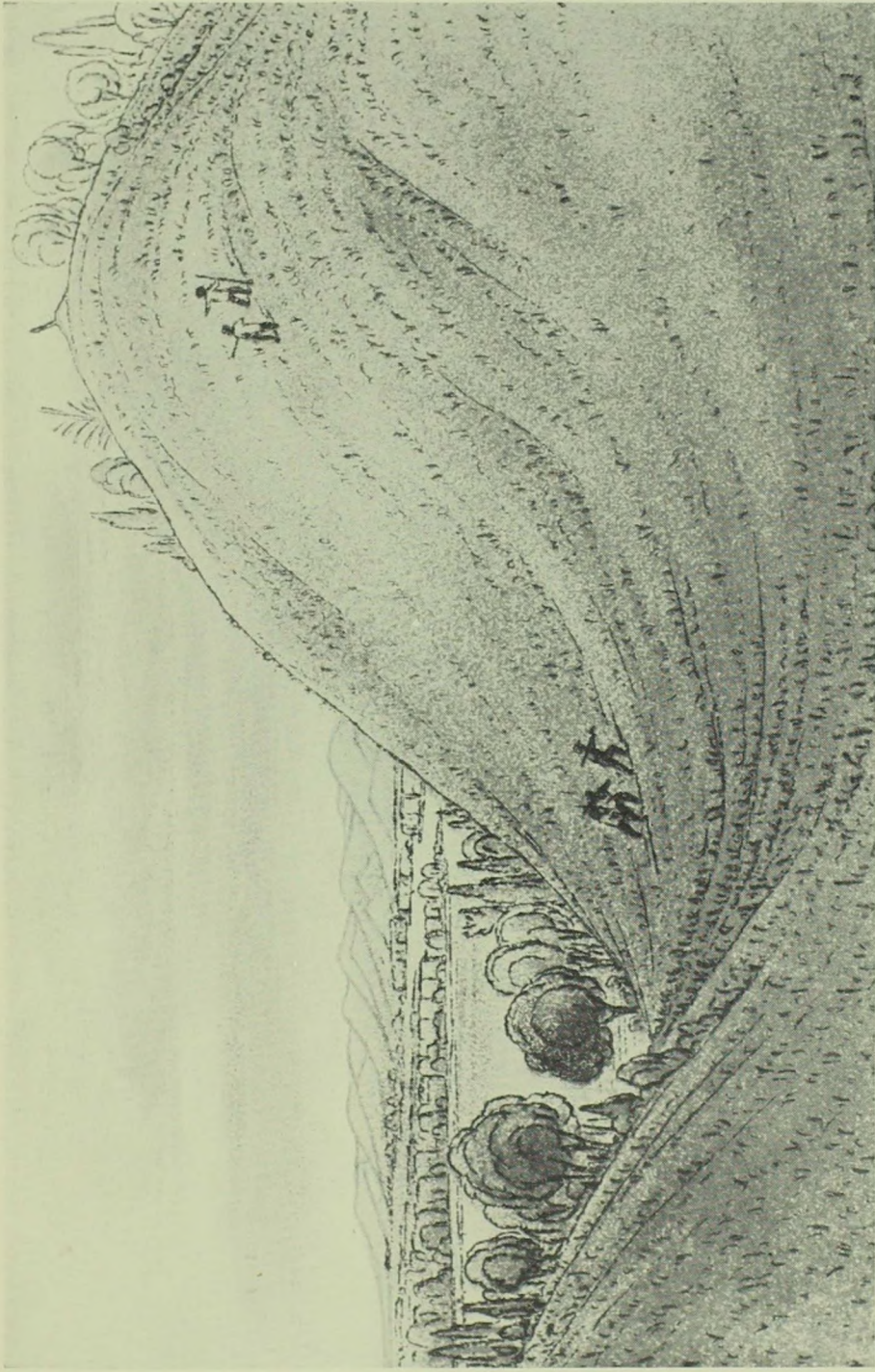


On the Upper Mississippi

The Upper Mississippi, like the Upper Missouri, must be approached to be appreciated; for all that can be seen below Saint Louis gives no hint of the magnificence of the scenes which are continually opening to the view of the traveller and riveting him to the deck of the steamer through sunshine, lightning, or rain, from the mouth of the Ouisconsin to the Fall of Saint Anthony. Each succeeding reach and turn in the river between Prairie du Chien and Lake Pepin presents a more immense and magnificent scene of beauty.

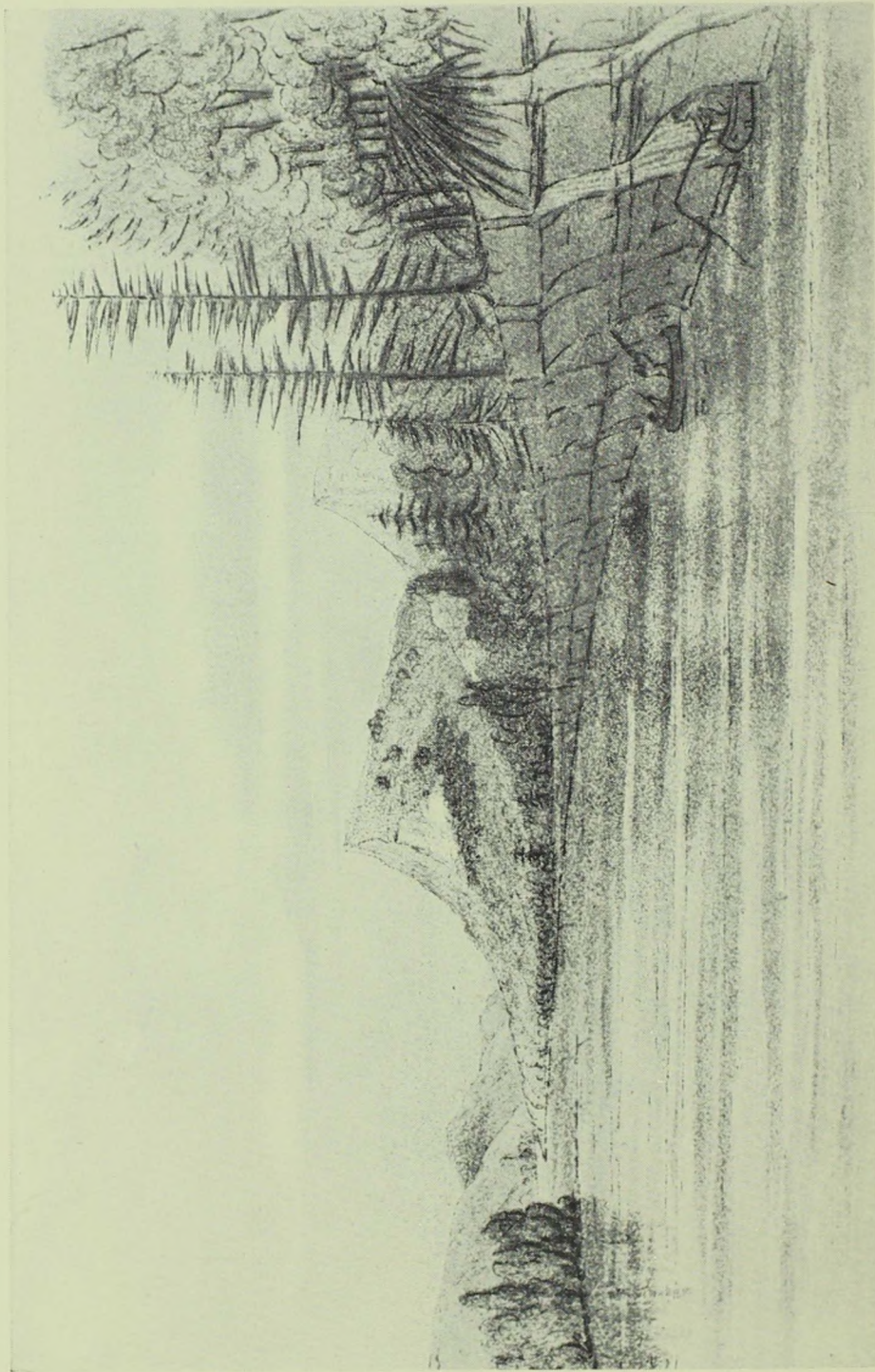
The whole face of the country is covered with a luxuriant growth of grass, whether there is timber or not; and the magnificent bluffs, studding the sides of the river and rising in the forms of immense cones, domes, and ramparts, give peculiar pleasure from the deep and soft green carpet of grass in which they are clad up their broad sides and to their extreme tops, with spots of timber of a deeper green apparently arranged by the hands of art.

After spending several weeks studying the Sioux and Chippeway Indians at Fort Snelling in the summer of 1835, I placed my wife on board the steamer bound for Prairie du Chien, while I embarked in a light bark canoe with Corporal Allen from the garrison, a young man of considerable taste who



FROM CATLIN'S NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS

THE GRAVE OF SERGEANT FLOYD



FROM CATLIN'S NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS

CORNICE ROCKS ON THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI

thought he would relish the transient scenes of such a voyage in company with a painter.

With stores laid in for a ten days' voyage and armed for any emergency, with sketch-book and colors prepared, we shoved off and swiftly glided away with paddles nimbly plied, resolved to see and relish every thing curious or beautiful that fell in our way as we lingered along among the scenes of grandeur which presented themselves amid the thousand bluffs.

Ducks, deer, and bass were our food. Our bed was generally on the grass at the foot of some towering bluff where, in the melancholy stillness of night, we were lulled to sleep by the liquid notes of the whip-poor-will; and after his warbling ceased, we were roused by the mournful complaints of the starving wolf or surprised by the startling interrogation, "who! who! who!" by the winged monarch of the dark.

When the morning's dew was shaken off, our coffee enjoyed, our light bark again launched upon the water, and the chill of the morning banished by the quick stroke of the paddle, our eyes were open to the scenes of romance that were about us. Our boat ran to every ledge, dodged into every slough, every mineral was examined, every cave explored, and almost every bluff of grandeur ascended. "Cap au l'ail" (Garlic Cape) about twenty miles above Prairie du Chien is a beautiful scene; and the "Cornice Rocks" on the west bank, where my little bark

rested two days till the corporal and I had taken bass from every nook and eddy about them, is a most picturesque ledge. At Prairie du Chien, which is near the mouth of the Ouisconsin River and six hundred miles above Saint Louis, I found my wife enjoying the hospitality of Mrs. Lockwood, who had been a schoolmate of mine in our childhood.

Prairie du Chien has been one of the earliest and principal trading posts of the Fur Company, and they now have a large establishment at that place, but are doing far less business than formerly, owing to the great mortality of the Indians in the vicinity and the destruction of the game which has almost entirely disappeared in those regions. The prairie is a beautiful elevation above the river, several miles in length and a mile or so in width, with a most picturesque range of grassy bluffs encompassing it in the rear. The Government have erected there a substantial Fort, in which are generally stationed three or four companies of men for the purpose of keeping the peace amongst the hostile tribes, and also of protecting the frontier inhabitants from the attacks of the excited savages.

About the place there is one continual scene of wretchedness and drunkenness and disease amongst the Indians, who come there to trade and to receive their annuities. When I was there, Wabesha's band of the Sioux came and remained several weeks. Their annuities fell far short of paying off their account, which the traders take good care to have

standing against them for goods furnished on a year's credit. However, whether they pay off or not, they can always get whiskey enough for a grand carouse which lasts for a week or two, and is almost sure to terminate the lives of some of their number.

At the end of one of these brawls a few days since, after the men had enjoyed their surfeit of whiskey and wanted a little more amusement, it was announced amongst them, and through the village, that the women were going to have a ball-play! For this purpose the men laid out a great quantity of ribbons and calicoes with other presents well adapted to the wants and desires of the women. These were hung on a pole resting on crotches, and guarded by an old man who was to be judge and umpire of the play. The women, who were divided into two equal parties, were to play a desperate game of ball for the valuable stakes that were hanging before them.

In this game the women have two balls attached to the ends of a string about a foot and a half long. Each woman has a short stick in each hand, on which she endeavors to catch the string with the two balls and throw them over the goal of her own party. The contest sometimes lasts for hours. Meanwhile the men, more than half drunk, take infinite pleasure in rolling about on the ground and laughing to excess, whilst the women are tumbling about in all attitudes and scuffling for the ball.

GEORGE CATLIN