

# *The* PALIMPSEST



Fox Indians Watch Steamboat Virginia Pass Dubuque in 1823

A Glimpse of Iowa In 1823

Published Monthly by

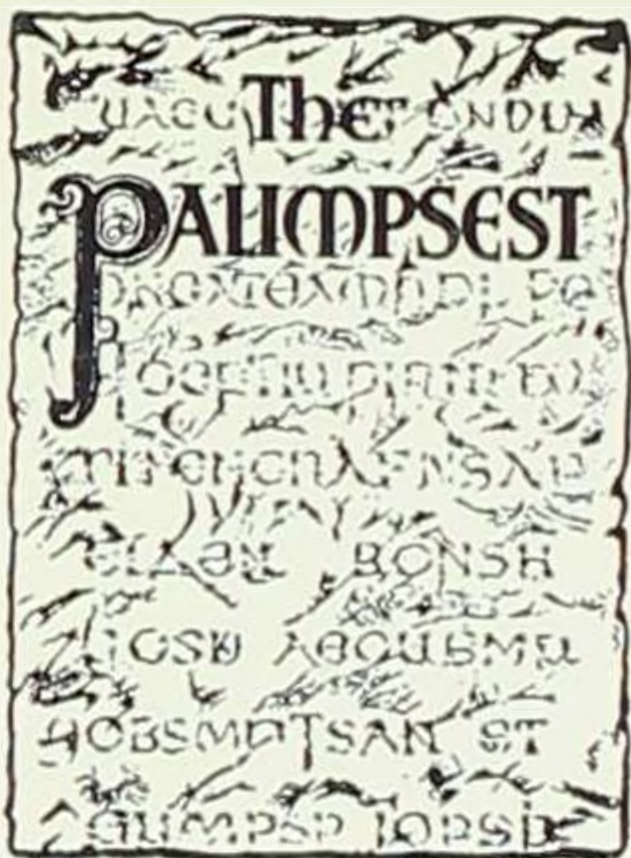
The State Historical Society of Iowa

Iowa City, Iowa

DECEMBER 1969

SPECIAL BELTRAMI ISSUE — FIFTY CENTS





## *The Meaning of Palimpsest*

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material 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 record 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.

## *Contents*

### A GLIMPSE OF IOWA IN 1823

Giacomo Constantine Beltrami 657

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Italian Exile In Iowaland 661

J. C. BELTRAMI

In Quest of a True Source 713

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

## *Illustrations*

The illustrations used appeared originally in the 1828 English edition of Beltrami's *Pilgrimage In Europe and America*. The cover picture was painted by James McBurney for the Federal Bank and Trust Company of Dubuque. The back cover is from A. T. Andreas' *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota*, 1874.

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THE PALIMPSEST is published monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City, William J. Petersen, Editor. It is printed in Iowa City and distributed free to Society members, depositories, and exchanges. This is the December, 1969, issue and is Number 12 of Volume 50. Second class postage paid at Iowa City, Iowa.

PRICE—Included in Membership. Regular issues, 25¢; Special—50¢

MEMBERSHIP — By application. Annual Dues \$5.00

ADDRESS—The State Historical Society, 402 Iowa Avenue  
Iowa City, Iowa 52240



# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. L

ISSUED IN DECEMBER 1969

No. 12

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## Giacomo Constantine Beltrami

The student of Iowa history owes much to the private explorers, both foreign and American, for the contributions they have made to our knowledge of Iowaland prior to the beginning of permanent white settlement in 1833. Too often the contributions of these adventurous souls have been overshadowed, and hence overlooked, because of the magnitude of such expeditions as those of Lewis and Clarke and Zebulon M. Pike. And yet, several of these adventurous foreign travelers have left an invaluable record of their wanderings when Iowa was very young.

Outstanding among these early travelers was Giacomo Constantine Beltrami, an Italian exile and judge, who journeyed through Europe in 1822 and then crossed the tempestuous Atlantic and wrote his first letter from Philadelphia on February 28, 1823. This letter (as were all his European and American letters) was addressed to his friend Countess Compagnoni, born Passeri, who appears to be a confidante of the voluble Italian.



At Pittsburgh he met Major Lawrence Taliaferro, who was Indian Agent at Fort Snelling from 1819 to 1840. According to Taliaferro:

I was in Washington in 1823 relative to my official connection with the northwestern tribes of Minnesota; whilst on my return, in March, to my post, I found a note, or card, at a hotel in Pittsburgh, from Beltrami, asking permission to bear me company to the Falls of St. Anthony. When I saw him, his presence and manner at once obtained my confidence, and leave was granted to do so.

What of the background of this exuberant Italian? According to Taliaferro: "Beltrami was six feet high, of commanding appearance and some forty-five years of age; proud of bearing, and quick of temper, high spirited, but always the gentleman."

In Vol. II of *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, A. J. Hill wrote of Beltrami in 1867:

. . . Constantine was bred to the law; and although he possessed a restless spirit, desirous of adventure, and that when he was just ten years old the great public commotions, that afterward shook all Europe were beginning, yet his natural talent prompted him to the acquisition of the Latin and Greek literature, to which afterward, from his experience in public affairs, was added a rich store of geographical knowledge, and, finally, a familiarity with the modern languages. The courage and adventurous will that shone in him at forty-four impelled him, in his youthful vigor, to abandon the paternal house for military affairs; and being brought to the notice of men in high office, friends of the family, and shortly opening the way by his own abilities, he became vice inspector of the armies; but,



disgusted with occupations so far below his higher aspirations, he returned to civil pursuits. At the age of twenty-eight, in 1807, he became chancellor of the French departments of the Stura and the Tanaro, and soon after Judge of the court at Udine. There, by his fine intellect and untiring zeal, he gained the praises of his superiors, who testified to him their high satisfactions, as appears by many of their letters . . .

After holding various judicial posts for which he showed unusual ability, Beltrami became enmeshed in the dark political intrigues that were shaking France, Italy, and Austria. He retired to his estates at Filotrano, whence he made occasional excursions to Naples, Rome, and Florence, between the years 1816 and 1819. He appears to have become involved in the Carbonari, a revolutionary group organized about 1811 to establish a united Italian Republic, and was exiled in 1821.

It was while awaiting transportation up the Mississippi from St. Louis that Beltrami became entranced with the idea of visiting the Indian tribes of the northwest and perhaps discovering the source of the Mississippi. At that very time, the steamboat *Virginia* was taking on passengers and supplies for the military posts on the Upper Mississippi at the St. Louis levee. Should she succeed in her voyage, the *Virginia* would be the first steamboat to navigate the waters of the Upper Mississippi! The prospect of going on this adventure was anticipated with keen relish by Beltrami.

On April 21, 1823, the *Virginia* backed out



from the St. Louis levee and churned upstream.

In addition to Beltrami and Taliaferro, a woman missionary and a Kentucky family, bound for the lead mines at Galena, were the only white passengers aboard the 109-ton sternwheeler. The *Virginia* had been chartered primarily to carry government supplies to the posts on the Upper Mississippi—Fort Edwards, Fort Armstrong, Fort Crawford, and Fort St. Anthony, renamed Fort Snelling in 1825.

There were only 121,797 inhabitants in Illinois and Missouri in 1820. There were a few huts at Clarksville and Louisiana, the northernmost towns in Missouri. The region north of the new state of Missouri was referred to by Beltrami as "Savage Lands."

Perhaps the most colorful passenger for Beltrami was Great Eagle, a Sauk chief, who had been prevailed upon to board the *Virginia* while his fellow tribesmen walked along the banks. Great Eagle left the boat after a dispute with the pilot of the *Virginia*. When the *Virginia* reached Fort Edwards, Great Eagle was there exchanging furs with the traders of the Southwest Company. Since Fort Edwards was located opposite the mouth of the Des Moines River in Illinois, Beltrami's journal of the Iowa country begins with his visit to the Sauk village at this point.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN



## Italian Exile In Iowaland

I visited their camp: their flying tents or huts, which are their only houses, are covered with mats or skins. The Canadians, who may be considered as the classical nomenclators of these countries, call them lodges. They are elliptical. Each of them generally contains a family, sometimes two, with or without their relations; they sleep in a circle upon skins, mats, or dried grass. The fire is made in the centre, as among the ancients, who gave the name of *imagines fumosæ* to the pictures and statues placed in the room containing the fire, from their being blackened by the smoke. In the Indian huts the smoke passes through the round opening in the centre of the roof, the *foramina vel oculi*, by which the light was admitted into the temples and houses of the Romans.

A copper or tin boiler which they get in exchange from the traders, often supported only by a wooden fork stuck in the ground, pieces of wood hollowed into spoons, bits of the bark of trees formed into plates and dishes, the horns of buffalos or other animals cut into cups, constitute the whole of their *batterie de cuisine*, their plate, and their table service. A stake supplies the place of a spit, their fingers serve for forks, the earth for a



table, and a skin or the beautiful carpet of nature for their table-cloth.

They all sit indiscriminately around the food with which Providence and their guns supply them. Neither kings, ministers, nor courtiers are treated with any distinction.

In this perfect republic, equality is not less the privilege of animals than men. The dogs, although *illegitimate* and descended from wolves, are seated at the same table with the savages, and at the same *divan*; they partake of the same dishes and sleep on the same beds. I have seen young bears and otters treated as a part of the community.

The faces of the Saukis [Sauk], although exhibiting features characteristic of their savage state, are not disagreeable; and they are rather well made than otherwise. Their size and structure, which are of the middle kind, indicate neither peculiar strength nor weakness. Their heads are rather small; that part called by French anatomists *voute orbitaire*, has in general no hair except a small tuft upon the pineal gland, like that of the Turks; this gives the forehead an appearance of great elevation. Their eyes are small, and their eye-brows thin; the cornea approaches rather to yellow, the pupil to red; they are the link between those of the Orang-outang and ours. Their ears are sufficiently large to bear all the jewels, &c. with which they are adorned: two foxes' tails dangled from those of the Great Eagle. I have seen others



to which were hung bells, heads of birds and dozens of buckles, which penetrated the whole cartilaginous part from top to bottom. Their noses are large and flat, like those of the nations of eastern Asia; their nostrils are pierced and ornamented like their ears. The maxillary bones, or *pommettes*, are very prominent. The under jaw extends outwards on both sides. Their mouths are rather large, their teeth close set, and of the finest enamel; their lips a little inverted. Their necks are regularly formed: they have large bellies and narrow chests, so that their bodies are generally larger below than above. Their feet and hands are well proportioned; their arms are slender: this may be attributed to want of exercise, which checks the development of the muscles; the only part of the body which savages inure to fatigue is the legs, which are therefore more robust than the rest of their frame. Their complexion is copper-coloured, whence they call themselves the *red people*, as a distinction both from whites and blacks. Except the tuft in the head, which we have already remarked, they have no hair on any part of the body. Books, which deal greatly in the marvellous, convert this into an extraordinary phenomenon; but the fact is that, from a superstition common to all savages, they pluck it out, and as they begin at an early age and use the most persevering means for its extirpation, nothing is left but a soft down.

You know that many of our drivers and coach-



men believe that the manes of their horses are haunted by devils who make their nests in them, and that they employ conjurations to drive them away: the Indians, who have the same creed on this point and have neither saints nor *holy water* wherewith to exorcise them, prevent the effect by tearing up the cause by the roots. The Greeks and Romans had similar superstitions, and the Egyptian kings, like others, carefully infused them into the minds of the people the better to enslave them.

You would be astonished, my dear Madam, at the striking coincidences between the character and habits of the Indians and those of the ancient and modern people of the old world, though their country was entirely unknown to the former, and very imperfectly to the latter.

Notwithstanding the continuance of the cold weather, the men had nothing but a single covering of wool or skin, which serves them by day and by night. They throw it about them with extraordinary grace and dexterity, as the Romans did their *pallium*. Their coverings for the feet and legs, which they call *mokasins*, are made of the skin of the roe-buck, buffalo, or elk, and are precisely like the *perones*, *cothurni*, *mulei* and *calcei* of the Greeks and Romans; but in summer they generally go barefoot. In winter they wear a kind of skin or cloth gaiters, like those of the Cimbri in the time of Marius, which they call *mytas*. They wear a covering round the loins; all the rest of the



body, even the head, is naked, whether it rains, hails, or freezes, or the earth is parched with the burning heat of the dog-days.

Their offensive weapons are the bow, the arrow, the pike, the lance, as among the ancients; the axe, the club, the dagger, as among the combatants of the middle ages; the *casse-tête*, the tomahawk, as used by the Tartars of Tamerlane; and the gun used by modern nations.

The shield is their only defensive weapon. It is precisely like that of the early Romans, of leather, round like the *clypeus*, or oval like the *scutum*; but the most singular instance of resemblance is that they paint it as the Romans did, and, like them, trace the origin of their armorial bearings from it; they have already begun to paint upon their tents and elsewhere,—as we do upon the doors or walls of our mansions,—those glorious hieroglyphics formerly painted only upon shields. I have one in my possession which is ornamented with plumes, and bears the head of the *Manitou* or peculiar god of the hero from whom I received it. It is the head of a wild duck, by means of which he expected perhaps to petrify his enemies, as Perseus did with the head of Medusa.

The ephod, from the Hebrew word *aphael*, which signifies to *dress*, was a kind of short tunic with large sleeves. It was first confined to the Jewish high priest, who could not perform his sacerdotal functions without it; and was after-



wards in a manner profaned by David, who had the presumption to wear it; after him it was irreverently worn by the whole family of Gideon; and when this nation addicted itself to idolatry, it became a part of the fashionable dress of every woman of rank. It passed from Asia to Greece, thence to Rome, and lastly to these savage countries; for the species of short tunic with large sleeves which comes down to the girdle of the female Saukis, is precisely like the *ephod*: plates of white metal, fixed upon the part which covers the breast, seem an imitation of the *fibulæ* of the ancients. By their roundness they appear to be an emblem of the sun, which the Peruvians also wore upon their breasts.

A petticoat, fitting close to the body, descends to the bottom of the knees, and their legs are covered with a kind of gaiters, resembling those of the ancient Scythian women. The covering for the feet and legs is distinguished from that of the men only by its elegance: in summer, however, their feet and legs are always uncovered. During the period of youth their forms are attractive, but these flowers soon fade: the evening succeeds to the morning without the interval of noon; for these poor women are the porters, the beasts of burden of the men, who, they say, would lose all dignity and become as vile, abject, and despicable, as the whites, if they condescended to submit to any other occupations than those of hunting and war. There



is no slavery more abject than that of the Indian women. They are looked upon with such contempt, that the greatest insult to an Indian is to say to him "Go, you are a *squaw* (a woman)." It frequently happens that these victims of the instinctive tyranny of man have such a horror of the fate of their sex, that they destroy their daughters at their birth, to save them from the wretched, miserable life which awaits them.

They have very luxuriant hair which they tie into what some people call *catogans*, like the carters and *poissards* of the south of France. Their heads, like those of the men, are uncovered, and, like them, they wear a covering for the body, consisting of a piece of coarse blue or red cloth. This is a recent fashion.

The men and women daub their faces with red, yellow, white, or blue. When they are in mourning they paint the whole face, and even the body, black, during a year; the second year they paint only half; and, at last, merely streak themselves with it in various patterns. Both men and women wear ornaments on the neck and arms: some wear what we call *margaritines*, that is to say, small glass beads, or composition trinkets, which the traders sell them in exchange; others, the teeth or claws of wild beasts:—here, you will admit, is something of every age—the most antique, the ancient, the middle ages, the modern, and the very modern.



Enoch tells us that, before the deluge, the angel Azazel taught young women the art of painting their persons. Isaiah alludes to the same fact in respect to those of Sion; the Greek and Roman women borrowed it from the Asiatics, and Juvenal represents the effeminate priests of Athens as painted with white and red. Ambrose exclaims loudly against the vanity of this custom; the famous monk Hildebrand, (Gregory VII), imputes this vice with many others to the women of his time, the more highly to exalt the virtues of Matilda, who gave him pretty substantial proofs of her gratitude. Before the time of Peter the Great, the Muscovites striped their faces with all sorts of colours: even in our time, this is practised by many of the nations of Asia; and our ladies, and even our *dandies*, seldom blow their noses without leaving some of their complexion upon their handkerchiefs. It is not a little singular that antimony is an ingredient in the most ancient *rouge*, as well as of that which the Indians regard as the paint *de grand parade*.

That the female savages should wear necklaces, like the Greeks and Romans, is not extraordinary, for they are worn everywhere; but what does surprise one is, that like the women of antiquity they offer them to the departed spirits of their relations, of which I have been an eye-witness.

The custom of wearing necklaces, prevalent among the men, reminds us of that of the Egyp-



tians; it is still more singular, that their bracelets are precisely like the *armillæ* of the Romans, and that they wear them on the upper part of the arm, as they did.

I saw one of these tribes break up their tents to go in quest of a new domicile, or forest. In half an hour everything was ready for their departure.

The lustres, wardrobe, sideboard, equipage, plate, kitchen utensils, &c. occupied the centre of the canoe; the house, that is to say, the mats and skins for the tent, served to cover them; the children, the dogs, the bears, &c. were placed opposite; the men on either side; and the women, at the two extremities, exercised the functions of pilots and sailors: sometimes, however, the men row too.

Their vessel is the hollowed trunk of a tree, and the oars resemble those of our ancestors,—such as artists put into the hands of painted or sculptured deities of rivers. The ease with which they manage these *liburnicæ* is astonishing; and considering how narrow they are, how unsteady on the water, and how heavily they are laden, it is surprising that they so seldom upset.

On the evening of the 6th we set out from Fort Edward[s], where we were treated by the officers with much politeness; we soon returned, however, for the steam-boat, being too heavily laden, was unable to make a very difficult and dangerous passage at a place called the Middle of the Rapids of the Moine [Des Moines], nine miles above the



Fort. By great good luck we escaped from a rock which might have dashed our steam-boat to pieces; it was only slightly damaged.

On the 7th, while the steam-boat was getting ready, I made a little shooting excursion. I killed a monstrous serpent, almost entirely black, spotted with yellow; it is called by the Indians *piacoiba* (i.e. terrible animal). They dread it more than the rattle-snake, though its bite is not so dangerous, because it glides silently and insidiously among the briars and grass, and its attacks are unexpected; whereas, the other gives notice of its approach by the sound of that substance with which nature has providentially furnished its tail, that man may have time to escape its pursuit. I have preserved its skin, because I do not recollect to have seen one like it in the museums I have visited, either in this world or our own.

The Indians, at the sight of my prize, welcomed me as if I had been a beneficent *Manitou*. Their nakedness and their wandering life render *wamenduska* (reptiles) objects of great terror to them, and yet no one dares kill them, for they believe that they are malevolent spirits, who would visit their families and camps with every kind of misfortune if they attempted to destroy them.

The next day we ascended, though not without difficulty, these rapids, which continue for the space of twenty-one miles, when we saw another encampment of Saukis upon the eastern bank.



Nine miles higher, on the western bank, are the ruins of the old Fort Madison.

The president of that name had established an *entrepôt* of the most necessary articles for the Indians, to be exchanged for their peltry. The object of the government was not speculation, but, by its example, to fix reasonable prices among the traders; for, in the United States, everybody traffics *except* the government. Fearing, however, the effect of any restraint on the trade of private individuals, it has withdrawn its factories and agents, and left the field open to the South West Company, which has been joined by a rival company, and now monopolizes the commerce of almost the whole savage region of the valleys of the Mississippi and the Missouri. Its two principal centres of operations are St. Louis and Michilimackinac, on lake Huron.

At a short distance from this fort, on the same side, is the river of the *Bête Puante* [Skunk], and farther on, that of the Yahowa [Iowa], so-called from the name of the savage tribes which inhabited its banks. It is ninety-seven miles from Fort Edward, and three hundred from St. Louis.

The fields were beginning to resume their verdure; the meadows, groves, and forests were reviving at the return of spring. Never had I seen nature more beautiful, more majestic, than in this vast domain of silence and solitude. Never did the warbling of the birds so expressively declare



the renewal of their innocent loves. Every object was as new to my imagination as to my eye.

All around me breathed that melancholy, which, by turns sweet and bitter, exercises so powerful an influence over minds endowed with sensibility. How ardently, how often, did I long to be alone!

Wooded islands, disposed in beautiful order by the hand of nature, continually varied the picture; the course of the river, which had become calm and smooth, reflected the dazzling rays of the sun like glass; smiling hills formed a delightful contrast with the immense prairies, which are like oceans, and the monotony of which is relieved by isolated clusters of thick and massy trees. These enchanting scenes lasted from the river Yahowa till we reached a place which presents a distant and exquisitely blended view of what is called Rocky [Rock] Island, three hundred and seventy-two miles from St. Louis, and one hundred and sixty from Fort Edward. Fort Armstrong, at this spot, is constructed upon a *plateau*, at an elevation of about fifty feet above the level of the river, and rewards the spectator who ascends it with the most magical variety of scenery. It takes its name from Mr. [John] Armstrong, who was secretary at war at the time of its construction.

The eastern bank at the mouth of Rocky [Rock] River was lined with an encampment of Indians, called Foxes. Their features, dress, weapons, customs, and language, are similar to



those of the Saukis, whose allies they are, in peace and war. On the western shore of the Mississippi, a semicircular hill, clothed with trees and under-wood, encloses a fertile spot carefully cultivated by the garrison, and formed into fields and kitchen gardens. The fort saluted us on our arrival with four discharges of cannon, and the Indians paid us the same compliment with their muskets. The echo, which repeated them a thousand times, was most striking from its contrast with the deep repose of these deserts.

We arrived on the 10th, about noon. After dinner I visited the Saukis, three miles to the east, on the north bank of the Rocky River. Here they had formed their most extensive encampment, the only one they inhabit during the summer.

In this village, if I may call it so, I witnessed, for the first time, the dexterity with which the Indians handle their bows. Children, nine or ten years of age, hit a small piece of money of six sous, which I had fixed up for them to aim at, at a distance of twenty-five paces,—often at the second trial. At last I was obliged to remove it to thirty-five, or they would soon have exhausted the little purse I had filled for this visit. The chiefs offered us a slight refreshment; it consisted of bear's flesh dried in the smoke, which I thought more delicious than our hams, and of roots, resembling chicory, but less bitter and very highly flavoured: they call them *pokinota*.



They had completed their toilet, so that their faces exhibited every variety of colour. Some, by the hieroglyphics painted on their bodies, reminded me of the mysteries of the ancient Egyptian priests. Those who favoured us with the dance called the *Medicine Dance*, or *Wakaw Watà*, had their bodies covered with them.

As the only people the Indians ever heard of are the French, English, Spaniards, and Americans, and as their conception of the world is confined to those nations, the Saukis were much astonished when I told them that I did not belong to any one of them. I made them believe that I came from the moon: their astonishment was then converted into veneration; for they adore this planet as a beneficent deity, whose rays enable them to hunt, fish, and travel, during the night. Whatever is useful seems to be an object of worship in every part of the world.

This *medicine dance* is the offspring of political knavery and superstitious folly and credulity. It has some analogy with the mysteries of Eleusis, and with others which turn the brains of some of the moderns. The initiated are enclosed within a parallelogram, formed by a small barricade covered with skins: the profane may witness the ceremony, but at a distance.

As I wished to know the whole secret, I determined to try the result of a clandestine entrance; accordingly, I glided into the enclosure, but was



turned out, although a son or inhabitant of the moon. A sort of president, whose head is adorned with plumes and with the horns of a buffalo, the points of which are turned inwards like those on the mitre of Aaron and Melchisedeck, takes his station, surrounded by a band of musicians, east of the enclosure. At the west, two warriors, armed with bows and arrows, guard the entrance. A master of ceremonies, with a club in his hand, stands in the centre, and receives the orders of the president. The elect, male and female, (for some were of the latter sex), are seated on the north and south, according to his or her seniority or respective rank.

An orator, (for there must be one everywhere), placed at some distance on the left of the president, every now and then raised his eyebrows, as if under the influence of celestial inspiration, and shewed by every movement of his agitated body his impatience to speak,—perhaps to hear the delightful sound of *bravo* or *encore*. As they have no written language, there is no secretary; this is a great defect: in any other country, a session without a *procès verbal* would be absolutely null and void.

I cannot tell what the president said in his opening speech, for nobody could understand him, not even, I think, his neophytes; but the orator, who almost immediately addressed the assembly, must unquestionably have spoken well, for he equalled



in eloquent emphasis the greatest orators of Greece or Rome. The vehemence and animation of the oratory of savages excite astonishment, when contrasted with their taciturnity and apathy in the common transactions of life. Sometimes the inspiration is so powerful, that they tremble in every limb, like the Shakers. I could neither understand nor guess the meaning of his speech; but I conclude that with these superstitious people, as with many others, fanaticism holds the place of reason, and blindness, of belief.

On a signal given by the president, the musicians then played upon their horns and drums; the latter, beaten with a stick covered with leather, produce a very touching sound; but the *nenice* and *ululatus* to which they beat time, were torturing to the ears, and truly terrific.

At this beautiful music, the president, the doorkeepers, the orator, the male and female elect, form a circle; and the master of the ceremonies, from the centre, directs the necessary formalities. Each carries in his right hand the skin of an otter, beaver, or some other favourite animal, made in the form of a bag, open at the two ends; and at the moment the president raises his in the air, the *great ceremony* begins.

The president, making frightful contortions, and fervently stammering out a few ejaculatory prayers, first blows into one end of his bag, the other end of which is turned towards his right-hand



neighbour. At this instant, the latter suddenly falls to the ground; no matter in what direction, or whether he break his neck or not, for he is considered dead.

He is only restored to life by degrees, and in proportion as his exorcist—the same person by whose influence he fell—pronounces some expiatory formulæ, which operate upon him like galvanism: the resuscitated person is then completely purified *ab omni maculâ*. Although he retains the same body, the bag and the ceremony have given him a new soul: a doctrine quite contrary to that of the *metempsychosis*, which transfuses an old soul into a new body; it is also opposed to the creed of the savages of several nations, who seem to hold the Pythagorean hypothesis about death.

If I may presume to give my opinion on this farce, I think the *medicine dance* is only a spiritual medicine, given in this transitory life to prepare the soul for a more successful aspiration to a celestial and eternal one.

The president and his neighbours, and the other persons of the mystic chain, become successively active and passive, until the president himself falls, dies, and is restored to life in his turn; he then closes the dance by declaring that *la séance est levée*.

I expected that my philharmonical friends and the master of the ceremonies would have acted the same part; but either they have some other mode



of purification, or they purify themselves by sympathy, like bodies attracted by the force of electricity.

Would that I were a painter! But then perhaps my observations would have been superficial. Let people say what they please, Pangloss is a great man; everything is certainly for the best. There is only one exception . . . . with that you are acquainted, my dear Countess.

In the midst of this laughable scene, I suffered much from not being allowed to laugh. My interpreter, who saw what I endured from the violence I did to my inclination, intimated to me that its indulgence might condemn me to an *auto da fé*. One of the actors threw himself into such violent contortions, that he tore his face; perhaps to serve as a *procès verbal* (in default of secretary) of the session, till a renewal of the ceremonies.

I have been told that no one can obtain admission into this fraternity without the requisite qualities, of which that of a fortunate dreamer is the most meritorious. Our lottery gamblers, and dealers in political systems, might become successful candidates.

I have also been told that those who propose themselves for admission make large offerings, and that they are sometimes obliged to give all they possess to the order. Religious systems are to be found at all times, and in all places; but it appears that the salvation of the soul must be paid for



under all;—in modern as well as in ancient times, in the new world and in the old, among savage and among civilized nations. I was told, and I believe it, that in this camp, and in others where they are stationary during part of the year, there are houses in which young girls are appointed to watch over a fire which burns in the centre; like the Roman and Peruvian vestals, the guardians of the Prytaneum at Athens, and the Guebres. It appears that they consecrate it to the sun, or consider it as the emblem of that life-giving luminary.

A bag of such miraculous properties as the *medicine bag*, deserved all my attention; I therefore exerted every effort to obtain one. Vain, however, would have been the veneration I expressed for the prodigies it performed, had I not made a present of good whiskey both to the person who gave it me, and to the high-priest, as a bribe for his sanction. This was the first convincing proof I saw of the resistless, and, as you will soon perceive, fatal allurements of spirituous liquors to the savages.

The next day we quitted Rocky [Rock] Island, where the gentlemen of the garrison were as polite to us as those of Fort Edward[s].

The rapids above this island, which is three miles in length from north to south, are stronger and extend farther than those of the Moine [Des Moines]; and had not Providence come to our aid and swelled the waters of the river for two days,



the steam-boat would perhaps have remained nailed to the rock upon which it had already struck.

Whilst the captain allowed some repose to the crew, who were exhausted with fatigue, I paid a visit to the forests as usual. It was generally thought that I should turn savage, and the captain, as you have seen, had done his best to convert it into a reality: but this time I acted with more precaution.

Chance almost immediately threw a rattle-snake in my way. At first it fled from me; it then stopped, and was in the act of looking at me, when I shot it through the head. I have preserved its skin. It is almost five feet in length, and has six rows of rattles, which indicate its age by the same number of years. Although the head is crushed, the organization of the mouth is still visible: it inflicts the mortal wound with a tooth, which it uses as a cat does its claws. It dips it in the poison by passing it, at the moment it bites, across the vesicle which contains the liquid.

At the distance of six miles from the rapids, we met with another tribe of Foxes encamped on the western bank. Higher up, after passing the rivers *la Pomme* and *la Garde* [Wapsipinicon], which run westward, we saw a place called the Death's-heads; a field of battle where the Foxes defeated the Kikassias, whose heads they fixed upon poles as trophies of their victory. We stopped at the



entrance of the river *la Fièvre* [Fever or Galena], a name in perfect conformity with the effect of the bad air which prevails there. It flows from the east, and is navigable for about one hundred miles.

At seven miles from its mouth the Indians formerly collected lead, which they found in abundance scattered over the surface of the earth. They converted it to no other use than that of making bullets, as they wanted them. The government, which never loses sight of its interests when opportunity offers, purchased, or rather obliged the Foxes to sell, these lands, consisting of fifteen square miles; it has thus secured to itself the rich mines, which it has granted out to adventurers, who pay the tenth of the net produce of the lead. It has established an agent there to watch over its rights.

A whole family from the interior of Kentucky have come to establish themselves at a distance of thirteen or fourteen hundred miles from their home. They were in the steam-boat, with their arms and baggage, cats and dogs, hens and turkeys; the children too had their own stock. The facility, the indifference with which the Americans undertake distant and difficult emigrations, are perfectly amazing. Their spirit of speculation would carry them to the infernal regions, if another Sybil led the way with a golden bough.

A cross-road soon brought me to the mines. The rocks are almost one mass of lead, and the ore



produces from seventy-five to eighty per cent. The site is a perfect Thebais. I congratulated this good family upon the prosperity they seemed to anticipate; and I wished Mrs. R . . . much more success in her intended biblical missions among the savages than she had met with in the steam-boat. A young man had turned into utter ridicule both her and her attempt to convert him. She was one of those good women who devote themselves to God when they have lost all hope of pleasing men, and whose fervour, like that of almost all bigots, is mysticism. I must detain you one instant longer at these mines, to describe to you, as I heard it, one of the most remarkable phenomena of nature.

A rattle-snake was killed there with a hundred and forty young ones in its belly, several of which contained other young ones. Major [John] Anderson, agent of the mines and a man of unimpeachable veracity, told me this as a positive fact, of which he had been an eye-witness.

Twelve miles higher, upon the western bank of the Mississippi, are other lead mines, called the mines of Dubuques.

A Canadian of that name was the friend of a tribe of Foxes, who have a kind of village here. In 1788, these Indians granted him permission to work the mines. His establishment flourished; but the fatal sisters cut the thread of his days and of his fortune.

He had no children. The attachment of the



Indians was confined to him; and, to get rid as soon as possible of the importunities of those who wanted to succeed him, they burnt his furnaces, warehouses, and dwelling-house; and by this energetic measure, expressed the determination of the red people to have no other whites among them than such as they liked.

The relations and creditors of Dubuques appealed to the congress of the United States to secure to themselves the adjudication of the property of these mines. It is said, that their claim was founded upon a treaty of cession or acquisition between Dubuques and the Indians; that this treaty had been sanctioned by an act of the baron de Carondelet, the Spanish governor of Louisiana, west of the Missississippi,—and that general [William Henry] Harrison had confirmed it when he took possession of it for the United States, in 1804: but the congress decided in favour of the Indians. What belongs to the Indians does, in fact, belong to the United States; and it is not usual to give judgment against our own interests. Augustus refused to decide in a case in which he would have been both party and judge, and lost his cause. So liberal a government as the United States should have imitated his example.

The Indians still keep exclusive possession of these mines, and with such jealousy, that I was obliged to have recourse to the all-powerful whiskey to obtain permission to see them.



They melt the lead into holes which they dig in the rock, to reduce it into pigs. They exchange it with the traders for articles of the greatest necessity; but they carry it themselves to the other side of the river, which they will not suffer them to pass. Notwithstanding these precautions, the mines are so valuable, and the Americans so enterprising, that I much question whether the Indians will long retain possession of them.

Dubuques reposes, with royal state, in a leaden chest contained in a mausoleum of wood, which the Indians erected to him upon the summit of a small hill that overlooks their camps and commands the river.

This man has become their idol, because he possessed, or pretended to possess, an antidote to the bite of the rattle-snake. Nothing but artifice and delusion can render the red people friendly to the whites; for, both from instinct, and from feelings transmitted from father to son, they cordially despise and hate them.

A very respectable gentleman, a friend of Dubuques, attempted to persuade me that this juggler was in the habit of taking rattle-snakes into his hands, and that by speaking to them authoritatively, in a language which they *understood*, he could tame them and render them as gentle as doves. I merely observed that I believed what he asserted, because he said he had seen it; but if I saw it with my own eyes I should not believe it.



These people, proud as they are of their independence, are so inclined to superstition (the inseparable companion of implicit subjection) that they would become the most abject slaves, if they were civilized after the fashion of the Jesuits. In fact, these reverend fathers had rendered the Indians of la Plata so subservient to their will, that they induced them to revolt against *legitimacy*. Whenever this mystical body of men present themselves to my thoughts, even in these wild regions, I cannot help lamenting the blindness and false policy which are endeavouring to re-establish their domination over the world.

To form a correct opinion of what has been, it would be sufficient to recollect what all the potentates of Christendom, and an enlightened pope, unanimously declared against them; and what had been said at an earlier period by Urban VIII, when, in 1630, he suppressed the scandalous order of the Jesuitesses: but the knowledge that the Loyolists were the mortal enemies of all other religious bodies, only because they were more religious than themselves, and opposed the universal despotism which it was their policy to organize over consciences and over empires;—this knowledge might surely convince the most obstinate and fanatical persons of the nature and purpose of the zeal which influences these gentlemen.

I neither am, nor can be, the personal enemy of the Jesuits; for I was not in being when they were



expelled from the whole Catholic world; but as I am the friend of public tranquility and of religion, I cannot be theirs. While they professed poverty and humility and called themselves the *company of Jesus*, they insinuated themselves into courts, and encouraged every vice that prevailed in them; perhaps for the very purpose of bringing them into contempt, and thus promoting the accomplishment of their ambitious views; they have been one of the grand causes of every revolution which has convulsed society, and have vitally wounded religion by the scandal they have occasioned, and by their efforts to secure to themselves the monopoly both of commerce and of faith.

"The morality of Jesus Christ," says a holy father of the church, "is pure and severe, but simple and popular; it is not propounded as a deep and exclusive science: he reduces it to maxims, adapts it to the comprehension of the most ignorant, and confirms it by his example. Mild and condescending, indulgent, merciful, charitable, the friend of the poor and the oppressed; he affects neither the pomp of eloquence, nor the rigour of asceticism; neither austere manners, nor a reserved, mysterious deportment. He promises peace and happiness to those who will practise his precepts, but he does not pretend to compel them. The faith he requires is rational and free; he has no object but the glory of God, his father, the sanctification of man, the salvation and the final



happiness of the world. He is poor and humble, and his kingdom is not of this world." Let any one decide how far the morality of the Jesuits accords with this.

It is urged that they are necessary to the world, in its present state of corruption. It was not, however, by the ministry of obstinate, intolerant, ambitious men, that Jesus Christ undertook to reform mankind: the choice of his apostles shews the contrary. Such men, wherever they have any influence over kings or nations, are calculated only to plunge the world still more deeply into disorder and misery; and which accounts for the English re-establishing the Jesuits on the continent.

My pen was struck motionless during about forty miles; nor amidst the variety of objects that every moment solicited my attention and excited my astonishment, could I determine where to fix my choice: at length a place which might very appropriately be called *Longue Vue* [North Buena Vista], decided me at once. Twelve small isolated mountains present themselves in defile, and project one behind another, like side-scenes. They are intersected by small valleys; each has its rivulet, which divides it, and reflects from its limpid streams the beauty of the trees by which its banks are adorned. These hills exhibit a mixture of the gloomy and the gay, while those which appear at the back of the scene are veiled with magical effect in the transparent mist of the horizon. On the



eastern bank a verdant meadow rises with gentle slope to a distant prospect, formed and bounded by a small chain of abrupt mountains. Little islands, studded with clumps of trees, among which the steam-boat was winding its course, appeared like the most enchanting gardens. It would be difficult anywhere to find a picture in which the pleasing and the romantic predominate with such delightful alternation, and such perfect harmony. One would think that it had been designed by art aided by the resources of nature, or by nature aided by the devices of art.

A little above the river Turkey, which flows from the west, and is navigable to a considerable distance inland, is an old village which the Foxes have deserted. Here terminates the pretended territorial jurisdiction of these savages; I say pretended, for savages hunt wherever they find no obstacle; which is sometimes the cause of, or at least the pretext for, the bloody wars by which they are continually destroying each other.

The true name of these savages is Outhagamis [Meskwaki]. That of Foxes (Re[y]nards) is a nick-name, given them by the first Frenchmen who discovered these countries: it was probably significant of their resemblance to these animals; and indeed they are no blockheads. Their number is much diminished. It scarcely amounts to more than sixteen hundred, who, like the Saukis, are distributed into four tribes.





GIACOMO CONSTANTINE BELTRAMI  
1779 - 1855

A brilliant Italian legal and literary savant, who, after being exiled from his native land for his efforts to unify his country, embarked on an adventurous tour of Europe and America that ultimately led him to Iowaland and the sources of the Mississippi. His colorful exploits occurred in 1823, ten years before the beginning of permanent white settlement in Iowa.



A  
PILGRIMAGE  
IN  
EUROPE AND AMERICA,  
LEADING TO  
**THE DISCOVERY**  
OF  
THE SOURCES OF THE MISSISSIPPI  
AND BLOODY RIVER;  
WITH A DESCRIPTION OF  
THE WHOLE COURSE OF THE FORMER,  
AND OF  
THE OHIO.

---

By J. C. BELTRAMI, Esq.

FORMERLY JUDGE OF A ROYAL COURT IN THE EX-KINGDOM OF ITALY.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:  
PRINTED FOR HUNT AND CLARKE,  
YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

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1828.

Title page of the original English edition in the Library of the  
State Historical Society of Iowa.



REFERENCE  
TO THE  
PLATES OF INDIAN ORNAMENTS, &c.

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PLATE I.

- 1 A Medicine Sack, made of the coat of an animal.
- 2 A Pouch (Sioux).
- 3 A Knife-sheath (Cypowais).
- 4 A Woman's Apron-pouch.

[All these ornaments are embroidered with porcupine quills].

PLATE II.

- 1 A War Pipe (Sioux).
- 2 A Scalp of a Sioux, given to M. Beltrami by the Great Eagle Chief of the Cypowais.
- 3 A Necklace made of the claws of the White Eagle.
- 4 A Pipe-bowl (Saukis).
- 5 A Knife-sheath (Sioux).

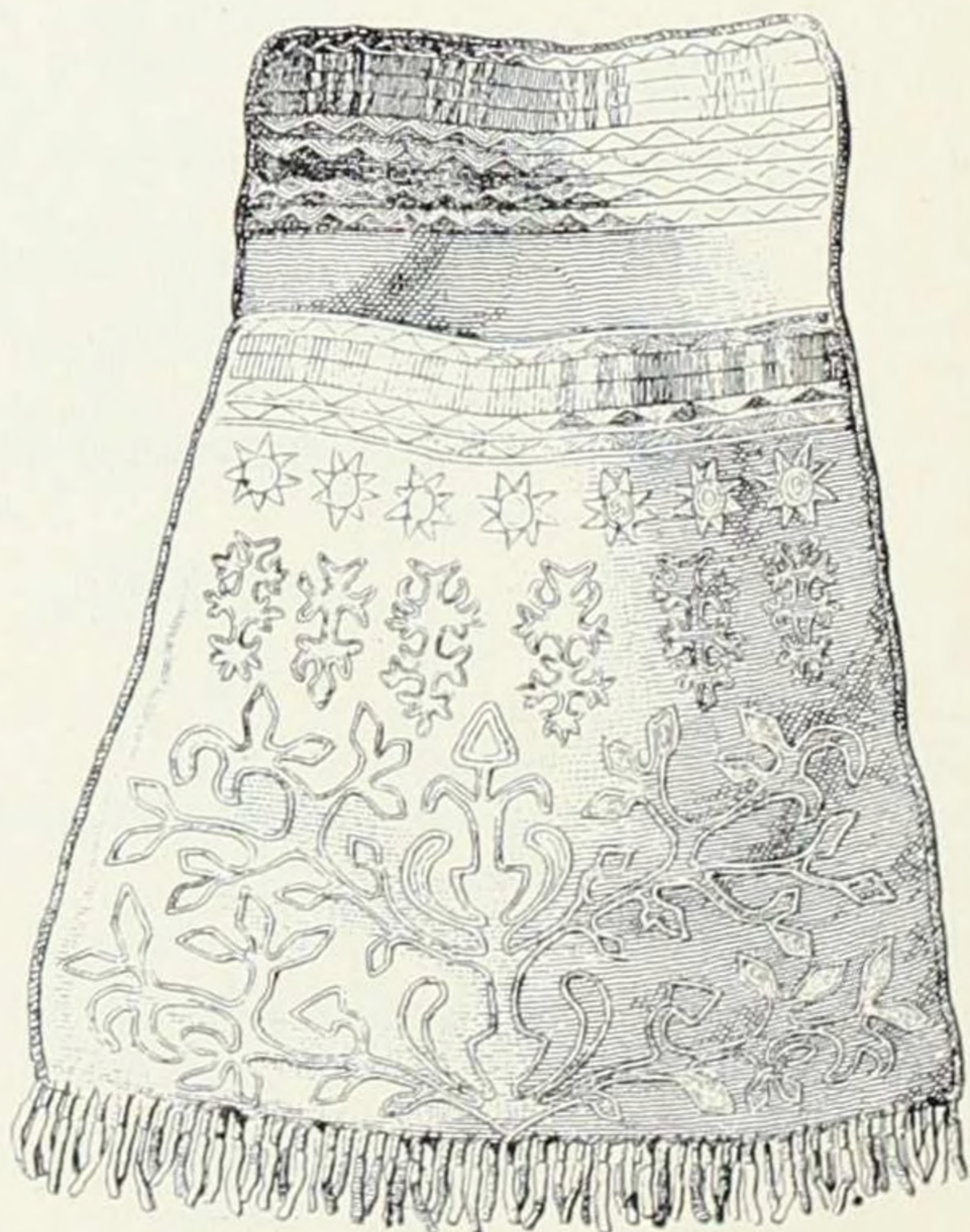
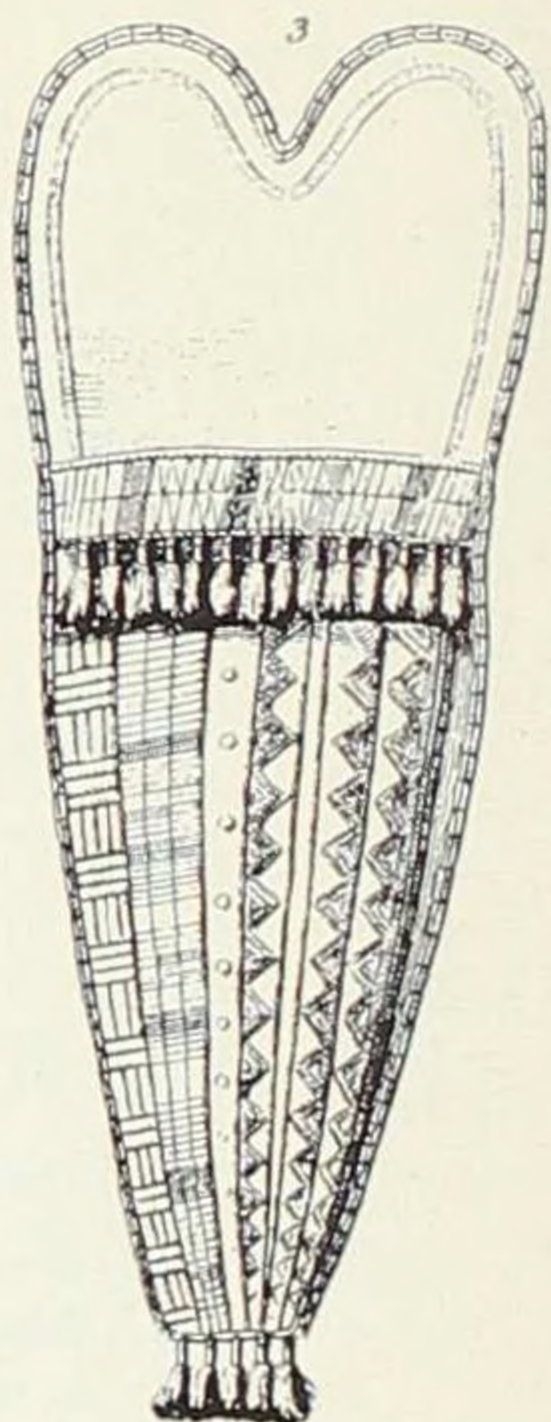
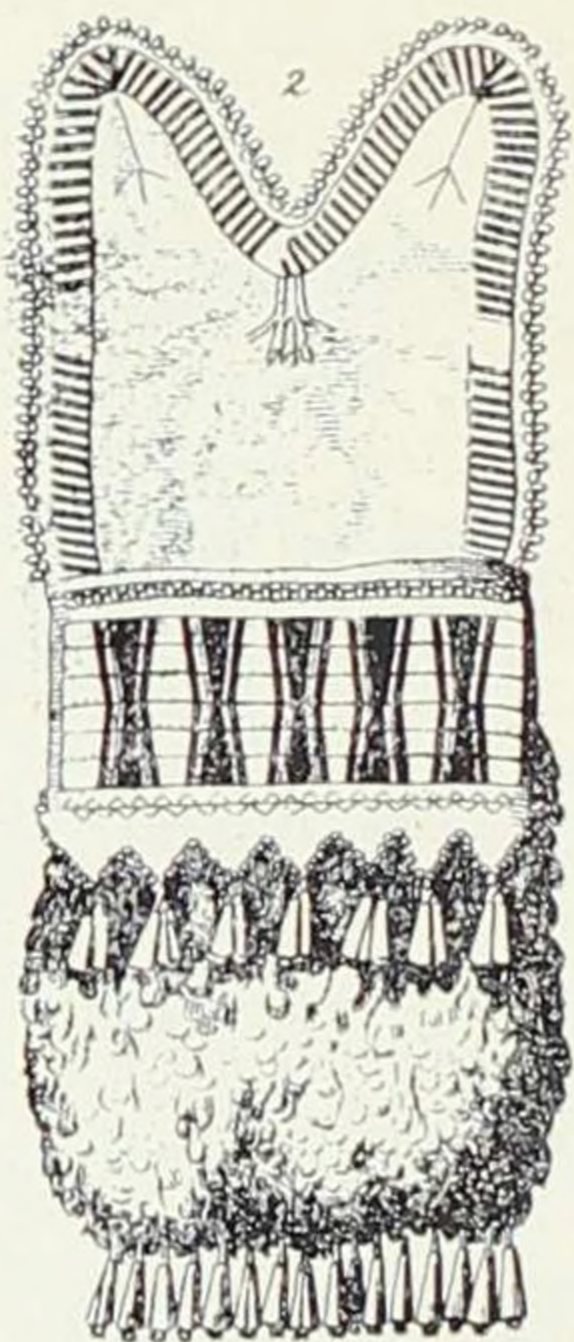
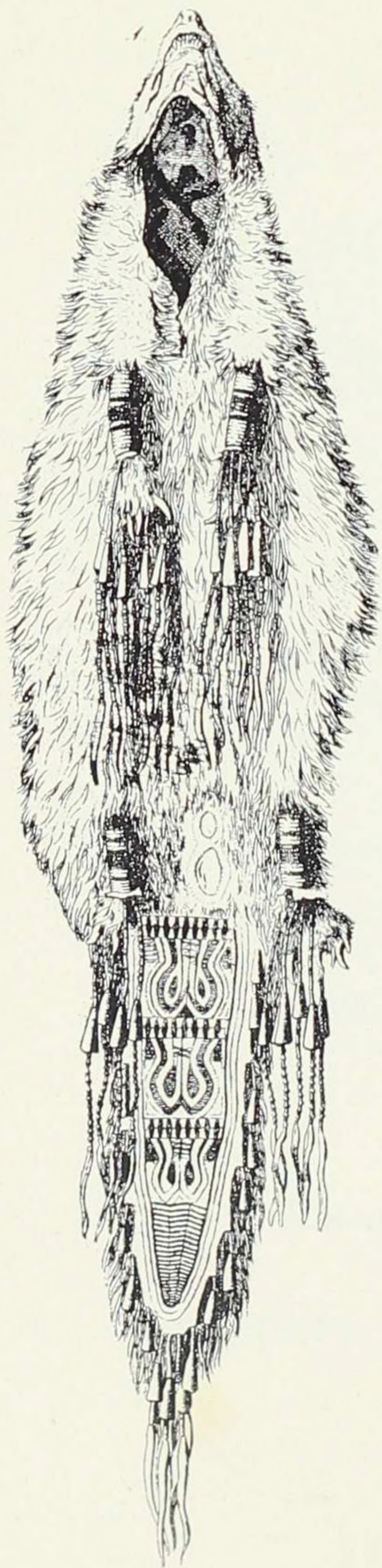
[The ornaments 1 and 5 are embroidered with porcupine quills].

PLATE III.

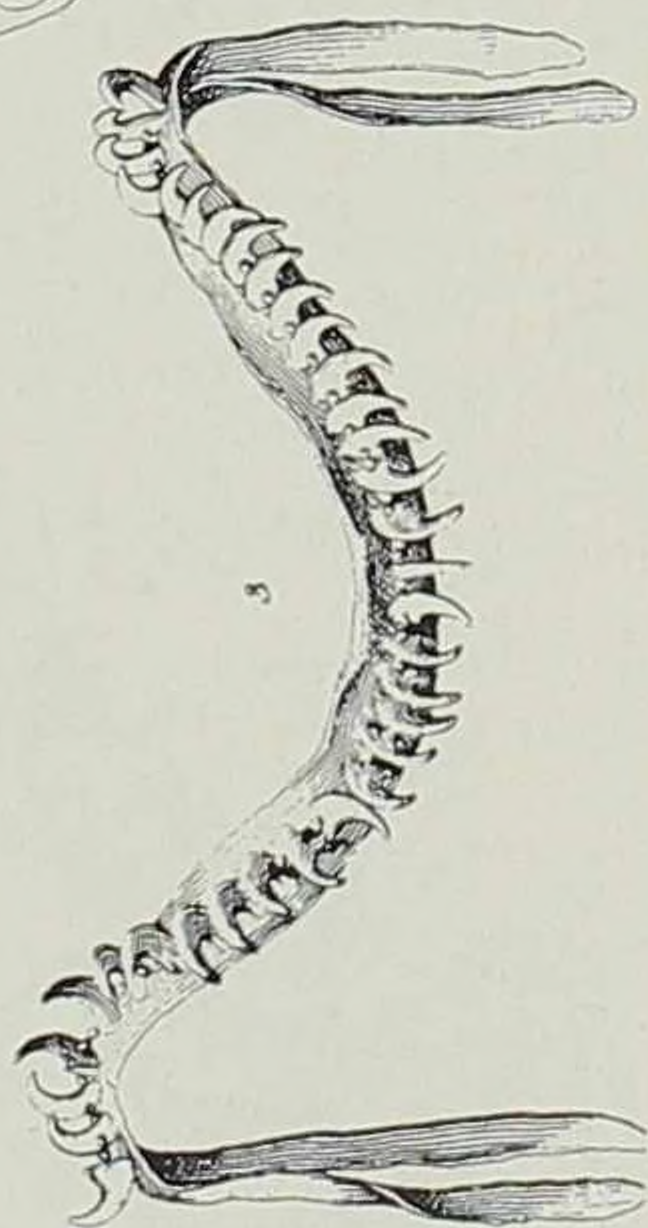
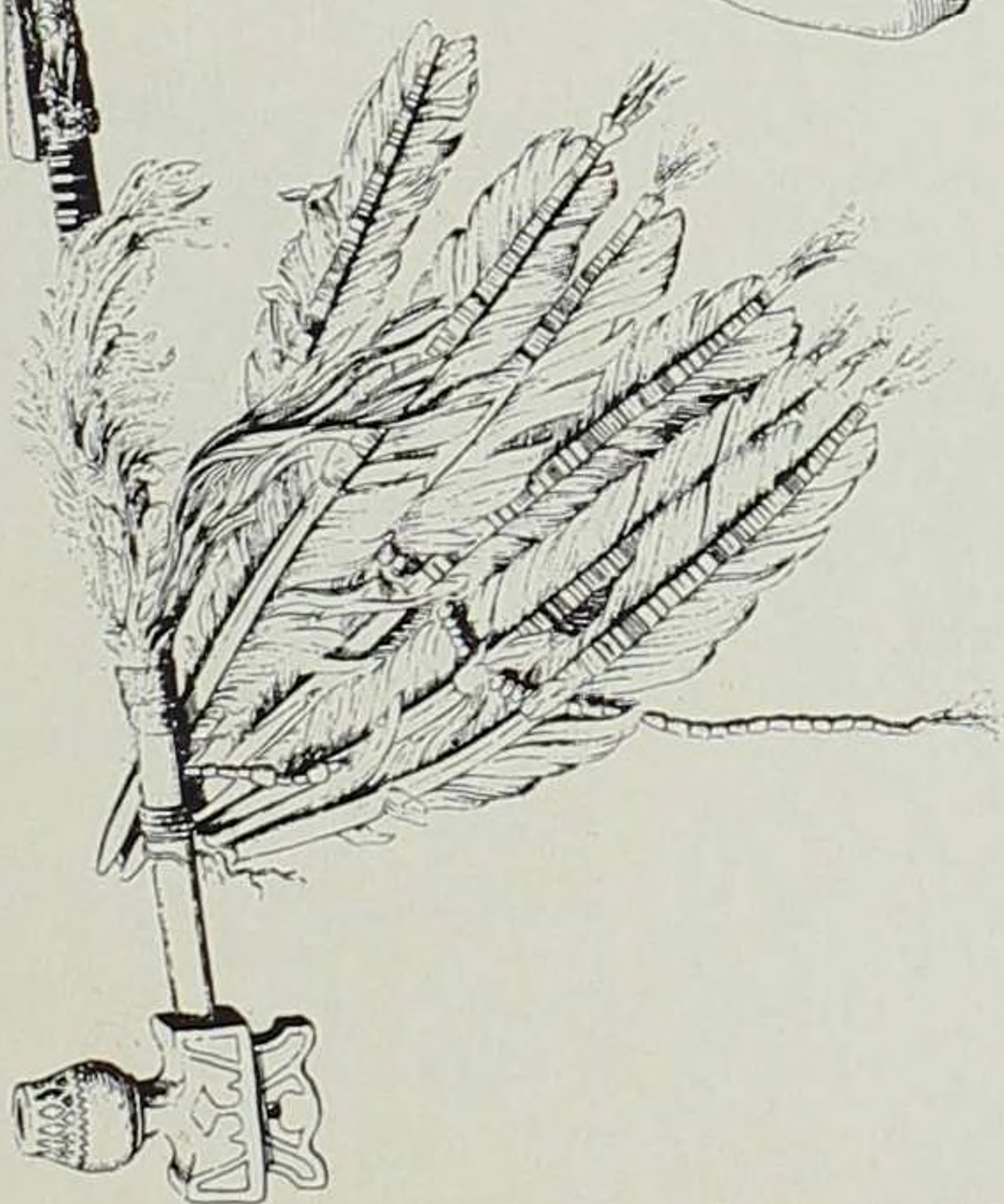
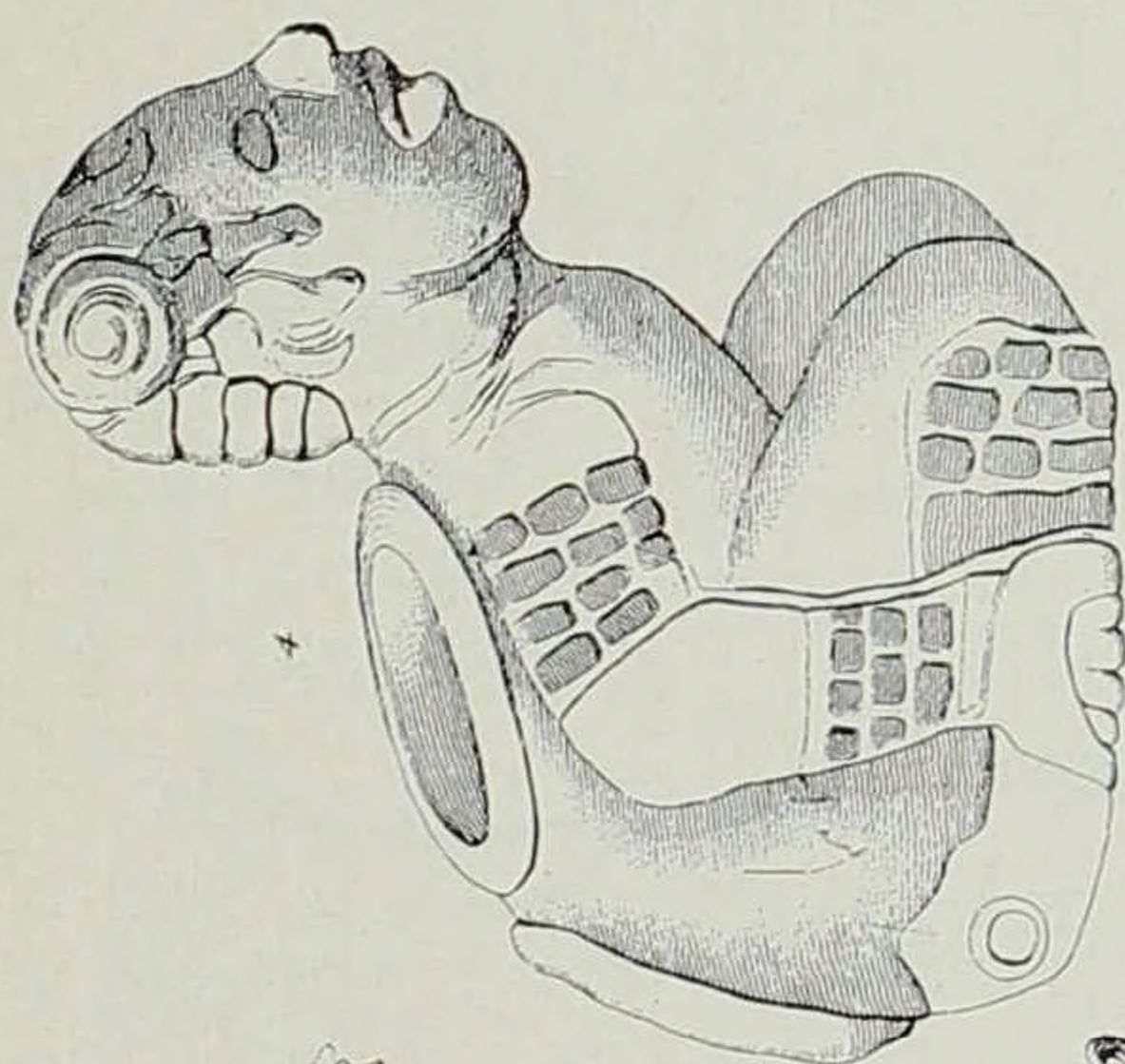
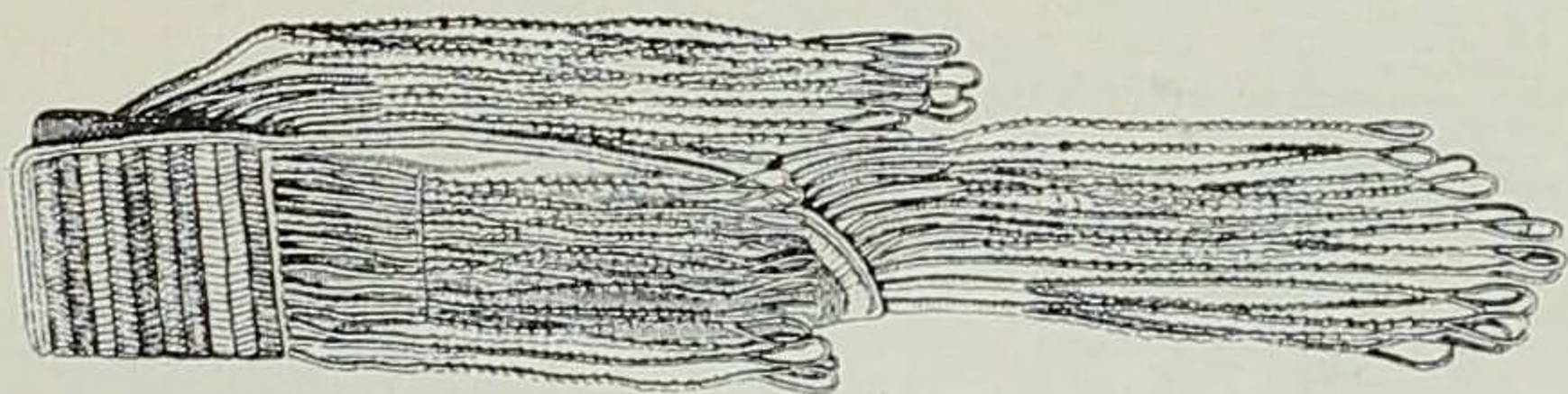
- 1 A Mocassin (Sioux).
- 2 ————— (Cypowais).
- 3 ————— (Ditto female.)
- 4 A Basket made of bark, and embroidered with coloured grass.
- 5 A Wooden Idol (Cypowais).
- 6 A Pewter Pipe-bowl (Ditto).

[The ornaments 1, 2, and 3, are embroidered with porcupine quills].

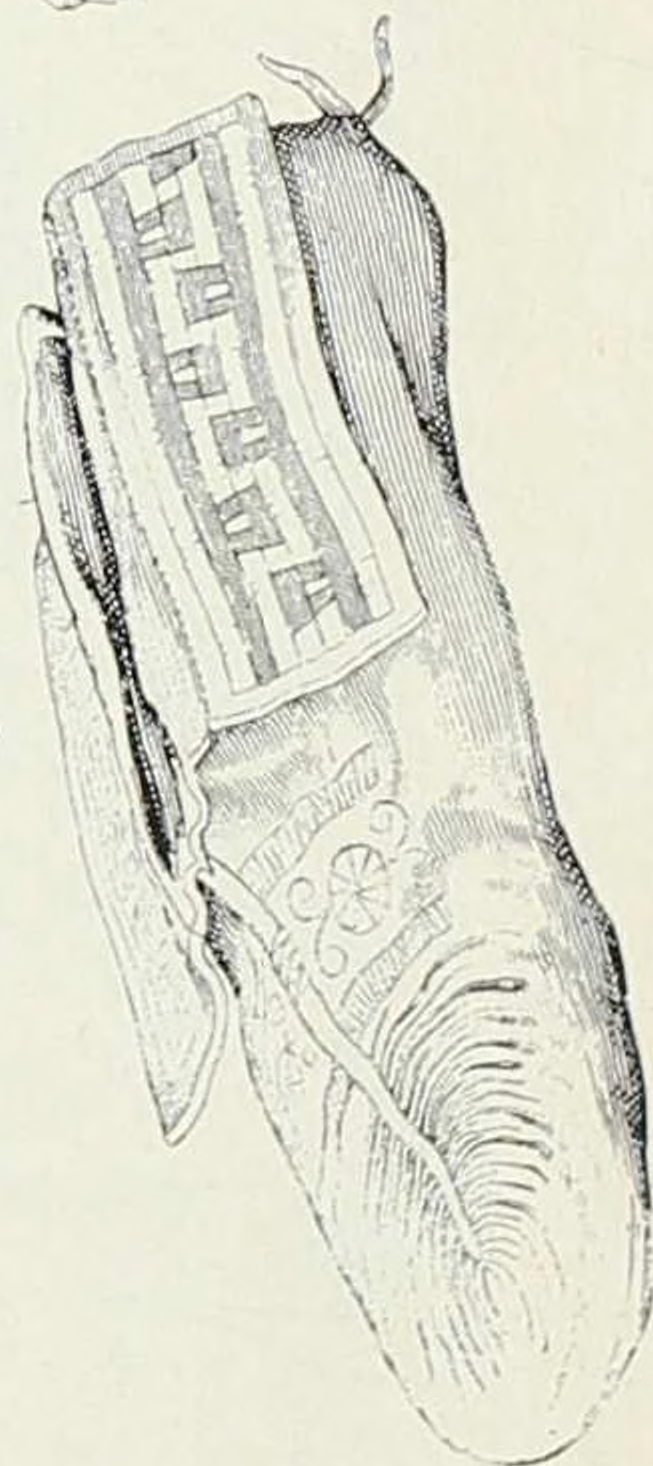
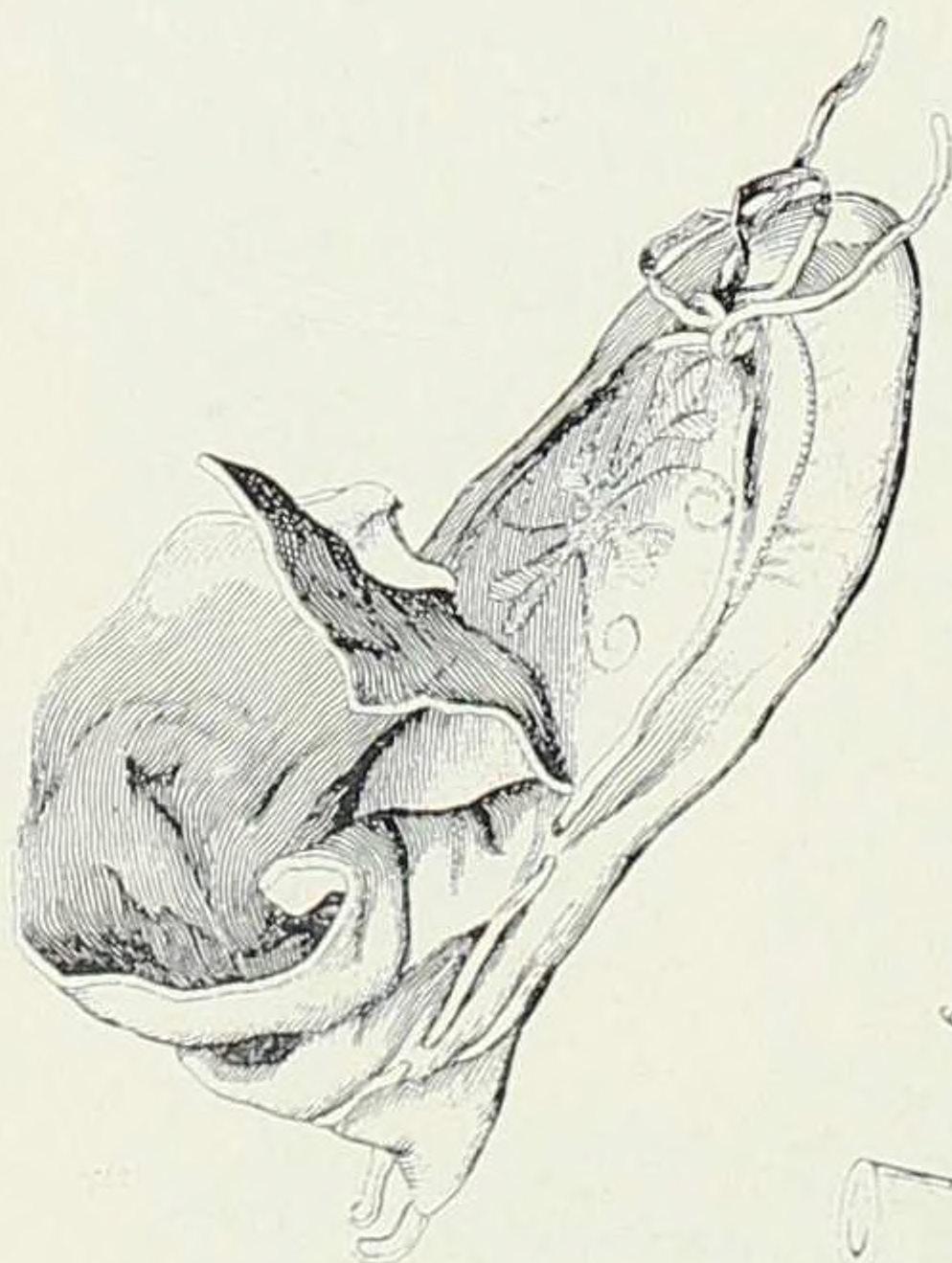
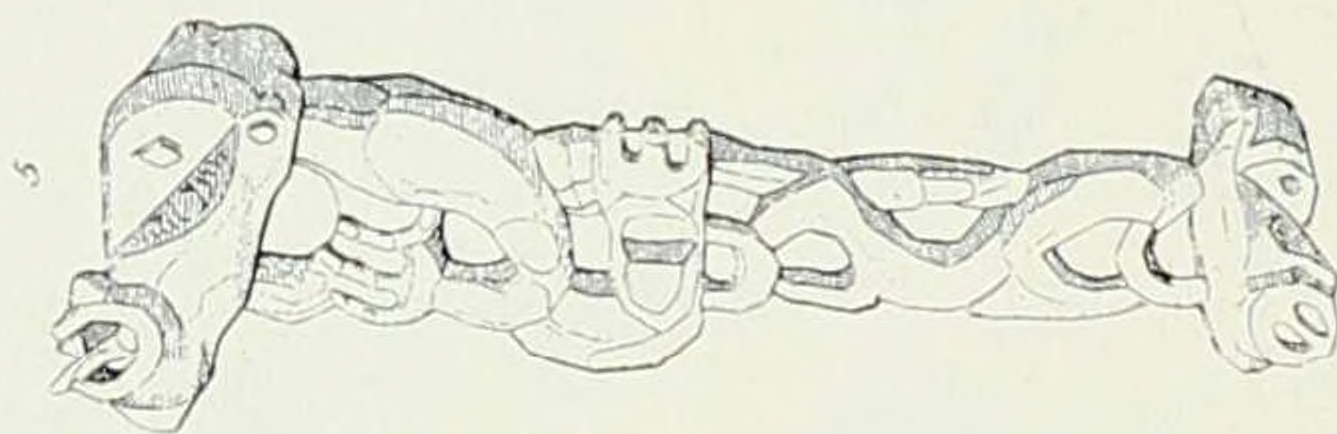
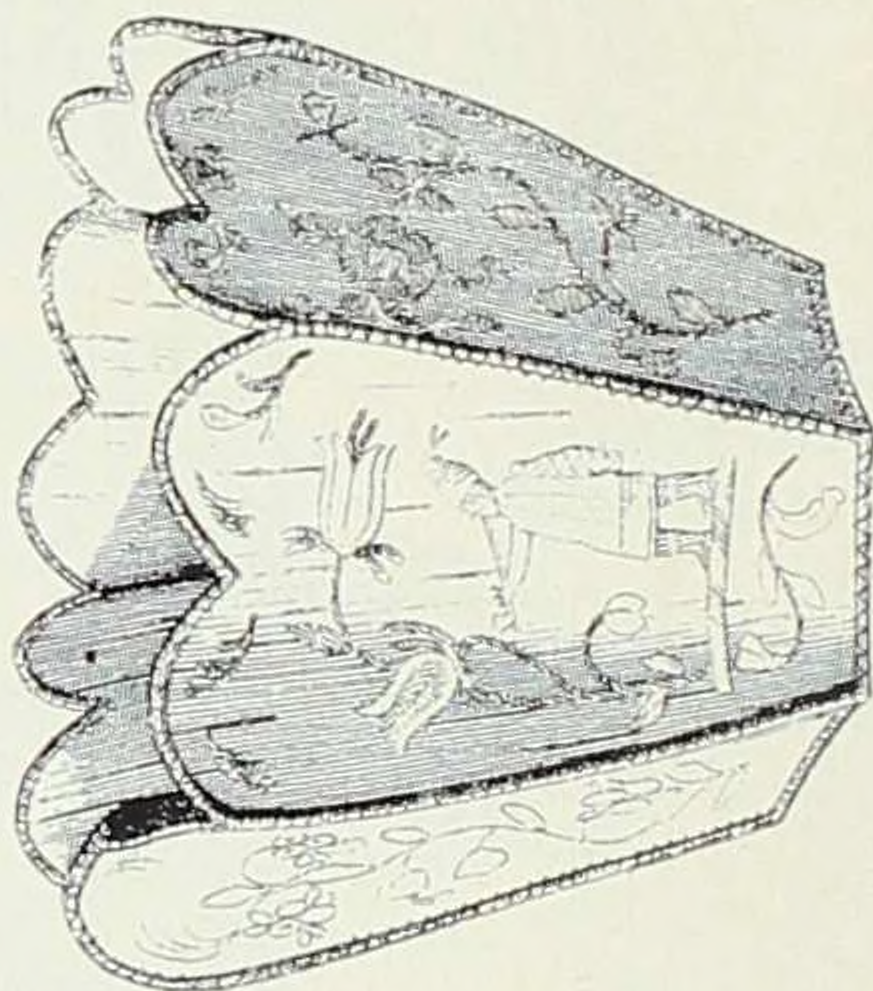














## TABLE OF DISTANCES.

**TABLE**  
OF SHORT DISTANCES FROM ST LOUIS TO  
FORT ST ANTHONY.

NAMES OF PLACES.	Bear-ings of the bank of the river.	Miles.	OBSERVATIONS.
From St Louis to the mouths of the Missouri,	W.	21	
To the Portage of the Sioux,	W.	12	
To the River Illinois,	E.	9	
To the Great Cape Gray,	E.	13	
To Clarksville,	W.	46	
To Louisianaville,	W.	18	
To the Salt River,	W.	4	
To the Establishment of Mr Gilbert,	W.	13	
To another small Establishment,	E.	8	
To the Two Rivers,	W.	28	
To the Prairie des Liards,	W.	22	
To the Channel of the Foxes,	E.	16	
To Fort Edward,	E.	12	
To the top of the Rapids,		22	
To Old Fort Madison,	W.	10	
To the River Bête Puante,	W.	10	
To the Yellow Hills,	E.	22	
To the River Yawoha,	W.	28	
To the Grande Prairie Mascotin,	W.	16	
To the end of the same,	W.	17	
To the River la Roche, or Rocky,	E.	31	
To Fort Armstrong,	Isle	4	
To the top of the Rapids,		16	
To the Village of the Foxes,	W.	9	
To the Marais d'Ogé,	E.	16	Formerly inhabited by a
To the old Village Sauvage,	W.	10	savage of the same
To the Potatoe Prairie,	W.	9	name.
To the Prairie du Frappeur,	W.	10	Formerly inhabited by a
To the River la Pomme,	E.	18	savage of that name.
To the Chénierre,	W.	10	
To the River la Garde,	W.	10	
To the <i>Têtes des Morts</i> ,	W.	16	
To the River <i>aux Fièvres</i> ,	E.	4	
To the Dubuques Mines,	W.	13	
To the Prairie Macotche,	W.	16	From the name of a sa-
To the old Village du Bâtard,	W.	10	vage who inhabited it.
To the Turkies' River,	W.	16	A place formerly inhabit-
To the old Village de la Port,	W.	10	ed by savages, whose
To the River Owisconsin,	E.	10	chief was called the
To the <i>Prairie du Chien</i> ,	E.	6	Bastard.
To the Pointed Rock,	W.	9	
To Cape Winebegos,	W.	18	



CONTINUATION OF THE TABLE.

NAMES OF PLACES.	Bear-ings of the bank of the river.	Miles.	OBSERVATIONS.
Brought forward		618	
To Cape à l'Ail Sauvage,	W.	10	
To the Upper River Yawoha,	W.	19	
To the River de la Mauvaise Hache,	E.	7	
To the Treille,	E.	10	
To the River Racoon,	E.	10	
To the River aux Racines,	W.	12	
To the Prairie la Crosse,	E.	7	
To the Casse Fusils,	W.	14	
To the Black River,	E.	9	
To the Mountain <i>qui trempe à l'Eau</i> ,	Isle	10	
To the Prairie <i>aux Ailes</i> ,	W.	10	
To the River <i>aux Embarras</i> ,	W.	22	
To the Prairie of Cypresses,	W.	7	
To the Buffalos River,	E.	11	
To the Great Encampment,	W.	8	
To the River Cypawais,	E.	10	
Lake Pepin to the end,		21	
To the River Gange,	W.	6	
To the River Canon,	W.	9	
To the River St Croix,	E.	25	
To the Medicine Wood,	Isle	19	This is a beech, a tree unknown in these countries, and which the savages venerate as a God.
To the <i>Detour des Pins</i> ,	W.	10	
To the Great March,	E.	13	
To the Cave de Carver,	E.	7	Where is situated Fort St Anthony.
To the Cave of the Manitous,	E.	6	
To the River St Peter,	W.	6	
To the River of the Little Falls,	W.	4	
To the Falls of St Anthony,		5	

*Beltrami to Countess Compagnoni (May 24, 1823):*

P.S. To give you a proof of my patience, in which you have not much faith, I send you a table of the distances we have just traversed; a task which would exhaust the patience of a hermit. It may be of some use to any of our friends who are inclined to undertake a similar ramble.



The Owisconsin is a large river, which flows from the east. At three hundred miles from its mouth it communicates, by means of a *portage*, with the Foxes' river, which falls into Green bay, in lake Michigan. This river is therefore the principal channel of the fur trade carried on by all these savage countries, by way of Michilimakinak and the lakes, with Canada and New York; of which the village of the Prairie du Chien, at the distance of six miles higher on the same eastern bank, is a considerable *entrepôt*.

After passing through a space of about six hundred and seventy miles of desert, this village comes upon one as by enchantment, and the contrast is the more striking as it bespeaks a certain degree of civilization; French is the prevailing language, and strangers are well received. It takes its name from an Indian family whom the first Frenchmen met there, called *Kigigad*, or dog, for almost all the savages are distinguished by the name of some animal, which is often their peculiar *Manitou*.

The Americans ought to regard this village as one of the most interesting scenes of the last war against the English. This is the only place where the Anglo-savage army observed the terms of a capitulation during that war.

The American garrison, which general [William] Clark had placed there in a wretched wooden fort, named fort Crawford, in order to neutral-



ize as much as possible the influence and intrigues by which the English emissaries in these forests endeavoured to encrease the number of the *allies of Great Britain*, after having opposed an heroic resistance, was forced to surrender, but on honourable conditions. Of these, the principal was intended to prevent the massacres so often perpetrated by the savages, their *commilitones*, upon defenceless prisoners who confided in the faith and sanctity of treaties.

The English colonel who commanded the expedition kept his promise, although acting under the famous general \*\*\*\*\* who saw with the utmost indifference the tomahawk and knife of these barbarians daily reeking with American blood. I wish I knew the name of this respectable officer, that I might hold it up to public admiration.

Cikago, Pigeon-roost, French town, forts Mil-den [Malden] and Meigs, were the scenes of cruelty which would make you shudder. The heart of captain Wells was roasted and eaten; the whole body of a surgeon was served up as a banquet to a numerous party of guests; nor could even the innocent children whom nature held concealed in the bosoms of their mothers, escape the relentless fury of these cannibals. Such was the horrible scene of massacre and slaughter, that Thecumseh, the general of king George, and the brother of the great prophet whom I mentioned to you upon the Ohio, felt himself more than once compelled to exclaim,



"Stop! in the name of the Great Spirit, our brothers are sufficiently avenged."

Not only did this barbarian savage show himself less cruel than \*\*\*\*\*, but at the battle of the Thames, where general [William Henry] Harrison triumphed over this sanguinary army, he died the death of a hero, while \*\*\*\*\* fled like a coward, abandoning both the Indians and his own soldiers to the fury of that vengeance, the whole weight of which ought to have fallen upon himself. His horse, the interpreter of his conscience, saved him from that ignominious end, which ought to have served as a warning to all monsters who trample under foot the laws of nations and the claims of humanity.

I am convinced that the people of England have never known these horrors, or they would have held them up to public execration. They will perhaps thank me for the information.

The *Prairie du Chien* is the rendezvous of a number of Indians who come there in autumn to lay in winter provisions, and in spring to settle with their creditors, who receive skins in payment. They are much more punctual than the whites would be if they had no other guide than the law of nature, nor any other argument than their bow and arrow, their knife and gun.

I also saw there some of the Winebegos [Winnebago], who are distinguished from all the other Indians by their gloomy and ferocious counte-



nances. They are regarded as the most malignant, and in fact they were most intimately connected with \*\*\*\*\*. Their chief, Mai-Pock, paid his court to him by always appearing before him with a necklace composed of the ears, noses, and scalps of Americans. I saw him, but refused to shake hands with him; an expression of contempt the most severe and humiliating an Indian can receive. He it was who regaled his friends with human flesh.

It is supposed that this nation came from the northern parts of Mexico; and, indeed, they speak a language peculiar to themselves, and are the only friends of the Sioux, who seem also to have emigrated from Mexico. They roam and hunt towards the sources of Rocky River, upon the Owisconsin, Fox River, Green Bay, and upon lake Michigan. They are divided into seven tribes, who disperse their small summer encampments upon these rivers. Their number is about sixteen hundred. The first Frenchmen that arrived among them called them *Puans*, from the disagreeable odour that exhales from their bodies.

I met there some of the Menomenis [Menominee], whom the French distinguish by the name of *Folle Avoine*; because, with more prudence than most other savages, they collect in summer a quantity of wild oats, which grow in great abundance upon lake Hinlin, the Kakalin, and the river La Cross[e], where they hunt and often pitch their



tents, which much resemble those of the Saukis, Foxes, and Winebegos. They have nearly the same habits and customs, but are considered more industrious and less barbarous. In the last war, they repeatedly refused to join the standards of the English. They replied to the emissaries who endeavoured to persuade them to enlist, "What have the Americans done to us, that we should go and plunge our tomahawks into their bosoms?" This is a savage lesson to civilized people. Their number does not exceed twelve hundred.

I cannot take leave of the *Prairie du Chien* without mentioning the many civilities I received from Mr. [Jean Joseph Rolette] Roulet, an agent, and one of the principals of the South West Company.

The Americans generally consider the Canadians as ignorant. Whether this be true, I know not; but I do know that I invariably found them very polite and obliging, even among the lower classes.

Heretics always think they know more than Catholics. I am not skilled in controversy: as to religious tenets, therefore, I shall merely observe that, as the sects which have abjured Catholicism are still without a common centre of union, and are continually wandering from error to error, in pursuit of that true *credo* which they never find, the inference seems to be that they know much less than we. But, in point of learning, it would be easy to prove, from the history of science and lit-



erature, that the Catholics were as well informed before the existence of an heretical church, as they are now, and that even since that period they have continued to furnish a large contingent to the literary world.

When ministers, faithless to the laws of the divine legislator, and princes, rebellious to God and the people who confide the sceptre to them, that they may govern in *justitiâ et equitate*, conceal, or disfigure the heavenly maxims of the Gospel, in order to render ignorance subservient to their political views, they are the only persons against whom the voice of censure should be raised: but respect is due to the professor of the most august of all religions.

Nine miles above the Prairie, at a spot where the savages pay their adorations to a rock which they annually paint with red and yellow [Yellow River], the Mississippi presents scenes of peculiar novelty.

The hills disappear, the number of islands increases, the waters divide into various branches, and the bed of the river in some places extends to a breadth of nearly three miles, which is greater by one half than at St. Louis; and, what is very remarkable, its depth is not diminished; for from the Prairie to Fort St. Peter we ran a-ground only once, whereas, from St. Louis to the Prairie, it occurred four times. This is an additional proof of the correctness of my observations, in our first ex-



cursion, respecting the waters of the Ohio. Of three parts of the fluid which compose the ocean, two certainly filter through subterranean passages.

We arrived very late on the 16th, but though it was night—*vi si vedea*. I am going to introduce you to a spectacle, my dear madam, which, I assure you, I had not dreamt of in my wandering anticipations.

The vigorous fertility of these countries imparts such strength to the vegetation of the grass and brushwood with which they are overspread, that they obstruct the march of the Indians, and in spite of every precaution produce a rustling which awakens the wild beasts in their coverts.

The Indians, who are not easily stopped by difficulties, set fire once a year to the brushwood, so that the surface of all the vast regions they traverse is successively consumed by the flames.

It was perfectly dark, and we were at the mouth of the river Yahowa [Upper Iowa],—the second of that name, which, like the first, descends from the west,—when we saw at a great distance all the combined images of the infernal regions in full perfection. I was on the point of exclaiming, with Michael Angelo, "*How terrible! but yet how beautiful!*"

The venerable trees of these eternal forests were on fire, which had communicated to the grass and brushwood, and these had been borne by a violent north-west wind to the adjacent plains and



valleys. The flames towering above the tops of the hills and mountains, where the wind raged with most violence, gave them the appearance of volcanoes, at the moment of their most terrific eruptions; and the fire winding in its descent through places covered with grass, exhibited an exact resemblance of the undulating lava of Vesuvius or *Ætna*. Ceres was perhaps seeking a new Proserpina:—we had one in the steam-boat, but certainly no one had the least intention of carrying her off. The fire accompanied us with some variations for fifteen miles. The great conflagration which was one of the causes that accelerated the fall of *l'Homme des siècles* might be more terrific, but it would convey only a very faint conception of the sublime and awful appearance of this. I have no doubt the devil himself was jealous of it; and the moon blushed at her powerless attempts to shine.

A good old woman in our *Bucentaur*, who appeared to me the image of our poor Venice, really believed that the day of judgment was come. Showers of large sparks, which fell upon us, excited terror in some, and laughter in others. I do not believe that I shall ever again witness such astonishing contrasts of light and darkness, of the pathetic and the comic, the formidable and the amusing, the wonderful and the grotesque.

But to repeat the burden of Pangloss—"*tout est pour le mieux*:"—these conflagrations destroy a



number of serpents and other reptiles, which would otherwise infest the whole earth; for I have been told that they, like fishes, cross the sea without compass or pilot: and you may judge of their fecundity by the serpent of major Anderson.

As we had travelled almost all night by the light of this superb torch, the steam-boat was tired, and ran a-ground in the morning upon a sand bank by way of resting itself. The place is called *l'Embarras*, from a river of that name which runs towards the west. Here we may apply, *conveniunt rebus nomina sæpe suis*.

During the night we passed before the mouths of the rivers *la Mauvaise Hache* [Bad Axe], *la Treille*, et de *Ra[c]coon*, which descend from the east.

Six miles above the river *aux Racines*, at the west, on the same side, is a place called by the Indians, *Casse-Fusils* [Broken Muskets]. It alludes to a very remarkable event in the history of these people.

The first time that guns were given to the savages by the English, much jealousy was excited among those who did not receive them. It happened that a small party provided with those weapons, was attacked by another more numerous who had none, and had all their muskets broken. It is one hundred and eighteen miles from the Prairie.

From this spot a chain of mountains, whose romantic character reminds one of the valley of the



Rhine, between Bingen and Coblenz, leads to the *Mountain which dips into the water* [Trempealeau]. This place would exhaust all my powers of expression if I had not seen Longue Vue. Amid a number of delightful little islands, encircled by the river, rises a mountain of a conical form equally isolated. You climb amid cedars and cypresses, strikingly contrasted with the rocks which intersect them, and from the summit you command a view of valleys, prairies, and distances in which the eye loses itself. From this point I saw both the last and the first rays of a splendid sun gild the lovely picture. The western bank presents another illusion to the eye. Mountains, ruggedly broken into abrupt rocks, which appear cut perpendicularly into towers, steeples, cottages, &c., appear precisely like towns and villages.

A little higher on the same side, is a large prairie, called *la Prairie aux Ailes* [Winona], at which begins the tract inhabited by the Sioux. The Great Wabiscihouwa [Wabasha], who is regarded as the Ulysses of the whole nation, has pitched his summer camp there. It is also the commencement of major Tagliawar's [Taliaferro] jurisdiction. The Indian tribes whom we have already seen are under the inspection of two other agents of the government, established at Rocky Island, and at the *Prairie du Chien*.

The Sioux are the most numerous and powerful of all the savage nations of North America. It ap-



pears, indeed, from their language, that they are not natives of the country, but have established themselves in it by conquest: and, indeed, they are to the Aborigines what the Greeks were in Asia, the Romans in Greece, the Goths in Italy, and the English in the East Indies.

To obtain any accurate knowledge of these regions, or of their inhabitants, one must see and examine them oneself; for though a great deal has been written about the new world,—often either from mere distant guesses, or for the sake of making a book,—it seems that we are still in uncertainty or in ignorance as to the most important facts concerning it. But as my researches have hitherto been impeded by jealousy, I have not yet been able to prosecute them far. I shall therefore defer telling you about the Sioux till a future letter, when I may perhaps have succeeded by time and perseverance in taming or lulling to sleep my Arguses. Meanwhile let us continue our ramble.

The Great Wabiscihouwa came on board the steam-boat with his suite of *patres conscripti*, and the customary high ceremonies were gone through between him and his *father*,—the name which the Indians are taught to apply to the agent of government. Major Tagliawar accordingly gave them plenty of shakes by the hand, and smoked the calumet of peace and amity, and I was the ape to this troop of comedians.

Wabiscihouwa, though wrapped in a wretched



buffalo's skin, had perfectly the air and aspect of a *man of quality*. His countenance, his arched eyebrows, his large nose, which he blew with great noise though without a handkerchief,—the motion of his right hand, with which he frequently stroked his forehead and chin,—his thoughtful air,—his eyes fixed as if entranced,—and his imposing manner of sitting, although on the ground, all marked him for a great statesman; he wanted nothing to complete the resemblance but an embroidered coat, a large portfolio under his arm, and spectacles.

The tents of the Sioux are quite different from any we have seen. They are in the form of a cone, covered with skins of buffalos, or elks; the smoke goes out at the top, and almost all are painted in hieroglyphics. For some characteristic features which mark their untutored state, the painter and sculptor might recognise in the countenances of these savages a model of the Roman face; the noses, of the men especially, are quite Roman, while those of the women are perfectly Grecian. The Sioux of both sexes have fine heads of hair, generally black, like their eyes, but almost as coarse and rough as horse-hair. The women, in imitation of those of the Saukis, wear the *catogan*. The men, on occasions of ceremony, or when they are in full dress, generally wear it parted, or in small tresses. These tresses fall upon the shoulders, the breast, the two sides, and the back, and



are interlaced with small paste buckles, which the traders give them in exchange for skins. I counted twenty in a single lock of hair.

Their wardrobe and furniture, as well as their canoes and their arms, are very like those of the Saukis. The women would be more attractive than those of the Saukis, if they were not much more dirty in their persons.

This encampment is about one hundred and fifty-four miles from the *Prairie du Chien*. From this encampment as far as lake Pepin, a distance of about fifty miles, the country is pleasant, and diversified by hills, plains, meadows, and forests. The only two considerable rivers which flow into the Mississippi, within this space, are those of the *Buffaloes* and the *Cypewais* [Chippewa]: they descend from the east, and are navigable to a considerable distance up the country.

Near the mouth of the latter begins lake Pepin, which is only a deep valley filled by the Mississippi. But before we enter it, my dear Countess, let us give our attention and sympathy a moment to a subject which is interesting, from the proof it affords of noble qualities in the savages.

A rock, which projects over the eastern side of the lake [Maiden Rock], precisely where it begins, is remarkable for the same physical and historical features as that of Leucadia. There, the Muse of Mitylene, who was more distinguished for her learning than her beauty, precipitated



herself as the only means of curing a passion, which Phaon requited with contempt; here *Oholoaitha* [Winona], who was beautiful but not less unhappy, resigned a life which was become insupportable to her, separated from her loved and loving *Anikigi*.

If I did not write letters on my rambles, I would write her history, out of which I might make a novel; but a few facts are sometimes much more valuable than whole volumes decked out with fiction.

The tribe of *Oholoaitha* was surprised by a hostile band, of which the father of *Anikigi* is the chief. She escaped the massacre, but was made prisoner. Brought up in the house of the victorious chief, from the age of ten to that of eighteen, the most impressible period of existence, her heart was touched with sentiments of gratitude and love for his son, who had saved her life, and who returned her affection with equal ardour. On the conclusion of a peace, of that kind which both savages and non-savages so often confirm with their lips and belie in their hearts, she was restored to her tribe, and at the same time demanded in marriage for *Anikigi*. Her father, a barbarous Sioux, and an irreconcilable enemy, obstinately refused to comply with the request of the good Cypewais, who wished at once to gratify his paternal tenderness and the passion of his son, and to consolidate the peace of the two families



and of the two nations. Poor Oholoaitha, seeing the obstinacy of her father, gave herself up to despair, and took the fatal leap: she precipitated herself from this rock, the very day her father intended to sacrifice her to a union which she detested. Heaven knows how many noble minds are concealed under this rude exterior, notwithstanding the vices which their contact with civilized nations has already planted in their hearts.

The Indians devoted her memory to infamy: with them, murder is a meritorious act, but self-murder the greatest of crimes.

Lake Pepin, as you enter it, presents the appearance of an elliptical amphitheatre. It is encircled by little hills of equal height, which, gradually lessening as they ascend, are the *Cunei*; an elevated bank extending completely round it, is the exact representation of the *Podium*. The passages through which the river enters and flows out, are the two *portæ triumphales*—exactly at the north and south, like those of the amphitheatres of antiquity. The waters of the lake formed the *Euripus*, and we were the combatants in the naval games, or *naumachia*; for we found to our cost that the common notion of the savage is not, as is generally thought, a mere prejudice. It is a fact that vessels on this lake are exposed in the daytime to a dangerous sort of whirlwind; we were obliged to resort to some dexterous manœuvres to avoid its consequences. Indians, who looked at us with



astonishment from the banks, were spectators.

Nature gave the first lessons in architecture; and it is very probable that one of the basins, called lakes, supplied the first model of an amphitheatre. Rome had two of great beauty in the lakes of Albano and Nemi: in the Coliseum, the great amphitheatre of Vespasian, I think I can trace a perfect resemblance to the latter.

Lake Pepin is the head quarters of rattle-snakes. I must detain you an instant to give you some new information, which I have just received, respecting the phenomena of their poison.

The poison of the rattle-snake produces no effect upon pigs; they eat it, thrive and fatten: yet it is fatal to itself; when it is held down with a forked stick, if it can turn its head, it bites itself, swells, and dies. It is an excellent tonic to any one who has courage to swallow it; but it is proved that a wound from its tooth is fatal years after the death of the serpent; nor can chemical agents rob it of its poisonous qualities, although long exposed to the action of the sun, wind, rain or snow.

Four or five miles above the termination of the lake towards the west, we met with another tribe of the Sioux, whose chief is named *Tantangamani* [Tatankamani or Walking Buffalo], celebrated as one of the bravest warriors of his nation. He was one of the most ferocious agents of Procter [General Henry Procter], and the unnatural father of the unhappy Oholoaitha.



He came on board the steam-boat to shake hands with major Tagliawar. He is an old man of hideous aspect, bent under the weight of years and atrocities; but still, the scars with which his naked body was covered,—the dignity with which he wore his buffalo-skin, hung on his shoulders like the *clamis* of the Romans,—his bow and quiver slung across his back,—a club, which added to the imposing gesticulations of his right hand;—and his Indian followers, who, with an air of pride and independence, formed a circle around him, gave him more *éclat* and majesty than are possessed by sceptered kings amidst the splendour of heartless pomp, decked with the spoils of their subjects, surrounded by base slaves who flatter to deceive them, and by mercenary Prætorians, who, like the Romans of Jugurtha and Vitellius, sell themselves to the highest bidder.

He spoke with frankness, though dissimulation is by no means uncommon even among the Indians.

"My father," said he to the agent, "I thank the Great Spirit, that he has granted me another year to behold you once more; for you see that I am very old, and expecting every instant to go to inhabit another earth. I again repeat, that I have been the fierce enemy to your nation, because I had bad advisers, who made me believe that you were coming to deprive us of the liberty of hunting, and to kill our wives and children. But from the time we promised you our friendship, our



hearts have been as white as this—(pointing to the agent's shirt). Give us some assistance; (this is the *amen* of all their speeches) for in this season we can obtain nothing by hunting, and you know that we have no other dependence; be our friends, smoke with us, and in a few days I will pay you a visit at the Fort."

This chief, although seventy, and almost worn out, is still much respected by his tribe, and almost feared. This is the sole effect of the power which true merit exercises over the minds of barbarians, of which this chief is a memorable example; for savages generally neglect their old men, and abandon them to perish with hunger. The Winebegos carry their barbarity so far as to kill them. Probably, however, they consider it a meritorious act to terminate a life, which others spare, only to expose the object of their compassion to the most cruel sufferings and to a dreadful and lingering death.

I tried to obtain his bow and quiver, by flattering him with the notion that I would immortalize his name by shewing them to everybody in my own country (the moon), and whatever others I should pass through; but finding that this sort of Paradise had but little attraction for him, I offered him in exchange some tobacco and gunpowder. Upon this he immediately grew generous, and gave them to me. Red people give nothing for nothing, any more than white ones.



The place where this tribe was encamped, is called the Mountain of the G[r]ange [Barn Bluff at Red Wing]. Its summit, which is of a flat form, commands a view equal in beauty to those with which I have almost exhausted your admiration. Below me, lay lake Pepin,—the river,—undulating hills and valleys,—forests,—meadows, intermixed with small lakes scattered here and there reflecting every object from their crystal surface,—and lastly, the G[r]ange, which, winding its course along the foot of this lovely mountain, brings the tribute of its waters to the Great River: it was perfect enchantment. I could not satisfy the ardour and impatience of my eyes, and was at length glad to seek repose in the steam-boat, where an atmosphere of Asiatic apathy operated upon me like an opiate. In the midst of these impressive scenes, I heard no other expressions of admiration than—*"Very fine weather!" "A very pleasant day!"*

The river Canon, which flows from the west, has its sources in the extensive prairies which separate it from the Missouri. The Indians navigate it in their canoes nearly throughout its whole course.

Between the mouth of this river and that of the St. Croix, the Mississippi becomes narrower, and less studded with islands. It is frequently confined between steep rocks, which give an awfully romantic character to its banks. Abrasions, which run horizontally along them, indicate that the waters of this river were formerly more copious;



and the traditions of some of the aboriginal savages support this conjecture. Some think that the *Otter's Tail* river, which now flows from the south-east to the north into Hudson's Bay, formerly discharged itself, from the north-west to the south, into the Mississippi, by communicating with the Crow's river, which arises a little to the east of it. These horizontal abrasions frequently assume the striking appearance of friezes, cornices, &c. They were, I have no doubt, the first models of these architectural decorations. Nature is the mistress in everything: art only polishes and perfects.

The river St. Croix flows from the eastward. It is a large river, and affords an easy and extensive navigation. The country in which it rises is inhabited by the Cypewais; but the Sioux claim sovereignty over it, which is the cause or pretext for perpetual wars with that nation. This river, I think, received its name from father Hanepin [Louis Hennepin], who probably discovered it on the festival of the cross. It is fifty miles from lake Pepin.

Twenty-two miles higher, at a place called the Marsh, on the same shore, is another tribe of Sioux, governed by *Chatewaconamani*, or the Little Raven. He was gone on a hunting excursion with the principal part of his warriors;—or on the track of the enemy; for when they have no beasts to kill, they kill each other. Perhaps they would



prefer to amuse themselves in this way with the whites; but the Americans are become too powerful, and have stationed military posts between their tribes. There is no union among these Indians; and, if I mistake not, the United States think it would be dangerous to them if there were.

War with the savages will ever be defensive. Victories obtained over them would have no other effect than to drive them into their forests, where they are impregnable; whilst the Americans would see their cities and their villages, their fields and cattle, laid waste by fire and sword.

On the 19th we stopped to take in wood. I was told of a cavern, which was only at a short distance from there, and about twelve miles above the encampment of the Marsh.

A small valley on the east leads to it. Cedars, firs, and cypresses, seem to have been purposely placed there by nature, that the approach might bespeak the venerable majesty of this sacred retreat. The entrance is spacious, and formed in lime-stone rock, as white as snow. A rivulet, as transparent as air, flows through the middle. One may walk on with perfect ease for five or six fathoms, after which a narrow passage, which however is no obstacle, except to those apathetic beings whom nothing can excite, conducts to a vast elliptical cavern, where the waters of the rivulet, precipitating themselves from a cascade, and reflecting the gleam of our torches, produced



an indescribable effect. You climb to the top of a small rock to reach the level of the bed of this Castalian spring, whose captivating murmur allures you onwards, in spite of the difficulties which impede your progress, and you arrive at its source, which is at the very end of the cavern. It is calculated that it is about a mile in length.

The ancients had yearly *lustrationes*, to purify themselves, their cities, fields, flocks, houses, and armies. The Peruvians used them nearly for the same purpose. The Catholic church has its *rogationes*, by means of which it implores the same mercies of the true god; and in like manner the savages assemble yearly in this cavern, to perform *their lustrationes*; and, what is more remarkable, at the same season, that is to say, in the spring; and in the same manner, by water and fire, as the Catholics, the Peruvians, and the ancients. They plunge their clothes, arms, *medicine bags*, and persons, in the water of this rivulet; they afterwards pass their arms and clothes, together with their *medicine bags*, through a large fire, which was not extinguished at the time of my visit. This ceremony is always accompanied with a dance round the sacred fire, in a mystic circle, like the *medicine dance*. It appears that this *lustratio* is their corporeal purification.

The cave is appropriated to other ceremonies in the course of the year.

The Indians assemble there to consult either the



*Great Manitou* or their particular *Manitous*; and their chiefs, like Numa Pompilius, can make their nymph *Egeria* speak whenever they want to prevail on a reluctant people to obey them. They perform all their *lustrationes* before they consult the oracle, as the Greeks did before they entered the cave of *Trophonius*. The Sioux call this cave *Whakoon-Thiiby*, or the abode of the *Manitous*. Its walls are covered with hieroglyphics: these are perhaps their *ex-voto* inscriptions.

This cavern has one great advantage over those of antiquity; credulity is not here an object of traffic. Some religion there must be everywhere, and the one freest from this vice is perhaps the best.

On the 20th we arrived here [Fort St. Anthony], where I could not excuse myself from lodging at the colonel's, the commandant of the fort. The extreme politeness with which he opposed my wish to shut myself up, in some independent little room, at first excited my suspicion that his object was to keep a stricter watch upon me; and I confess that I was so malicious as to laugh at this idea, and to make it a subject of laughter to others; but I have since had reason to believe that his intention was to pay me respect, for which I am truly grateful. If any restraint is occasionally imposed upon my curiosity or my enquiries, it is only the effect of that petty jealousy which is to be found everywhere, and particularly in republics; unless they are afraid that I am come



to make myself master of these savage regions.

In America you meet with nothing of that hideous police which impedes and molests every movement all over the continent of Europe; and if every individual American choose to exercise the functions of a police officer in his own person, his only object is to know if you are rich, (*primo*); what rank you hold in society,—for it is utterly false that they are indifferent to that consideration;—what your political opinions are; what business brings you to America; and a number of other trifles, which are rather gossiping than inquisitorial. In America, people are as free and independent as the air they breathe.

However, we may perform the comedy of *Ruse contre Ruse*; and, if the author of the *Caractères Nationaux* is right in the type he gives the Italians, I shall beat the Americans.

Let us rest a little, my dear Countess, for this ramble has been a very long one; nearly nine hundred and twenty-five miles. I hope at least it may have been an agreeable one to you. As for myself, it *ought* to have given me pleasure and relief; but, though the mind may be diverted from its pains for a moment, it soon relapses.



## In Quest of a True Source

When Beltrami debarked from the *Virginia* on May 10th he found a letter from Countess Compagnoni had already reached Fort St. Peter—now Fort Snelling. He was not slow in setting down his impressions of the significance of the arrival of the *Virginia* or the wonder and fear instilled in the "savages" who lined the shore:

I know not what impression the first sight of the Phœnician vessels might make on the inhabitants of the coasts of Greece; or the Triremi of the Romans on the wild natives of Iberia, Gaul, or Britain; but I am sure it could not be stronger than that which I saw on the countenances of these savages at the arrival of our steam-boat.

When they saw it cut its way without oars or sails against the current of the great river, some thought it a monster vomiting fire, others the dwelling of the Manitous, but all approached it with reverence or fear.

All the persons on board were in their eyes something more than human. Major Tagliawar, the agent, was astonished at the extraordinary marks of respect with which he was received. The Indians thought he was in the company of spirits;—it matters little whether they took us for gods or devils, for savages pay equal reverence to both; nay, they pray more to the evil spirits than to the good; for, say they, the latter, who are perfectly good, can do only good, but we must take great care not to offend the wicked, that they may do us no harm. If this is not ortho-



dox, it shews at least that the savages are not bad logicians.

Beltrami spent several exciting weeks at Fort Snelling visiting with the soldiers and officers. He especially enjoyed his intimate contacts with the various tribes of the Sioux Nation who had gathered there, and who had witnessed the advent of the *Virginia*. His entire waking moments were given over to conversing with the headmen and chiefs, attending the ceremonies, and learning of their customs. Since he was held in veneration for two things—because he was an Italian (a new race for the Indians) and because he had arrived in a fire canoe—Beltrami made the most of his situation and succeeded in wheedling a number of prized trophies from the redmen.

Beltrami's cup was filled to overflowing when he had the "good luck" to witness the arrival of an "extraordinary flotilla" of Chippewa Indians who promptly began negotiations with Major Taliaferro. The life, customs, and beliefs of these irreconcilable enemies of the Sioux were described in two successive letters by Beltrami to his "dear Countess."

But Beltrami's burning desire, once Fort Snelling had been reached, was to explore the St. Peter's, or Minnesota River, "which has never yet been explored, the sources of which are occupied by the most wild and powerful tribes of the *Sioux*, and as yet only vaguely defined; while the sur-



rounding territory abounds in buffaloes . . . It was my intention to proceed towards the sources of the Mississippi, which are still absolutely unknown . . . and which was always before my eyes."

Since Major Taliaferro was unable to go, Beltrami joined the exploring party of Major Stephen H. Long, whose destination was the headwaters of the St. Peter's, the Red River of the North, and Pembina. The arrangement with Major Long was not a happy one although it did allow Beltrami to continue chronicling the life of the Indians and fur traders. At Pembina, after more difficulties with the Major, Beltrami passed near the 49° parallel and then proceeded in a southeasterly direction to the headwaters of the Mississippi.

Beltrami fixed the source of the Mississippi in what he called "Lake Julia; and the sources of the two rivers, *the Julian sources of Bloody [Red] river*, and *the Julian sources of the Mississippi*, which, in the Algonquin language, means *the Father of Rivers*." The area Beltrami associated with the headwaters of the Mississippi can best be seen on modern maps as Lower Red Lake, Turtle Lake, and Red Cedar or Cass Lake. It is, unfortunately, not the accepted source of the Mississippi, which Henry Rowe Schoolcraft placed in Lake Itasca in 1832.

The hardships and dangers Beltrami underwent between Pembina and Cass Lake were many and sometimes exasperating. As Taliaferro relates:



His sufferings were of no agreeable nature. Here, near Leech lake, he fell in with a sub-chief, the 'Cloudy Weather,' most fortunately, who knew Mr. B., having seen him in one of my councils at the agency. The old man was given by signs, to know that white man wanted to descend the river. The chief took our Italian friend in his canoe, and turned down stream. Indians are proverbially slow, hunting and fishing on the way; Beltrami lost all patience—abused his Indian crew,—made many menaces, etc. The 'Cloud' tapped him on the hat with his pipe stem, as much as to say 'I will take you to my father safe if you will be still.' The old chief told of this temper of my friend, but Mr. B. never made allusion to it, but was very grateful to his kind Pillager friends.

From Cass Lake the indomitable Beltrami paddled down the Mississippi through Leech Lake, Grand Rapids, and Sandy Lake, finally reaching Fort Snelling where his warm reception by Major Taliaferro and the officers at the Fort so touched him that he "could not help shedding tears of gratitude and attachment."

Beltrami left his friends at Fort Snelling in a "decked vessel called a *keel-boat*" on October 3, 1823. He would have preferred crossing what is now Minnesota and Iowa to Fort Council Bluff on the Missouri River but the late season made this impractical. "Though I have in general the greatest aversion to return the way I came, yet the Mississippi has still developed to me new charms. I could, indeed, never restrain my admiration of it. What a beautiful—what a majestic river!"



From St. Louis, which he reached on October 20th, Beltrami headed downstream on the steamboat *Dolphin*, a 144-ton craft built at Pittsburgh in 1820. The mouth of the Ohio, New Madrid, Chickasaw Bluff, and a place called Memphis, an "inconsiderable village" containing "nothing of the ancient, nor the progress of the modern" are mentioned by Beltrami. Continuing downstream past the mouths of the St. Francis, White, and Arkansas rivers, Beltrami recorded Natchez, and a "pleasant little town" called Baton Rouge. Finally New Orleans was reached, a city with a "prodigious population" despite the fact it "may be said to have just emerged from a swamp" and yet appeared like some "grand capital" with its streets "well lighted with reflecting lamps."

When Beltrami reached the mouth of the Mississippi he wrote Countess Compagnoni that it could no longer be doubted that the Mississippi was the "first river in the world."

You have seen that, by facilitating commerce, that inexhaustible source of wealth, it imparts occupation and life to a world.

Finally, you have admired with me its beauty, its opulent mines, its almost always smooth and tranquil course, and the wisdom of nature in its *bayoux* or passes.

Judge now whether another such river can be found on the globe which thus communicates with every sea and at various points, which combines so many wonders with such great utility, which surveys more than one hundred steam-boats gliding over its waters, with an infinite num-



ber of other vessels freighted with the productions and manufacture of both worlds, and to which futurity promises such brilliant destinies. Judge whether the Mississippi be not the first river in the world!

Beltrami received many honors following his exciting pilgrimage through the United States in 1823. A 328-page book entitled *La Decouverte des Sources du Mississippi et de la Riviere Sanglante* was published at New Orleans in 1824. Four years later, in 1828, he published a 2-volume work of 1,093 pages in London entitled *A Pilgrimage in Europe and America, leading to the Discovery of the Sources of the Mississippi and Bloody River*. It is from the second volume of the latter that the material in this issue of *The Palimpsest* is in large measure taken.

Upon returning to Europe, Beltrami represented France at the Scientific Congress held in Stuttgart in 1834. Shortly afterward he acquired a small landed estate at Heidelberg where he lived for two years. In 1837 he was in Vienna, shortly thereafter in Rome; and finally, after more wanderings, he returned to his property at Filotrano in 1850 to be among friends. There he died in 1855 at the ripe old age of seventy-five.

Giacomo Constantine Beltrami must always be considered as one of Bergamo's most distinguished citizens. That neither his name, nor his daring adventures, have been forgotten is attested by another citizen of Bergamo, who attained world re-



noun in 1958 when he became Pope John XXIII. On one occasion, the story is told, this beloved Roman Pontiff was holding his regular audience for foreign visitors to the Vatican. Noting that one of them hailed from Memphis, Pope John declared he was especially interested in meeting the gentleman from Memphis because that city was located on the mighty Mississippi and a fellow townsman of his from Bergamo had the honor of discovering the source of the Father of Waters. Truly, Beltrami and his American exploits have not been forgotten. And Bergamo itself can be proud of being the birthplace of such outstanding men as Giacomo Constantine Beltrami and Pope John XXIII.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN







N<sup>o</sup>. 92

ENROLMENT, in conformity to an Act of the Congress of the United States of America, entitled "An act for enrolling and licensing ships or vessels to be employed in the Coasting trade and fisheries, and for regulating the same,"

*Redick McKee of Wheeling*  
in the State of Virginia —

having taken or subscribed the Oath — required by the said act, and  
having sworn — that he together with *Noah Lane*  
*Charles D. Knox, John Dully, George Dully,*  
*John Fawcett, James Pemberton and John Coffin*  
of Wheeling aforesaid and *Daniel Moore*  
of Washington, State of Pennsylvania

are citizens of the United States, sole owners  
of the ship or vessel called the *Virginia*  
of *Wheeling* — whereof — *W. McKnight*  
is at present master, and as he hath sworn — is a citizen of the  
United States, and that the said ship or vessel was built at *Wheeling,*  
~~in the~~ State aforesaid in the year 1819.  
as per Certificate of *Redick McKee* on file  
in this office, who saw her built —

And *William Emerson*  
Surveyor of the Port of New Orleans — having certified  
that the said ship or vessel has one deck and no mast and that her  
length is *One hundred & eighteen feet*  
her breadth *Eighteen feet, ten inches*  
her depth *five feet, two inches*  
and that she measures *One hundred & three*  
and  $\frac{32}{95}$  tons;  
that she is a *Steam boat* has a *Square Stern* with a  
*American Bow on deck* and no figure head;  
And the said *Redick McKee* — having  
agreed to the description and admeasurement above specified, and sufficient security  
having been given according to the said act, the said *Steam boat* has been duly  
enrolled at the port of *New Orleans.*

GIVEN under our Hands and Seal at the Port of New Orleans;  
this *21<sup>st</sup>* day of *December* in the Year One Thousand  
*Eight Hundred & Twenty two*

Original Enrolment of the *Virginia*, dated at New Orleans on December 21, 1822, and discovered by William J. Petersen in the National Archives in Washington on December 23, 1969.



