

Comment by the Editor

WHAT IS A PIONEER?

The sketch of Augustus Caesar Dodge by Mr. Irish, which is printed in this number, raises some interesting questions. Just who is entitled to be called a pioneer? And when did the pioneer period end in Iowa? The answers are not easy, for the terms are relative. According to the dictionary, a pioneer is "one who goes before, as into a wilderness, preparing the way for others". Taken literally, then, only the very first arrivals in a geographic location could be classed as pioneers; but such restrictions never have been adhered to. Rather have we spoken of men and women as pioneers who lived in what we call pioneer conditions — which involves further definition. Log cabins and linsey-woolsey clothes, puncheon floors, broad axes, and gourd dippers — these we think of as the natural background of those who went before, preparing the way for others. But it is hard to draw a line and say: up to this time men were preparing the way, thereafter men were simply followers.

And it can not be said that Iowa shed its pioneer conditions on any certain date. Burlington in 1835 was less of a pioneer town than Iowa City in 1840, or Webster City in 1850, or Sioux City in 1855. The frontier was moving westward and the pioneers,

though they might not class themselves as frontiersmen, were never far from that border line. Dodge was no doubt more distinctly a pioneer than Kirkwood. He was born on the frontier and his various moves always took him to a newer fringe of civilization, while Kirkwood, in 1855, though he came upon other conditions which were to try his mettle, at least found log cabins and the gourd dipper no longer in vogue in Iowa City.

NEWCASTLE

An intimate presentation of pioneer conditions in Iowa is found in the *Reminiscences of Newcastle, Iowa* (Webster City) dictated by Mrs. Sarah Brewer Bonebright, written out by her daughter, Mrs. Harriet B. Closz, and published under the auspices of the Historical Department at Des Moines. The parents of Mrs. Bonebright came to the neighborhood of Webster City in 1848, and were the founders of the town which at first was called Newcastle. Fragments of memories of details of life and bits of local color, difficult things to resurrect in historical work, have been pieced together into a book that is illuminative of the daily existence of the pioneers — their clothes and their food and habits of eating, their homes and furniture and the tools with which they were made, their work and their entertainments. Material of this kind can not but be useful in the understanding and interpretation of pioneer life.

J. C. P.