

Comment by the Editor

WEST IS WEST

“Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” Kipling had in mind the Orient of the world and we will not dispute him. In America the West has been on the move. It has travelled steadily from Plymouth Rock to the farthest lighthouse at the entrance to the Golden Gate. It has moved with a sweep and a vigor that left the East far behind. But the East is striving to overtake the West, and we are inclined to think that “the twain shall meet”.

The West is not only a geographic term — it is an idea, a spirit, a kind of life. It has spaciousness and wide-openness; it has vigor and frankness and directness; it is crude but not crass, unfinished and incomplete simply because of the big things it has yet to do. It is not meticulous and highly polished and restrained, and it has few atrophies and little decay.

So busy has it been with the stupendous conquest of the continent that it has paid little attention to the East, but now come quieter days, and the question arises: will the East overtake and domesticate the West, or will the West turn back and meet and impulsate the East? Each has much to give the

other, and we rejoice as greatly at signs of domestication in Chicago as we do when we watch the doings of western men in New York.

But while the West is still the West we want the story of its early achievements to be preserved and recorded, and we want the literature of the West to find its place in the sun. The Mississippi Valley is the logical meeting ground of the East and the West and there is a growing body of Middle Western literature that is challenging our interest, our gratification, and occasionally our protest.

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

A four volume history of Minnesota has been recently announced, a centennial history of Missouri is in the course of preparation, and in Iowa has appeared during the present year a noteworthy volume covering the entire history of the State. Cyrenus Cole's *History of the People of Iowa*, is the work of a man full of enthusiasm for his task. He has gathered his facts both widely and faithfully and the story he tells is not mere historic chronicling of events — it is animated by the spirit of the development of the Middle West.

Another book that will be welcomed throughout the State is an *Iowa State Geography* by Miss Alison Aitchison (published by Ginn and Company). No longer will the school children in the intermediate grades have to search through the back pages of general geographies for a modicum of information

upon their own State, for here is a book of one hundred and sixty-eight pages, adequately supplied with maps, profusely illustrated with well chosen cuts, and written in a style to stimulate interest and further investigation.

MAIN STREET

We thought for a long time that since every one else in the world was reading *Main Street* we would not do so — but we did: at first with chuckles and appreciation, then with a sense of something lacking, a disappointed expectancy, and finally with determination through miles of unchanging scenery to the fruitless end of the trail. And after we had finished it, and had heard and read so many comments upon it, it seemed useless to add anything more. After all, hasn't a man a right to depict any characters he wishes? There are surely many Carol Kennicotts to be found. With a little more satisfaction we will agree that there are many country doctors like her sturdy husband. And in all towns there are drab store-keepers and pious old ladies and do-less lawyers and contemptible riff-raff. His characterizations are true to the life and drawn by a clever hand. But why limit one's self to such a group?

One may question the usefulness of the collector who assembles upon his row of pins only the commonplace and ugly specimens of a given locality; but no one can question the authenticity of the speci-

mens or his right to assemble any kind his fancy dictates. When, however, such a collector claims that his group is typical and representative, he stirs a protest from those who love truth. *Main Street* is not typical or representative of the small town, dwellers in large cities on the oriental side of the Alleghanies notwithstanding.

By reason of a sort of mental astigmatism, the author saw certain characters with the utmost clarity, while others were so indistinct to his vision that he does not reproduce them in his story. The typical small town of the Middle West or of any other portion of America, contains many unattractive individuals, but it also contains a leaven of people of culture and character, whose portrayal would have brightened while it made more truthful the story of Gopher Prairie.

SONGS OF A MAN WHO FAILED

In October, 1920, we published *A Few Martial Memories* by Clinton Parkhurst, of whose whereabouts we were ignorant and of whom we knew so little that we asked our readers for help in piecing out his biographical mosaic. During the next two months we received many interesting letters about him from all parts of the country, but none could tell where he was, though several intimated that he was basking on the shores of the Pacific. In the December number we told what we knew and printed a biographical sketch by August P. Richter, for-

merly editor of *Der Demokrat*, of Davenport, who had known considerable of the ups and downs of the career of Clinton Parkhurst.

Some time later we learned that Mr. Parkhurst was living in Lincoln, Nebraska, and finally that he was publishing there a book of verse entitled *Songs of a Man Who Failed*. The volume has just appeared, issued by the Woodruff Press, of Lincoln, Nebraska. In it he has collected all of the poems that have not been irrevocably lost in the course of more than half a century of variegated experiences. The book exhibits — particularly in the longer heroic poems — the same dramatic power over the English language that marked his prose story of Shiloh. But the remarkable thing about the book is its autobiographical, self-revealing frankness. He has written what he felt without regard to the opinion of the world. He has done an unusual thing — namely, having set himself a title, he has not deserted the self-portrayal which it involved.

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