

Comment by the Editor

FIRST IN FREEDOM

When William Salter called Iowa the first free State in the Louisiana Purchase, he meant that this was the first Commonwealth west of the Mississippi River to prohibit slavery. But freedom is more than the absence of bondage: freedom is equality of opportunity, the will to aspire, and a deep sense of justice. Iowa was created in the spirit of liberty; the pioneers cherished their particular hopes; tolerance prevailed; and the oppressed of other lands were welcome. To the prairies beyond the Father of Waters came political outcasts, strange religious sects, and social reformers. Revolutionists, adventurers, aristocrats, communists, utopians, inspirationists, atheists, monks, and polygamists — all found the Eldorado they sought.

Like a mighty earthquake, the French Revolution shook the foundations of the social structure, toppled the political edifice, and ruined the economic mansion of the old regime. Amid the turbulence which followed that cataclysm many architects appeared with ingenious plans for reconstruction. Earnest men they were, endowed

with contagious enthusiasm and armed with undaunted confidence in their dreams of human perfection. Zealous disciples of eccentric Charles Fourier and romantic Etienne Cabet, fascinated by promises of social harmony and economic security, yearned to try their schemes. Beside the Des Moines River in Mahaska County a phalanx of Fourierists discovered that their plan of communistic association was an empty illusion. A band of French artisans and shopkeepers likewise attempted to establish an ideal community near Corning, modeled upon Cabet's imaginary Icaria. Neither was restrained in the quest for happiness.

Perhaps liberty is characteristic of a new country. Pioneering is essentially individualistic. Every one is free to stretch himself to the uttermost in spirit, in thought, and in enterprise. Iowa has never levied a high tariff on new ideas to protect indigenous attitudes.

J. E. B.