

The
PALIMPSEST

AUGUST 1921

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THE EDITOR

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

The PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN C. PARISH

ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

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Perils of a Pioneer Editor

The Old Stone Capitol at Iowa City seems to have been, in the forties, a dangerous place for Democratic newspaper men to frequent. For within its halls three successive editors of the *Iowa Capitol Reporter* became involved in physical encounters with irate legislators.

The editor in 1841 was Ver Planck Van Antwerp. Because of a West Point training he was dubbed "General", and among his enemies he received the titles of "Old Growler" and "My Lord Pomposity". He was a man of high dignity and pretentious dress, an aristocrat in tastes, but a Democrat in politics.

Van Antwerp was an early comer to the West and had held several political positions. In 1838 while Receiver of the Land Office in Burlington he experienced a bit of real frontier life. He and Stephen Whicher were walking arm in arm down the street one day when pistol shots startled them and a bullet whizzed past apparently between their heads. Van

Antwerp's account of the affair is not to be had, but Whicher in a letter written at the time said that the General "ran like an affrighted deer about ten rods, when he stopped, turned, and called to me to follow him".

Whicher stood his ground, however, and there came running up to him a man "without a hat, with a broken head, and an empty pistol". The man was a prominent lawyer of Burlington who had just shot and fatally wounded Cyrus S. Jacobs, a member-elect of the Territorial legislature, following an attempt of the latter to cane him.

Van Antwerp lost his office in 1841 and moved to Iowa City, the new capital of the Territory, where he began, in partnership with Thomas Hughes, the publication of a Democratic journal known as the *Iowa Capitol Reporter*.

In the session of 1841-1842 a considerable discussion arose at Iowa City over the bestowal of the legislative printing—a matter in which the *Reporter* was vitally interested. The Democrats in the Council were not unanimous in favoring the *Iowa Capitol Reporter*, and one of them—Mr. Bainbridge—evoked much wrath and condemnation from Van Antwerp, who denounced him in his paper as a "hybrid politician". Whereupon Bainbridge is reported to have remarked that "if Van had any friends they had better advise him to be cautious in taking liberties with his name, or he would get his face slapped."

Further difference of opinion arose over the Miners' Bank of Dubuque, at that time the only bank in Iowa. The *Iowa Capitol Reporter* and the Democrats generally were trying to force an immediate resumption of specie payments by the bank, which was — in the minds of its friends — equivalent to bankrupting the concern. Bainbridge, representing Dubuque County, endeavored to save the institution. Van Antwerp again attacked him in the columns of his paper with language that completed the dissolution of Bainbridge's patience.

With the stage thus set, Van Antwerp repaired one morning in early February to the Council Chamber in the Old Stone Capitol. When he left the room Bainbridge followed him into the hall and there occurred the incident upon which witnesses and near witnesses have failed to agree.

A writer in the *Iowa City Standard* reports that Bainbridge, looking Van sternly in the face said "the 'hybrid politician' . . . conceives you to be a d——d scoundrel and a puppy" and added that if he ever misrepresented him again he would traverse the Territory from one end to the other to kick him. After some parleying Van Antwerp, to use his own expression, "retorted his offensive language, and the scuffle between us ensued".

According to the *Standard*, Bainbridge struck Van Antwerp over the hat and head with his cane, seized a pistol which Van Antwerp tried to draw, and smote him upon his be-spectacled face with his fist so vigorously as to draw blood.

“It is false that we were struck at all”, said Van Antwerp. “Our assailant raised a stick which he held in his hand, as if intending to strike us — but we threw up our arm and seized it, endeavoring at the same time to draw a pistol with which to defend ourself in case he did strike. . . . the weapon which we carried was wrested from us. *An exchange of weapons* thus took place between us in the affray; and when other persons came forward to interfere between us, we held the stick of our assailant in our left hand, with our right grappled upon the collar of his coat.” About this time Mr. Stull, the Secretary of the Territory, appeared in the doorway, and seeing the pistol in the possession of Bainbridge, is said to have roared out “to the victors belong the spoils”.

During the same year Van Antwerp dropped out of the firm of publishers and was succeeded by Jesse Williams. The Territorial legislature met and again took up the question of the Miners' Bank of Dubuque. Charges were made by the *Iowa Capitol Reporter* that members had been influenced by the offer of bribes to support the bank. An investigating committee was appointed with George H. Walworth as its chairman. The committee reported that although improper advances had actually been made, no legislator had been influenced in his vote, and the report closed with a recommendation that the editors of the *Reporter* justly deserved the censure of the House.

The report was laid upon the table, but Editor Williams was not satisfied to let the matter drop, and wielded an acid pen in criticism of Walworth, the chairman of the committee. One day Walworth came upon Jesse Williams in the library of the capitol and took the opportunity to vent his wrath upon the editor in a personal assault. Being a powerful man Walworth soon had his opponent upon the floor where he proceeded to give him so thorough a beating that blood flowed freely and began to form a pool on the carpet. It seems that the carpet was one which the Secretary of the Territory had but recently purchased. The fight was on in full swing when the ubiquitous Stull burst into the room and fell upon the combatants.

“You d——d scoundrels!” he cried. “What are you spoiling my carpet for?” And he threw them both out of the room.

Bout number three occurred at the first session of the legislature of the new State of Iowa. Jesse Williams had been succeeded on the editorial staff of the *Reporter* by a man named Palmer. Another case of attempted bribery came before the legislature, this time in connection with the choice of Iowa's first United States Senators. The close division between Democrats and Whigs and the uncertainty as to how several of the members would vote made an exciting situation when one of the doubtful men, Mr. Nelson King from Keokuk County, rose and stated that he had been approached by several

persons and offered money and other rewards if he would cast his vote for the Democratic candidates.

A committee was appointed to investigate the case. Mr. King gave testimony: "Finally, about that time," he said, "me and him was in that path between the House of Representatives and the brick tavern . . . he offered me a hundred dollars, and gave me to understand if I would vote for Dodge I should have it."

But Mr. King in turn found his character questioned by the legal counsel of his reputed briber. Allusions were made to charges of assault with intent to kill and of stealing bacon. These charges were taken up by the press, and the *Iowa Capitol Reporter*, among other remarks, made the facetious observation that, whereas King was supposed to be deficient in literature, he was "evidently familiar with *Lock and Bacon*".

King was disposed to ignore these personal remarks of Palmer, but was led by his wife — so said this modern Adam — to believe that he should chastise his maligner. So he encountered Palmer one day in the Capitol and with true backwoods spirit undertook to thrash the editor. Palmer was small and unequal to the struggle but presented a plucky resistance. The affair assumed serious aspects when King drew a loaded pistol. Mr. Stull was not this time upon the scene of conflict but there were others who intervened and prevented a possible tragedy.

These three episodes, wherein the editors found their pens mightier than their swords, are characteristic of the times. Freedom of speech and of the press was limited not by the libel court but by the more summary physical vengeance of the libeled. Formal duelling was rare but informal encounters upon the streets and in public buildings were not uncommon. Canings often led to the use of the pistol and not always was the outcome so free from tragedy as in the attacks upon the editors of the *Iowa Capitol Reporter*.

JOHN C. PARISH

The Coming of the Railroad

I can well remember Iowa City as it was in the days long before the Civil War, when Gower and Holt and the Powell Brothers were among the principal business men and when Crummy's Tavern set out good cheer for the stranger. Those were the days when the only public conveyance between towns was the slow stage coach that also carried the mail. The drivers during the bitter cold weather were often so numbed when they reached their stopping place that they had to be lifted from their seats and carried into the station where a large fireplace was always heaped with glowing logs to welcome all who chose to enter.

The meeting of the legislature was the main event of importance until the excitement caused by the prospect of a railroad coming into the city. This brought a great boom to Iowa City and sent the price of property soaring. In those days everything the railroads asked for was willingly given to induce them to come into the State. Grants and privileges of all kinds were freely offered.

In the last days of December, 1855, I came up from Louisa County to Iowa City, a distance of fifty miles, with C. H. Berryhill, one of the most influential citizens of the town. We came by horse and buggy through deep snow and it took us two days.

As we neared the city, we saw off to our right huge bonfires burning to afford light for the men on the railroad construction to continue their work. The business men and others were out there helping to complete the road according to contract, and by twelve o'clock New Year's morning, 1856, the last rail was laid and the last spike driven. On the 3rd of January followed the great event of celebrating the completion of the railroad to Iowa City. It was a bitterly cold afternoon when the whistle blew announcing the entry of the first passenger train bringing the invited guests from Chicago, Rock Island, Davenport, and Muscatine. The cannon roared out their welcome, and the rattle of omnibuses was heard over the hard frozen street, as they bore the invited guests to the homes the committee had arranged for them.

The committee on arrangements consisted of thirty-five ladies and as many gentlemen. Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Berryhill were of this number and I, a schoolgirl, being one of the family at that time, had the opportunity in a small way of seeing and helping spread the four tables set the length of the Representatives' Hall. For instance, I had the privilege and pleasure of helping frost with *real loaf* sugar (a thing of luxury in those days) the thirty-two pounds of pound cake which Mrs. Berryhill had ordered from her baker for the occasion. We were told that only the white meat of the turkeys she had ordered would be used and must be sliced very thin. But the

supreme time to me was when on the last day of preparation, I went with Mrs. Berryhill to the Capitol and saw the tables and hall in all their glory. Over the speaker's stand was an arch that the ladies of the committee had covered with branches of evergreen in the midst of which were balls of cotton to imitate snow balls. In one corner of the hall was an old fashioned cook stove where the committee prepared and served hot coffee and hot fresh oysters, as the coming of the railroad made fresh oysters for the first time possible in Iowa. As the tables were bountifully spread with cold food, the committee served hot coffee and oysters all night "till broad day light in the morning".

As this was before the age of the European way of serving, everything was on the tables in abundance and every one helped himself. Besides the loaves of cake supplied, each table had three pyramids of cake from three to four feet in height and at the head of one table was one of popcorn four feet in height. I remember two of the pyramids of cake in particular from the way they were decorated. In the center of one was a peach tree, of wax of course, bearing perfect fruit with a blackberry vine with green leaves and black fruit starting from the base and winding round and round over the white surface to the top. The other one bore a tree of leaves and red apples with a vine of red raspberries. One of the trees was presented to the president of the road and the other, I believe, to the Governor.

Almost everything connected with this event was very primitive compared with to-day. The lighting for the halls was accomplished by means of two rows of chandeliers hung from the ceiling. They were made of rows of common laths, the first row of four laths full length, then the next row of shorter length succeeded by row after row until the apex was reached near the ceiling. Each row of laths had nails driven in about three inches apart on which were placed common lighted candles.

For outside illumination, there was a candle at each pane of glass from the basement of the Capitol building to the cupola, and all the business houses near the Capitol grounds were illuminated in some way; but not an alarm of fire was heard all night. Well, there were not so many insurance companies in those days.

LeGrand Byington, that silver tongued orator, was President of the Day and introduced the speakers. In complimenting the ladies of the committee on the dinner or supper as I guess it was called at that time, he said, "it was too good for kings, princes and potentates, but just good enough for the contractors and builders of our western railroads."

SARAH ELLEN GRAVES

A River Trip in 1833

[The following glimpses of travel on the Upper Mississippi are reprinted from *The Rambler in North America*, Vol. II, pp. 266-314, written by the Englishman, Charles Joseph Latrobe, who travelled extensively in America in 1832 and 1833, and who here describes a trip from Fort Crawford to Fort Snelling and back in the fall of the latter year.—THE EDITOR]

Two hours before sun-set, you may imagine us fairly packed and afloat; our lading consisting of eight men, one woman and child, to whom we gave passage for some distance, and our three selves — in all twelve adults, besides blankets, buffalo-skins, arms, and provisions for twelve days. At the village, whence we made our final start, a scene of hugging and kissing took place between divers of our paddlers and their cousins and friends of both sexes; and *Bon voyage! Bon voyage!* was echoed from the shore, as pushing into the stream, the eight paddles were plunged simultaneously into the water, and we began to stem the current. At the same instant, according to custom, the leader commenced screaming with a singularly tremulous voice, one of the innumerable boat-songs with which the Canadian *voyageurs* of the Upper Lakes and rivers, beguile their long and monotonous labours. The burden was taken up and repeated by his comrades.

. . . .

Our purpose this evening was merely to get fairly afloat; and accordingly, after having paddled a few miles, we encamped upon an island in the river, a little below the Painted Rocks, with a dry starlight night as a good omen over our heads; lulled by the howling of the Indians encamped in the vicinity, the barking of dogs, and other sounds which betokened that we had not yet passed out of the bounds of the farms on the Prairie. It was computed that unless prevented by unforeseen accidents, we ought to reach the Falls in six days. The whole of this time was however taken up in advancing as far as Lake Pepin, one hundred and seventy miles above the Prairie, and nearly four more were necessary for the attainment of our object. To give you the outline of our excursion at once, I will mention, that we paddled forward by day, and nightly sought some snug corner of the forest, either on the main or in the islands,—pitched our tent, raised our fire, cooked supper, sang, conversed, and looked at the stars till we were sleepy, and then betook ourselves to our buffalo-robe couch till dawn.

The whole distance to Lake Pepin, the mighty river flows through a deep valley of perhaps two miles average breadth, among innumerable islands, and under steep bluffs which rise frequently on both sides, with precipitous fronts to the height of five hundred feet. Their lower slopes near the river are mostly clothed in oak forest, and many of the summits terminated by a picturesque pile of highly-

coloured rock, of eighty feet or upwards perpendicular. Above and beyond this great channel hollowed out in the country for the passage of the "Father of Waters," the country on both sides seems to be rolling prairie.

The beauty of the scenery,— though only the last colouring of autumn lingered on the forests and prairies,— quite took us by surprise; and nothing can be more opposite than the impressions suggested by the scenery of the Mississippi above and the Mississippi below its junction with the Missouri — here a scene of beauty and romance, there a terribly monotonous turbid and swollen stream. . . .

Our progress for the first few days was far from being what we had expected. The canoe, liable to injury at all times from its extremely fragile nature, being merely a light framework, covered with birch bark, and held together by cross splints, and to be broken and snagged by running foul of objects in the shallows, or to be strained by the great weight which it carried, and still more by any accident in its daily conveyance to and from the shore on the backs of the men,— stood in need of constant repair.

Besides, we soon found that most, if not all our *Crapauds*, as these French Canadians are jocularly called, were in league with the boat to keep us as long on the road as possible. First, because they were rogues all. They had been born without consciences and never had had the chance of acquiring

them since. Secondly, because they were paid by the day, and we were bound to feed them as long as they were in our service. Thirdly, because they saw that we were honest gentlemen, travelling for amusement and instruction — novices in the arts of the *voyageurs*, and of very different habits from the hard-grinding traders whom they usually served, who portioned out their food to them by the square inch — keeping their wages back, if they did not do their duty. You will own that here was a little too much temptation thrown in the way of men who professed no further morality than would be of very easy carriage among the savages by whom they were surrounded, and no religion beyond Indian religion.

Demaret acted as pilot, and plied the stern-paddle, as the boat was his. He had made it with his own hands, and all his life had been a *voyageur*. His qualifications and the natural turn he had for this kind of life were so marked, that we found his very companions used to twit him with having “been born with a piece of birch-bark in his hand.” He looked like no class of human beings I ever saw, and his countenance, which was chiefly marked by the width of his mouth, bore signs of both Spanish and Indian blood. When he sang, he sang like a fox with his tail in a trap.

Garde-Pied, an old Canadian, was our bowman. Then mention we Guillaume, fat and handsome — the *farceur* of the party — the best singer, and, I believe in fact the greatest rogue amongst us, and

the one who both set the roguery agoing and sustained it. Alexandre, Rousseau, and Henri, were common-place rogues — that is to say, they would be honest, if other people would be honest too. Pascal, a mulatto, held about the same tenets, though, I recollect, he had a fragment of a conscience; and, in mentioning old Julian, a Neapolitan by birth, who had been taken by the British — incorporated with the Anglo-Swiss Regiment de Meuron — seen service in India and subsequently in Canada, — where he had been discharged, and had turned Crapaud in his old age — I may say that he was the best, the most sober and most obliging man in the party, and the only one in whom real confidence could be placed.

For the rest, they were all men who would dance from night to morning at a Gombo-ball — sing profane or pastoral French songs hour after hour on the water, — drink and smoke, — cheat their creditors, — live for months in the woods, — work like slaves without grumbling, when they could not help it, — swim like otters, — maintain their French gaiety of character on most occasions, but grumble incessantly when they had nothing to grumble about. They would feed like so many hungry wolves as long as there was anything to eat, knowing no medium; and then bear the pinch of hunger with the stoicism of the Indian with whom most of them had associated from infancy.

They measured their way, not by miles, nor leagues, but by pipes; and would say, — such a point

is so many pipes distant. They generally sang in their peculiar way for half an hour after a halt, solo and chorus, winding up with an Indian yell, or the exclamation, "*Hop! Hop! Sauvons-nous!*" and would then continue silently paddling with their short quick stroke, all following the time indicated by the bowman, till the pipe was out, or till they were tired; when at a signal, they would throw their paddles across the boat, give them a roll to clear the blade of the water, and then rest for a few minutes.

A compartment in the centre of the canoe in which our buffalo-ropes and mats were commodiously arranged, was our ordinary couch. Here we lay in luxurious ease, reading, and chatting hour after hour.

The first certain light which broke in upon us as to the real character of the strange race with whom we had to do,—though the singular conduct which we had remarked in them at the Prairie below, had given us warning,—was early on the sixth day, when approaching a lonely trading-house, near the remarkable mountain called "*La Montagne qui se trèmpe à l'eau,*" scarce a hundred miles on our way; when their long faces, shrugs, and significant gestures gave token that something was wrong. In effect we found that this devouring squad had,—unaided by us, as we had lived principally on water-fowl,—actually in the course of six days, made away with the whole of the provisions laid in with more than usual liberality for twelve days' consumption!

Upwards of a hundred pounds of bacon, besides bread and potatoes and beans in six days! Think of that! We had, to be sure, noticed that they had brought with them a curiously shaped iron pot; originally, perhaps, a foot in depth; but which, having had the original bottom burnt out, had been furnished by some frontier tinker with a fresh one of such form and dimensions as gave the renovated vessel an added profundity of six or eight inches more. We had observed that this marvelous bowl was always piled up to the very edge with provisions: and that frequently when it was simmering and bubbling over the fire in the camp, our rogues would stand round shrouding it from too close observation. If one or another of us approached, one or two of the Crapauds would turn to us with an air of perfect famine and of the greatest tribulation — and ejaculate, “*grande misère!*” or, “*il fait froid icit!*” — giving us to understand, that while we considered our common position as one full of amusement, they deemed it to be one of uncommon trial.

Moreover, we were sometimes awakened hours after supper, when all had appeared to retire to rest for the night, it might be about one in the morning, by loud talking and joyous sounds; and peeping forth, we might see that these unhappy mortals were as brisk as lions; sitting about the fire; passing the joke from one to another; — by the help of long sharply pointed sticks, fishing up meat from the depths of that fathomless pot; and making a very

hearty meal, for which, as to our certain knowledge, a hearty supper preceded it, and a no less hearty breakfast followed it at dawn — we had unfortunately no name in our vocabulary. Still, though it might cross our minds that they were a little lavish of the provisions, yet we never dreamed of a famine before we should reach Fort Snelling. However, there was now no doubt about it, and it was in vain to murmur; and here at the last trading post we had still to lay in fresh stock.

Their songs were very interesting to us, in spite of the horrible French in which they were couched, and the nonsense they contained; as we detected in them many signs of their origin on the plains and in the vineyards of *La belle France*, though now loaded with allusions to the peculiar scenery, manners, and circumstances of the country to which they had been transplanted. In many there was an air of Arcadian and pastoral simplicity which was almost touching at the same time that we knew that the singers had no simplicity about them, and that their character was much more that of the wolf than of the sheep. The airs were not unfrequently truly melodious, and all were characteristic, and chimed in well with our position.

I may elsewhere have given you sundry assurances of the *delights* of Indian Encampments in the forests. From the pleasant idea that these may have conveyed I would take nothing. They are

many and great; and far advanced as the season was, we were yet alive to them for a month to come, even in weather that might be deemed inclement elsewhere. Lest, however, you should accuse me of a disposition to paint every thing "*couleur de rose*," and to throw dust both in my own eyes and those of my neighbours — here follows a page of *miseries*. I remember one camp, which we called "Cross Camp," from the circumstance of all going wrong. It was, I believe, the second in this excursion. The weather had not yet become fairly settled. We had got entangled among the low islands, and not meeting with a place to our liking, as the evening was closing in raw and gusty, we had been obliged to betake ourselves to a shore covered with trees and jungle and make our nest just where we should have wished to have avoided doing so.

It was a confined situation, among thickets of towering dry grass and brushwood. The canoe was unloaded, and was hauled ashore; and the Crapauds as usual made preparations for their fire, ten or twenty yards from that of our trio. The difficulty of fixing the tent which we carried with us, in such a direction that we should be free from smoke, was considerable, as the wind came down on the river in flaws, and no one could decide from what quarter. Time had been lost in seeking a good camping-ground, and the twilight fell on us before all was in order for the night. The tent had been pitched in the midst of opposing opinions: — when suddenly the cry of fire was raised. We saw the wind scat-

tering the embers among the brushwood, and all hands were necessary to put out the flames, which, had they got a-head, would have burnt the canoe in the first place, and singed us out of our hole in the next. By beating them down with our coats and blankets, this was effected; and having broken down the brush on all sides, we returned to our labours near the fires. Every thing was mislaid, having been chucked out of the way of danger in the hurry—the axe was not to be found, and to collect the various articles necessary for our nightly accommodation and entertainment, was a work of time and patience. Of the former, we had plenty; of the latter but little, in the night in question.

Then came a terrific gust from the overhanging bluffs, and we found that the tree under which we had carefully pitched the tent, was rotten at heart, and gave decided tokens of a probable fall. The idea was not a pleasant one. All went wrong. We had not yet decided upon making use of the Cra-pauds as our cooks.—“Nothing easier,” exclaimed I, “than to boil the coffee.”—“Nothing easier,” observed Pourtales, “than to make a handsome fry of potatoes, and to roast a couple of wild ducks in the French style, with a savoury waistcoat of lard!” “Nothing easier than to make a beef-steak!”—said M’Euen! So to work we went, each in his own way, and following his own device, while he snarled at that of his neighbour. “Nothing easier than to find fault with what one does not understand!” thought each and every one of us.

Well, the coffee was on the fire and "progressing" — the process necessary for its perfection being after all the most simple of those under trial; — the potatoes were washed, peeled, and sliced; — the beef-steaks, skewered on long sticks, were bent towards the embers; — the mallards were plucked, drawn, and spitted — how, may not be said, — but exposed to the hot smoke and flame their waistcoats were kept in a constant flare and frizzle. Basting was out of the question, except with cold water; and the office of dredging-box was performed by the frequent gust, which covered them and the beef-steaks and the sliced potatoes with snow-white ashes.

Now imagine the consequences of being all cross, and overwhelmed with misfortunes — the miseries of cooking and camping on a windy night — difference of opinion — smoke in the eyes — fire at the finger ends — shakes — overturns — wet logs — mistakes — and bitterness of spirit!

No sooner have you got matters into something like order, but the wind veers a point or two, and the smoke which had hitherto sailed off sideways from your tent, leaving your night quarters warm and smokeless, as it always ought, is now driven directly against it, and you have no alternative, but either to bear the reverse, or to strike and pitch it anew.

You hang your coat, or blanket, or buffalo robe, — which may have been soaked by being undermost in the leaking canoe, — on a forked stick to dry, placing it to the windward of the fire, to keep it out of the

smoke and sparks; — and next time you look at it, you see it singeing among the glowing embers, into which possibly a careless friend, or more probably the wind, has precipitated it. In utter despair you collect a number of very indispensable articles, such as straps and ropes, not to be replaced; — and you go hang them carefully to a distant sapling, far away from the ordinary passage; — when you next look for them you see that some kind friend has by chance cut the tree down in the dark, and consigned it and its charge to the flames. You go valourously forth to cut a tent-pole or another log for the fire, — and, not having the true backwoodsman's fling with the axe, come hopping back in five minutes with a neat chip in your shin.

Jaded and gloomy, while the supper is cooking, you lie down with a book in your hand, say for example, "Burton on Melancholy," which by the by, was the only work, beside a Bible, that we had with us. You stretch yourself on your blanket in your corner of the tent, but find that besides lying on an unfortunate slope which makes your heels rise higher than your head, there is under you a stubborn knot of hard wood, which no coaxing of yours can extract, and which nothing but a complete turn out, and a forcible application of the axe, will rid you of: and so forth! But all these are trifles to the miseries of carrying on a partnership in cooking in a dark windy night.

You advance to shift your burning supper to a

safer place,— are maddened by the puff of pungent smoke that fills your eyes — start back,— tread on some long crooked branch, one end of which extends into the darkness and the other props the coffee-pot, when to your extreme surprise and the undisguised wrath of the superintendent of that particular branch of the duty, the vessel makes a jump into the air and overturns its contents into the tasty dish of potatoes frizzling below. Then follows a scene of objurgation, recrimination, and protestation.

But, *n'importe* — the coffee is replaced — the beef-steaks get thoroughly burned on one side; — the ducks are pronounced to be cooked because the waistcoat is reduced to a perfect cinder, and because the birds insist upon taking fire. The “medicine-chest,” as we called our store box, is brought out, and preparations for a meal seriously attempted. It is soon found that notwithstanding all losses and mischances there are still two things left, appetite and abundance; and though nothing perhaps is done with real gastronomic nicety, yet after a day spent in the open air, every thing has a relish which no sauce could give. As you have doubtless experienced, nothing predisposes to complacent good humour so much as a satisfied appetite, and by the time supper is ended, and the moon has risen, and the bright embers free from smoke are glowing in the wind,— you are ready to laugh together at every petty vexation. However, we learned wisdom at the “Cross Camp,” and forthwith hired Rousseau to

look to our cooking at his own fire — keeping possession of the coffee-pot alone, and henceforth our “*miseries*” were very sensibly diminished. . . .

Towards evening we descried the long looked-for Fort with its towers and imposing extent of wall crowning the high angular bluff at whose base the upper branch of the St. Peters enters the Mississippi; and paddling swiftly up the lower channel, a large triangular island separating the two,—we landed and were most hospitably received by the officers on duty. We were forthwith furnished with quarters in the Fort above, while the Crapauds pitched a tent under the shadow of the bluff by the water’s edge, got their canoe on shore, and set their enormous pot a boiling forthwith. I believe they never saw the bottom of it, nor suffered it to cool during the whole week of their stay. They did not forget whenever we visited them to talk a great deal about “*misère*”; at the same time that they had nothing to do but what they loved best,—eat and sleep. They are a singular race, half Indian, half French, with a dash of the prairie wolf.

Meanwhile we had been admitted to full participation in the rites of hospitality within the Fort, and were furnished with every needful accommodation. We spread our buffalo skins and blankets in an occupied apartment, and slept in quiet; not forgetting however in the course of the evening to ascend one of the bastions, and listen to the roar of the

Great Falls rising on the night air at a distance of seven miles. . . .

But we must turn our faces southward, for the Indian summer is past—the lagging files of the water fowl are scudding before the wind, and another week may curb the mighty Mississippi with a bridle of ice.—Another week in fact did so, but ere that, paddle, current, and sail had carried us far on our way south, as you may now hear.

Our intercourse with the inhabitants of Fort Snelling only strengthened that feeling of good will which will always make me happy to meet an officer of the United States' army.

The signal was given—the Crapauds, who had had all their time to themselves, packed up their big kettle with many a shrug and exclamation of "*misère,*" grasped their paddles, paid their compliments to their chums ashore, and betook themselves to their songs and their pipes.

In returning, both wind and current favoured us so far, that by the evening of the second day we reached Lake Pepin, across the upper part of which we careered before a strong north wind in a most marvellous fashion, under a broad blanket, double-reefed. A large flight of snow-white swans rose from a shallow cove just as we entered it, and, startled by our approach, hastened with their trumpet voice and broad vans flapping to the southward. We passed the Cape; and then stood over for the

Cap à la fille, which rose with its neighbour prominently in figure and height from the long line of steep bluffs forming the eastern boundary.

As we looked forth from the summit early in the morning, across the troubled surface of the lake, of which it commands a wide view; a dense column of smoke from the opposite side gave us intimation that the Prairies were on fire. The spread of the conflagration on the low grounds directly opposite, which drew our attention at intervals during the day, continued unabated; and as evening approached, other columns of smoke springing up in all directions, both on the summit of the opposite range of mountains and in the vallies at their feet, showed us that the Indians had taken advantage of the driving wind to fire the country for a great many miles inland. The scene which presented itself from the summit of the rock on the south side of our dell, when the sun, which had been hidden all day, just before setting, peered out windy and red, between long bars of cloud in the southwest — and from that time till long after dark, was one of the most sublime and extraordinary you can conceive, and a great contrast to the repose which reigned in the sheltered glen at our feet, where glistened our little tent and fires, and where the men might be seen lying under the shade of the canoe.

On the opposite side of the troubled sheet of water in the middle ground, over which the rock impended,

the range of western bluffs was seen to incline inland, behind the *Pointe aux Sables*, leaving a wide tract of country, partly forest and partly prairie, between their foot and the shore. A singularly conical and prominent hill rose abruptly from the middle of this plain. Around this detached eminence, which, swathed as it was in the smoke of the burning prairies beyond, seemed like a volcano, the fire had been concentrating itself during the earlier hours of the day, now advancing in one direction till checked by a dense tract of forest or a river, and then rushing on in another and rolling over the summit or the base of the mountains. At sunset, the flame seemed to have gathered full strength, and to have reached a long tract of level grassy prairie nearer the shore, upon which it then swiftly advanced, leaving a black path in its trail. Here we saw a bright red line, a couple of miles in range, advancing majestically over the wide prairie. In one place the progress of the fire, effectually checked by a small river opposite, died away or edged over the country with slower progress. In another, after being seemingly choked, it would burst forth with redoubled fury, sending bright jets of flame far on the wind. There again the light-blue smoke was suddenly changed to dark brown, as the conflagration burst upon a mass of grosser materials for destruction than the dry grass of the prairie. We calculated at this time that the fire spread over a tract of nearly twelve miles in length, while the dis-

tant glare upon the clouded horizon showed that it was raging far inland. The whole evening, the lake, the Maiden's Rock, the clouds, and the recesses of the glen, were illuminated by the flames, while, gaining the rank growth on the border of the lake and the brow of the distant mountains, the country opposite blazed like tinder in the wind; and from the summit of the Maiden's Rock, which we again ascended before we retired to rest — the scene was fearfully grand. It is difficult to calculate the advance of the flames on the dry level prairie, in the van of a strong and steady wind, but we should think it was at least eight miles per hour. . . .

Our encampment in the forests, near the Bad Axe, on the night between the 12th and 13th of November, was rendered remarkable by one circumstance.

The night was calm; the wind, which had been northerly the foregoing day, chopped about early in the morning to the south, and blew with some force with a clear sky. Early, it might be between two and three o'clock, the whole heavens became gradually covered with falling stars, increasing in number till the sky had the appearance of being filled with luminous flakes of snow. This meteoric rain continued to pour down till the light of the coming day rendered it invisible. Millions must have shone and disappeared during the course of these three or four hours. They appeared to proceed from a point in the heavens, about fourteen degrees to the south-

east of the zenith, and thence fell in curved lines to every point of the compass. Whether they remained visible down to the horizon or not, we do not know. There were some in the shower of larger size than the others, but for the greater part, they appeared as stars of the first or second magnitude. Their course in falling was interrupted, like the luminous flight of the fire fly. . . . We were fortunate, you may suppose, in enjoying for hours such a splendid and uncommon phenomenon, streaming over the river, and forests, and bluffs. Fortunate — yes, truly! what will you say, when I own that though all I have related is strictly true, not one of us saw it — having been permitted to remain prosaically sleeping within the shelter of our tent till all was over. Our Crapauds, it is true, were up and awake, and could not but notice the extraordinary appearance of the heavens, but before them hung their fathomless kettle filled to the brim; and they sat watching it simmering on the blazing logs with a philosophical insensibility to every thing else, which was extremely characteristic, though to us perfectly unaccountable. What was it to them if the stars fell from heaven, or the skies “drizzled blood?” — that there was that passing over their heads which would make the very wolves of the forest howl as their eyes glared upwards, or urge the Indian to kneel and pray to the Great Spirit — as long as their beloved camp-kettle was unmoved, and the whiskey-keg lay undisturbed in its bed in the tangled grass, what was that to them?

As we descended the river, we found the attention of all excited by the phenomenon, and we alone, reposing in the open air, in the best possible position for observation, were not witnesses of it!

Early on the evening of this day, we returned, blithely singing our *Chanson de retour*, down the river, to the little village of Prairie de Chien, where a knot of wives, daughters, and children, awaited the return of our men; and after a few moments spent by them in the ordinary compliments, kissing, and embraces, we were conducted to the landing of the Fort, and there welcomed as old friends.

Comment by the Editor

THE RAMBLER

To-day the Mississippi Valley is the most inland portion of the country. It lies farthest from the border, and is buttressed not only by its mountain walls but by the settled abodes of millions of people. But the time was when the valley was the distant and mysterious goal of the adventurous, when the Upper Mississippi ran along the outer edge of civilization and out of the West came only tales of Indians and wild animals.

In the twenties and thirties of the last century travellers from Europe, if they were sufficiently hardy and venturesome, trailed westward on the Ohio and ascended the Mississippi to Galena or Fort Crawford or Fort Snelling. They brought all sorts of predilections and prejudices. A few came with dyspepsia or with a monocled mind, some — as Latrobe puts it — “with their eyes shut and mouths open”; but for the most part they came in a high spirit of adventure and with keen appreciation for the wild charm of a new and beautiful country.

The course of the Mississippi below St. Louis often received the curses of travellers like Dickens who did not go north of that city or Captain Marryat, another Englishman who burst out:

I hate the Mississippi, and as I look down upon its wild and filthy waters, boiling and eddying, and reflect how uncertain is travelling in this region of high-pressure, and disregard of social rights, I cannot help feeling a disgust at the idea of perishing in such a vile sewer, to be buried in mud, and perhaps to be rooted out again by some pig-nosed alligator.

But the Upper Mississippi and the sea-like prairies that stretched away on either side captivated them all. They sometimes complained of the barbarities and primitiveness of the frontier towns but they returned full of the eulogies of the natural scenery. And most of them straightway proceeded to write books, which made pleasant reading for the stay-at-homes and provided valuable sources of information for readers of later generations.

The two volumes of descriptions by Charles Joseph Latrobe are among the most entertaining and valuable of these publications. Under the title *The Rambler in North America* he drew word pictures of the scenes and peoples of the time that are unusually vivid and accurate. Latrobe, while born in London, was of Huguenot extraction and his Latin temperament shows at every turn of the page.

He came from Europe with Pourtales, a young Swiss count, in 1832 and on shipboard they formed a friendship with Washington Irving who was just then returning to America after an absence of seventeen years. They travelled in New England with Irving and in the fall made a tour with him from St.

Louis to the southwest into the Pawnee hunting grounds. Irving has described this expedition in *A Tour of the Prairies* and he introduces Latrobe in the following fashion:

Another of my fellow-travellers was Mr. L., an Englishman by birth, but descended from a foreign stock; and who had all the buoyancy and accommodating spirit of a native of the Continent. Having rambled over many countries, he had become, to a certain degree, a citizen of the world, easily adapting himself to any change. He was a man of a thousand occupations; a botanist, a geologist, a hunter of beetles and butterflies, a musical amateur, a sketcher of no mean pretensions, in short, a complete virtuoso; added to which, he was a very indefatigable, if not always a very successful, sportsman. Never had a man more irons in the fire, and, consequently, never was a man more busy nor more cheerful.

In the fall of 1833, Latrobe with two companions visited the Upper Mississippi, and portions of his account of that trip are reprinted in this number of **THE PALIMPSEST**. An amiable and sympathetic observer, he caught and put into words the spirit of the French and Canadian boatmen, the wild beauty of the river and its shores, the joy of primitive camps, the fantastic glory of the prairie fire. Perhaps it was the spirit of adventure that took Latrobe a few years later to Australia where he became superintendent of the district of Port Phillip. When that district was organized as Victoria he administered its affairs as lieutenant governor.

ROMANCE AND THE PLOW

It is interesting to note the changes in the Mississippi Valley remarked by successive travellers. The early voyageurs passed only forts and Indian encampments. Then — particularly in the thirties — primitive villages sprang up; rough, western towns, picturesque but with few accommodations for the traveller. As migration increased these towns took on more of the trappings of civilization. Order and government became installed. When Latrobe passed up the river there was no Wisconsin, no Iowa, no Minnesota. The territory of Michigan extended to the river, and beyond it was no organized government. Two years later, when Murray came by, Michigan held sway over the entire territory but a year later it yielded the western domain to the Territory of Wisconsin. The territory of Iowa was formed in 1838 to include the land west of the Mississippi running north to the Canadian boundary; and not until 1846 did Iowa content itself with its present limits.

Whites came with increasing numbers, till they filled up with their handiwork the wild reaches where the red men had followed the trail of the bison, where wolves had howled at night outside the camp of white adventurers, and where the prairie fire had swept its course.

The travellers now stopped at village taverns and finally at city hotels. They came to see people, not scenery, and each year they observed a land more like

that from which they had come — settled, comfortable, and conventional. The freshness, the untamed, bloodstirring wildness was slipping away. Romance still rested in the valley but it was changing its form. It was now the romance of achievement, of subjugation. Through human activities the bison and bear and wolf vanished, and in their place stood mild-eyed cattle, subservient horses, and countless and prosaic pigs and chickens. The beauty of the river bank was broken by power plants and warehouses and railway trackage. Forests dwindled and virgin prairie grass gave place to far reaching acres of rippling corn fields.

It is a romantic story — this change — and a story of great human appeal, for to mankind the story of itself is always the most interesting. But with prosperity often comes dullness. The magic spirit of romance burns high when the struggle is on, but it pales with possession. As opulence increases, romance dies. Fortunate it is that nature has its own defenses and clings to its own romance. Rivers still flow in their downward courses, wooded ravines escape the plow, bits of original prairie survive, and here and there places of marked beauty so engage the deeper appreciation of mankind that they are preserved as parks. And so mankind, if it is to retain its idealism, must find in literature and history the spur and incentive to escape the plow of materialism and hold fast to the romance in life.

J. C. P.

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