

## Comment by the Editor

### *HISTORICAL NAVIGATION*

Below the Raccoon Fork, reported Albert M. Lea, the Des Moines River was "a succession of rapids and eddies", obstructed by "numerous bars of loose white sand", and full of snags. In many places the water was so shallow that his canoe, requiring a depth of only twelve inches, could not pass freely. Keelboats, he thought, would have difficulty in clearing the sudden bends. And yet, if "a few loose rocks at various rapids" were removed, navigation would be possible in the spring when the water was high. The Des Moines, he remarked in conclusion, "is the most beautiful stream that I have ever traversed" and "destined soon to become the outlet of great mineral and agricultural wealth."

In a figurative sense, Lieutenant Lea's observations concerning the Des Moines River might be applied to the history of the country through which it flows. The first pioneers, who came to explore the land and discover potential resources, found the channel of their course filled with innumerable obstacles.

During the century that has passed since settle-

ment began, the people of Iowa have occasionally lost fortunes in the rapids and eddies of business; they have been stranded now and again on the shifting sandbars of social, economic, and political opinion; they have encountered treacherous snags of disease and sharp rocks of prejudice. Some of the most dangerous perils to safe navigation have been removed, but general welfare still depends upon the depth of experience in the stream of life.

Navigation of the course of events has been thrilling as well as arduous for the pilots and crew of this Commonwealth. There have been discouragements, but no major disaster. Perhaps the natural barriers to progress have added zest to ultimate achievements. Iowans may be proud of their history. It is, indeed, "the most beautiful stream that I have ever traversed".

J. E. B.