

The PALIMPSEST

JANUARY 1939

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

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

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Superintendent

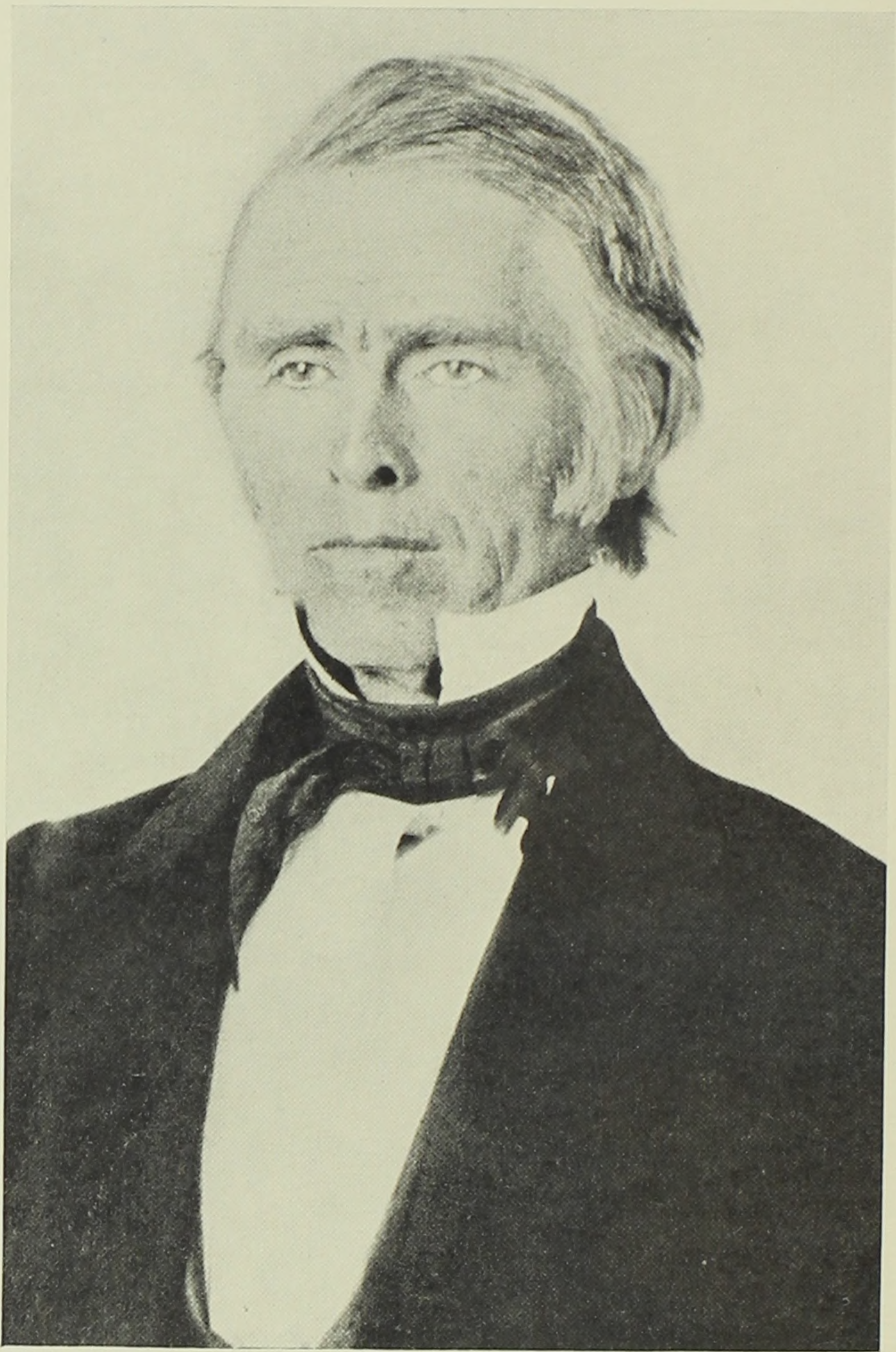
THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

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

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

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FROM A FERROTYPE

OZRO FRENCH

THE PALIMPSEST

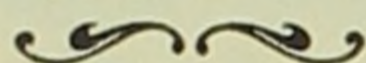
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The Education of a Clergyman

It was June 8, 1807. In the pleasant village of Dummerston, Vermont, an old, yet always new, event was taking place. When William French was presented with his new-born son, he called the baby Ozro. There had been Johns and Williams, Rebeccas and Mehitabels, and Jonathans and Abigails in the nine generations of the French family in America, but this child was the first to be named Ozro. And a good name it was. The infant who bore it was to make it known and respected, not only in the land of steady habits, but also in far-off India and ultimately on the Iowa frontier.

As Ozro French grew to boyhood, he learned something of the history of the French family. The surname was said to be derived from an ash tree or perhaps an ashen spear. Traditionally, the line extended back through the centuries to the days of Rollo, Duke of Normandy. There were Frenches in England in 1599. Lieutenant

William French, his wife Elizabeth, and their four children brought the family name to Boston on October 3, 1635, in the good ship *Defense*. From this contingent sprang the nine generations of ancestors to which Ozro could look back. He could even trace with his finger the names of God-fearing ancestors cut firmly into New England granite gravestones.

Ozro showed himself to be a boy of promise during the days of his early village education. His natural intelligence together with his pietism led to a desire for further schooling. Plans were made for him to attend one of the better institutions.

Brattleboro Academy, when the twenty-one-year-old lad entered in the spring of 1829, stood high in the educational life of New England. Its classical curriculum was sound, and its faculty were men of learning. There French first set foot upon the path which was to lead him to India and eventually to the Iowa agricultural frontier.

Ozro quickly adjusted himself to the academy environment. He spent many hours of "hard vexatious study" over Cicero and complained to his diary that the passing and repassing of stages frequently interrupted his work. He became a member of a small debating circle and attended a singing school conducted by a Mr. Baker. "Be-

fore they began to sing," he wrote, "my heart was wounded within me to behold some vain and wicked playing lively dancing tunes upon their musical instruments."

He was equally upset when, early in May, a traveling troupe exhibited a few cages of wild animals in the village. "Many people," commented the young scholar, "old and young, rich and poor, male and female went from the town. Some would give more to see wild animals than to send the gospel of peace and grace to the heathen".

Student life was not easy for French. He learned hard. In addition, he was poor. But he was determined in his ways and possessed the sterling qualities which so frequently New England imparted, as a precious gift, to her favored sons. He received some slight compensation for rising early each morning and ringing the academy bell. And even though he received his board free and his tuition gratis, he had to saw wood in order to meet his few incidental expenses. Two handkerchiefs, for example, cost him fifty-eight cents, and a new palm-leaf hat was fifty-four cents more. A Greek grammar and reader came to \$2.62½.

By the end of June, discouraged but determined, Ozro French left the academy to teach at Newfane, a small village only a few miles from

Dummerston. Before leaving Brattleboro, he essayed expression of his morbidity in verse.

Swifter than the flying arrow
Pass my days and months away;
Each reminds me of the narrow
House appointed for this clay.

In Newfane, he found a "very noisesome, roguish set of scholars" who tried his patience and flouted his authority. For teaching the full term of school, he received \$40.50, enough to enable him to register again in the academy in March, 1830. On September 6th, he completed his course satisfactorily and made ready to enter Williams College.

He went to Williams in the autumn of 1830 and was graduated four years later. His entrance examination, obligatory of every freshman, was conducted by Professor Ebenezer Kellogg, and he spent his first night at Kellogg's Tavern. The next morning he obtained a room at No. 12 Williams College, and found board with a Captain Taft. During the afternoon, French made himself a table from rough boards and began to build a desk.

Classes began on September 30th. "Recited the first lesson today to Tudor [Mason] Noble. He is very young, pleasant and affable in appear-

ance. The religious exercises of the chapel are interesting and devotional. Thus far I am highly pleased with my situation. I find amongst the students some devoted Christians, intercourse with whom I shall esteem and hope to be benefited from their example, and influence."

French's career at Williams was one of alternate satisfactions and disappointments. He relished the activities of the Sabbath School Society whose function was to establish Sabbath Schools in the "valley of the Mississippi", and he took an active part in the local temperance societies. He was also a member of the Anti-Tobacco Society. The Philotechian Literary Society, founded in 1795, invited him to become a member. On June 9, 1834, the group debated whether or not persons of color should be admitted to New England colleges.

Certain college activities, however, were anathema to him. Chip Day, when the students cleaned the college premises of debris accumulated during the winter months, and Gravel Day, when undergraduates carefully spread gravel upon the muddy college walks, were unpleasant occasions. He made no objection to the work involved for he was used to labor, but he heartily disliked the spirit of fun with which students clothed their tasks.

"Satan has triumphed," he wrote after Chip Day of 1832, "and led almost all College captive at his will. . . . Professors of religion joined with the ungodly in all the mean, sinful transactions of the day, which has disgraced the college and injured the character of many individuals."

It is interesting to compare French's picture of this typical New England college celebration with that painted of the same occasion by one of his classmates. "At length it came," wrote the more secular student, "and a beautiful one it was. The laughing sun shone brightly and not a cloud darkened the azure concave . . . 'Hurrah! Hurrah!' echoed through the halls. 'We have the day, hurrah, hurrah!' The big, disfiguring piles of rubbish were quickly removed. A procession followed in which the late chipmen became a martial troop, brooms and brushes served as flagstuffs, and sheets and handkerchiefs as floating pennants. Our quiet, beautiful town of the vale has not seen so imposing a sight this many a day."

On November 4, 1830, an agent of the American Tract Society arrived at the college to stress the wants of "the west" and of "foreign lands". With thoughts already turning to the ministry, French was deeply impressed by the claims of these two great areas of spiritual destitution.

During college vacations, the erstwhile student

frequently taught school. During the winter of 1830-31, he instructed twenty-six pupils at Canaan, New York. He taught at Adams for two months in the following year. His total salary at Adams was twenty-four dollars. During the heavy winter months of 1833-34, he conducted a family school where "seven precious souls" were under his care, and in April, 1834, he taught at the Burr Seminary in Manchester, Vermont. Years later, after his return from India, the missionary met two of the boys whom he had instructed when at Manchester. Both were in the ministry, and each testified that his inspiration came from French.

Fourteen days after his arrival at Burr Seminary, the young professor set down a list of the sins of which he was especially guilty.

1. Neglect to study the Bible, and bring the truth home to my heart.
2. Formality in prayer. (Very guilty)
3. Vanity in thought, word, and action.
4. Positive transgression of God's word.
5. Unfaithfulness to Christians.
6. Unfaithfulness to sinners.
7. Abuse of Sabbath and other means of grace.
8. General neglect of opportunities for doing good.
9. Special abuse of stations of influence.
10. Inclination to justify my disobedience. (A very great and aggravated offense.)
11. Misuse of seasons devoted to humiliation and fasting.

Such self-reproach seems feebly rooted in fact. It was customary for pietistic young folks to dwell more upon their shortcomings than upon their virtues. The true analysis of French's personality and character lies in the more than seventy small, paper-covered diaries which he kept for almost thirty years. Here is revealed a character devoted to honesty, truth, uprightness, and Christian living.

On July 10, 1834, French completed his duties at Burr Seminary and set out, on foot, for Williamstown. Within six days he completed his senior examinations and was ready for graduation. "This is the last Sabbath of my college life," he wrote on August 17th, after hearing Dr. Edward D. Griffin deliver the baccalaureate sermon from Zachariah 14:20, 21. Commencement exercises for the twenty-nine seniors were held three days later. In the evening the Handel Society gave an oratorio, but "the intended address on the occasion failed, and some of the instrumental music deserted us."

French was firmly determined to enter the ministry, although he was yet undecided whether to elect the foreign or home missionary field. After some discussion, he planned to enroll at Andover Theological Seminary and while there choose his field of activity. He arrived at Andover on Sep-

tember 9, 1834. Classes began in late October, yet there were some amusements. On November 1st, French wrote, "Saw the 'menagery' this afternoon. This is the first time that I ever saw a wild animal of any kind except a monkey." He was then twenty-seven years old.

The curriculum at Andover, of course, was centered around such subjects as Christian theology, sacred literature, sacred rhetoric, ecclesiastical history, and pastoral theology. The Reverend Justin Edwards was president of the seminary, and Lowell Mason, well-known in the annals of American song, was instructor of sacred music.

As the young man worked in his plain room at No. 29 Bartlet Hall, read in the seminary library, or walked in the hills, his thoughts frequently turned to his life work. Where should he preach? For a time he toyed with the idea of going to the trans-Mississippi frontier where the need for missionaries was great. But, more and more, his mind was attracted by the foreign field. Perhaps the lure of far places played fascinating tricks with the imagination of this sturdy New Englander so accustomed to the commonplace. Of one thing he was certain — he was going to be a missionary. He would elect no easy city pastorate.

On November 11, 1834, French met informally, after dusk, with a few classmates who felt a

personal interest in missions. "There are several of our number whose hearts are set on the ends of the world." And on New Year's Day of 1835, the second step was taken when he "met for the first time with the committee on Foreign Missions, to whom I have joined myself." The final decision came on April 9th. "Why should not I be a missionary," he entered in his diary. "Is my constitution and health sufficient? Yes. Do friends and earthly connections afford a barrier? No. Is there then anything in the way? Nothing which I can plead as an excuse before God. Shall I not, then, must I not go? . . . Lord, I am thine, to thee I consecrate my powers and devote my life. If thou wilt, send me to the heathen".

The years at Andover saw a mental and spiritual growth in the young man. Having mastered the technique of learning and having committed himself to theology, he prospered both in his studies and his professional obligations. Much time and energy was given to his Sabbath School class, to visiting the sick and sitting with the dead, and with seeking to convert domestic servants and laborers. He held meetings at the "poor house" near Andover, identified himself with temperance and anti-slavery interests, and became chairman of the Andover Foreign Mission Committee. During the fall vacation of 1836 he taught school

in West Chester, New Hampshire. That year also he journeyed on the Erie Canal to Buffalo. On April 11, 1836, in Dalton, he met Miss Jane Hotchkiss, his future wife. Sometime in May he proposed to her.

His senior year at Andover was little different from preceding semesters. His class of about twenty young theologians was graduated in 1837 and scattered from Andover's red brick buildings and enclosing fence to all parts of the world. French began to prepare for his ordination examinations.

He was ordained at Brattleboro on November 7, 1838. The services began at eleven o'clock amid surroundings which the candidate knew so well. From Isaiah 55: 12, 13, came the words of a well-known text beginning, "I have made the earth, and created man upon it." The young minister, dedicated to the church, read aloud the words of the closing hymn, "Yes, my native land, I love thee." At the end of that day, French wrote that he felt "entirely composed and at home" during the exercises. "The deed is done. I am now publicly consecrated to the sacred ministry."

PHILIP D. JORDAN

I. H. PIERCE

Missionary in India

After ordination, Ozro French continued his theological studies, labored at East Indian dialects, and supplied several pulpits. In the meantime, however, he planned to wed Jane Hotchkiss, of Harpersfield, New York. Their courtship terminated on March 11, 1839, when, on Monday afternoon, they were married. "The ceremony was performed by Rev. S. Williston in a very solemn and impressive manner," wrote George W. Reynolds, a mutual friend, "and instead of the levity generally manifest on such occasions, here was seen the falling tear and heard the heartfelt sigh."

On March 28th, the young couple "knelt for the last time around that sacred family Altar," and Mr. French led in prayer. Tearful farewells over, they took the stage to Prattsville and from there traveled to Salem by way of Boston. The brig *Waverly*, with New England lines and a Yankee master, was waiting, as were five other missionaries all bound to work "amid the darkness & degradation of heathenism."

Friends gathered at the wharf for prayers and a psalm. Then began the long voyage. The missionaries organized themselves into a Bible

class to study the words of the Apostles. On May 15th, an American whaler passed, stopping long enough, however, to take a packet of mail to the States. Two days later the *Waverly* was becalmed off the coast of Brazil. On June 8th, French celebrated the thirty-second anniversary of his birthday. "Soon my earthly course will be finished and yet I have scarcely begun to live." Land was first sighted on June 24th when French noted in his diary the coast of Madagascar.

Finally, after a "prosperous passage" of ninety-two days the sailing brig docked at Zanzibar. The date was July 2nd. French, together with the ship's captain, went ashore to call upon the American consul. They also visited a prince who received the party with "apparent cordiality" and served his guests with "a cup of coffee, then with a glass of sherbet and afterwards with a cocoanut."

On August 10th, the brig dropped anchor at Bombay. There was the field of which French had dreamed since a student at Williams College. And there he was to spend ten years of his life.

His first pastorate was at Ahmednugger, a desolate location less than 100 miles inland from Bombay. The new pastor found his task difficult, and the heathen singularly unconcerned with salvation. He remained about a year and a half when he moved to Siroor. There he labored most dili-

gently, traveling to isolated villages, distributing tracts, and preaching the Gospel. At Nighoos, Bohera, and other villages he established schools for natives. Sometimes, as at Adulgon, his audiences numbered 100 persons, but few natives showed a disposition to forsake their own gods. "O! the abominations of idolatry! When will the gospel, in its enlightening, purifying, saving influence be felt in this dark, ruined land!"

Mrs. French labored with the native women, receiving daily congregations and explaining the care of children and treatment of the sick. Sometimes she accompanied her husband on his exhausting trips into the back-country where natives bathed in the blood of the lamb and made sacrifices to grotesque gods. She helped also with transcribing hymns into a musical form which her husband had invented for native use. Local dialects were utilized as much as possible.

But the exhausting climate, the long treks, the death of three infants, Jane, Joseph, and Willie, and the unhappiness over his failure to achieve greater success undermined French's health. His eyes grew weak and inflamed, and he suffered from other disorders. For almost a year he gave up the bulk of his duties in order to care for his physical self. Finally, he surrendered to pain and prepared to return to America.

It was not easy for Ozro French to leave his chosen field. Weeks were spent in packing a few precious books and household belongings and saying goodbye to friends.

On December 14, 1848, Mr. and Mrs. French, together with their four-year-old daughter, Lydia, and their infant son, Russel, started on the ten-day trip to Bombay. There they rested until January 17, 1849, when, at one o'clock in the afternoon, they sailed on an English vessel for London. They never saw India again.

Their sailing vessel made from 130 to 240 miles per day, and put into port after a voyage of four months and a day. Both Mrs. French and Lydia were unable to walk and had to be carried from the ship. Their feet had been infected with a peculiar worm common to vessels of the 1840's. While in London, French attended the anniversary meeting of the National Temperance Society in Exeter Hall, visited Westminster Abbey, and heard "several excellent" sermons.

The party left London for Liverpool on June 6th, and six days later sailed for New York on the *Montisuma*. Their passage cost £44. There were only three other cabin passengers, while 340 persons crowded steerage quarters. The trip was without incident with the exception of two events. Little Russel spilled a bowl of soup upon his foot,

burning it badly. And on July 1st, an old man died with symptoms resembling cholera.

When Long Island was sighted on July 17th and a pilot came aboard, passengers learned that the disease was rampant in New York. Russel was ill when the Frenches arrived in the city on July 19th. He seemed to respond to treatment, however, and his parents hurried him to Catskill where they prayed the dreaded cholera would not follow. The child grew worse rapidly. He died of cholera on July 25th, and was buried at Catskill. "It was a severe trial to be called to follow this our *fourth* child to an early grave".

After the funeral, the parents and Lydia left for Mrs. French's home in Harpersfield, where they arrived on July 26th, six months and two days after leaving Bombay.

French spent the remainder of the year resting, making short trips, and attempting to regain his health. It is said that he traveled for some months in 1850-51 as an agent for home missions in Kentucky and Tennessee, but his careful diaries make no reference to this task, if, indeed, he ever performed it. A sixth child, Elizabeth, was born at Harpersfield on April 17, 1850.

PHILIP D. JORDAN
I. H. PIERCE

Iowa Pastor

"I am now expecting to start for Iowa about the first of May to labor in connection with the American Home Missionary Society." Thus reads the entry for March 31, 1851, in Ozro French's diary.

This decision was neither voluntary nor easy. His passionate desire was to return to his labors of affection in Siroor. But that was impossible. Boston physicians told him that he would risk his sight in India. And a series of water treatments had failed to relieve a body grown weary and weak on Indian trails. If, then, he could not continue as a foreign missionary, he would enlist in the ranks of those ministers who were carrying the gospel to the American frontier. He was going West. Iowa was his choice.

An anonymous clergyman, writing in *The Home Missionary* for October, 1851, struck off an apt characterization of the West in which French was to find himself. "The errors of the West are of gigantic proportions. Their leaders are bold, reckless, and revolutionary. One of the most striking characteristics of the West, too, is the spirit of self-reliance which manifests itself in

church and state, among saints and sinners . . . They are like steamboats of high pressure, which have vast propelling power, whether they have prudent captains and sober crews or not . . . The mighty West seems like a great caldron where every heterogeneous element is fermenting, foaming, and every now and then overflowing."

French learned, when he went to New York in April of '51 to receive his home missionary commission, that Iowa Congregationalism was prospering. Fifty missionaries already were in the Hawkeye State, in addition to eleven other Congregational ministers, six of whom were entirely supported by their own congregations. There were seventy-one Congregational and Presbyterian churches with a total membership of 2600 souls. This success was determined, in large part, by the work of the Iowa Band, a group of young men from Andover who had arrived in 1843.

Five Congregational churches were composed of Germans, and one of French immigrants. Twenty-nine churches had been dedicated, and ten were under construction. The Reverend Ephraim Adams, of Davenport, once pictured one of these frontier structures. The edifice, he wrote, "gave forth as many sounds as an aeolian harp, though not quite so melodious. With clapboards whizzing, and shingles trembling, windows rattl-

ing, and doors ajar, it afforded a fine opportunity for the cultivation of the [minister's] voice on the higher keys."

While in New York, preparatory to leaving for Iowa, French purchased some books, secured a supply of tracts, and replenished his wardrobe. Returning to Harpersfield, he packed his goods in stout cases and sent them to Saint Louis by way of the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes. On May 5th, he, his wife, Lydia, and the baby bade friends and relatives farewell and started, by easy stages, in a diagonal line running northwest from Harpersfield to Buffalo. They visited in Franklin, Elmira, and Springville. On May 21st, they embarked at Buffalo for Chicago where they arrived on the following Monday after a five-day voyage.

There French lost his pocketbook, containing \$150 in cash and valuable papers. From Chicago, they followed the Illinois canal system through Joliet to LaSalle, and thence Beardstown. The evening of June 2, 1851, was spent in Burlington, Iowa, where the missionary attended a monthly concert.

Early on the following morning, a Mississippi steamboat, her paddles churning the great river, took them to Saint Louis. French lingered in the old city only long enough to claim his baggage.

On the following evening he, his family, and their luggage were all in Fort Madison.

The General Association of Iowa was meeting in Denmark, home of Asa Turner and perhaps the fount of Congregationalism in Iowa. French attended the sessions, met many of the Iowa pastors, and on June 8th preached on the conditions and wants of India. Then he went on to the hamlet of Cedar in Lee County. Swollen streams, hot weather, and swarms of flying bugs all conspired to make the trip unpleasant. Upon one occasion he fell from his horse while fording a stream. Water rushed into his saddle-bags, ruining his few possessions.

Cedar he found an attractive place, newly settled, and in the midst of a farming district. French further emphasized the importance of the place. "Two plank roads," he wrote, "the one from Keokuk going N. W. between the Des Moines and Skunk rivers and the other passing from Burlington to Keosauqua — both of which will probably be constructed ere long — are expected to intersect near this place." There was the center of his pastoral activities. He preached in five different neighborhoods, and when the weather was favorable had good congregations. When he opened his copy of *The Home Missionary* for June, 1851, he found a notice that the

Reverend Ozro French had been commissioned in April to go to Iowa.

As the days passed and the golden time of Indian summer was nipped by November frost, French became increasingly discouraged. The plank roads had not materialized, his congregation was moving farther west, and the work of salvation dragged. He had only twenty-four church members. Of these, seventeen were women. Average attendance at morning service was about thirty-five. The pastor could count no hopeful conversions, no members added by letter, and none by profession. He had been unable to organize a temperance society. His Sabbath School library numbered only about forty-five volumes. His people had contributed only three dollars to foreign missions.

The minister, from his own meagre salary, was making far greater sacrifices for various worthy causes. He contributed to the American and Foreign Christian Union, the American Peace Society, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and the American Education Society. While in Cedar he subscribed to the *New Englander*, *Independent*, and *Journal of the American Temperance Union*. From time to time he received boxes of books and clothing from the Ladies Home Missionary Society of Warren,

Massachusetts. These were shipped to him in care of his forwarding agents, Chittenden and McGavie, of Keokuk.

When officials of the Home Missionary Society, in the fall of 1851, asked him to compare the foreign and home missionary fields, he replied in detail. "If you wish to know what my experience has been thus far, I can say that both in India & Iowa I have had enough to eat & to drink & have never known what it is to be anxious about the necessities or comforts of life. There my principal trials were connected with the climate & the want of social & religious privileges; here with the want of favorably situated & comfortable houses to live in, & a field of labor in which I can feel that I am working to advantage. In both fields I find it necessary to walk by faith in regard to the work in hand, but of the two I think my faith is more severely tried here than it was in India. . . . If a Missionary, with the spirit of his Master, has health & the prospect of usefulness, he will not have reason, in my estimation, to magnify his sufferings, either in the Home or the Foreign field."

He remained at Cedar until February 25, 1852. At that time, after securing permission from his superiors, he moved to a recently vacated field at Bentonsport. There he purchased a house for

\$800 and preached his first sermon in the town from Numbers 24: 13. "I entered upon my labors among this people," French wrote in his quarterly report to the Society, "under favorable circumstances, in most respects . . . I have reason to thank God that my lot has been cast among such a people".

Then, in his modest but comprehensive manner, he wrote on, describing his life and activities among the people of Iowa. "I spend one Sabbath in the month with the Little Cedar church, and preach at two different points. On the other three Sabbaths, I preach each morning at this place. In the afternoon of the first Sabbath, I lecture here on the subject of Foreign Missions, in connection with the monthly concert. The other two Sabbath afternoons, I preach in two neighborhoods, two and five miles distant. I attend regularly upon the Bible class, Sabbath morning at 8 o'clock, and the prayer meeting Wednesday night."

A year later he could report further progress. He had instituted a daily concert of private prayer, had organized a series of evening meetings, and had formed a Juvenile Total Abstinence Society with about fifty members. Only in a few cases was he "prophesying to the dry bones". In 1853, he wrote that "The Lord is favoring us still in reli-

gious matters" and went on to describe an increase in both church and Sabbath School attendance. In addition, he reported a flourishing Bible class for young people.

During the last week of December, 1853, the ladies of the Sewing Society "held a fair, the avails to be devoted to the purchase of a bell for our Academy. The occasion yielded them — after paying all expenses — some \$70 or more. That amount more than paid the balance due for the bell, whose daily tones strike our ears pleasantly."

So successful was he that both in 1853 and 1854, the Bentonsport church petitioned officials of the Home Missionary Society to grant further financial aid that French might be enabled to stay on. Both pleas were signed by John D. Sanford and Edward Colton, deacons. The Reverend Harvey Adams endorsed the petition of 1854. As a result, the national association granted French \$230 in 1853 and \$270 the subsequent year.

But, almost above all else, the Bentonsport missionary wanted a church building. His congregation was worshipping where it could. These temporary abodes were displeasing to French's orderly mind. Even in India he had had a chapel. By 1856 sufficient money had been raised and a

site selected for a new edifice. Workmen, however, were scarce. The immigrant was too busy tilling his fields and building mills to donate labor to a church. Much of the manual work fell to the pastor's lot.

"I have found it necessary," French complained, "to go into the woods, and with my own hands cut down trees, and get out saw logs, and then assist in hauling the lumber from the mill, and stacking it up in the dry-kiln." Twice he drove to the Mississippi with a team for supplies. He aided in building the furnace, helped the mason, and lathed part of the building. "Day after day have I wrought with my own hands, that the work might go on, and the Lord's house be completed this season." The structure was finished and dedicated in 1856. Then there was rejoicing.

Despite his heavy local duties, French found opportunity to identify himself with State religious interests. He became acquainted with O. W. Mather who was preaching in Paw Paw, with Daniel Lane at Keosauqua, and with William Salter in Burlington. On June 3, 1852, he attended meetings of the Des Moines River Association at Muscatine, and in the following year, when the group met in Mount Pleasant, he addressed the children. In 1854, the Association

named him as a delegate to the Synod of Illinois. Such activities he continued as long as he was able.

Ozro French, in this period of his life, made a dignified appearance in his black suit, dark silk waistcoat, and starched white shirt. His face seemed to express the determination of his New England background as well as the characteristics of his Yankee stock. Graying hair, brushed back from a high forehead and falling over the well-defined ears, softened what could easily have been an austere face. His keen eyes looked down over a rather thin nose which flared slightly at the nostrils. Prominent wrinkles, almost creases, ran in an arc from the lower face to beneath his narrow lips while the stiff points of a stand-up collar stood sentinel over a resolute chin.

His daughter, Elizabeth, described him as reserved and dignified, but quite fond of a proper and dignified joke. He regarded order as a first law, and on his desk each article was arranged with mathematical precision. A lover of native flowers, he frequently returned from preaching trips with plants, carefully wrapped in paper, in his saddle-bags.

In the fall of 1856, the Home Missionary Society moved French to Knoxville. He preached there and at nearby Pleasantville. These were

barren fields. French said that he seemed to be doing little more than holding the ground and keeping the church together. Frequently his thoughts turned to the heyday of his ministry in India. What a season of joy that experience now appeared to him. The comparison between labors in India and Iowa "always makes me feel that either I have sadly degenerated as a laborer in the vineyard of the Lord, or this is a less hopeful field of labor than it was my privilege to occupy on the other side of the globe."

Such gloom was further intensified by the death of Charles, an adopted son, on May 11, 1860. This five-year-old lad was the fourth male child lost to the pastor and his wife. Surely, the Lord's chastisement was heavy. They found consolation, however, in their three daughters. Mary, the youngest, was born at Bentonsport on December 15, 1852.

Members of the Knoxville congregation found it increasingly difficult to raise \$125 as their share toward French's salary of \$400 in 1861. The Home Missionary Society, generous as always, agreed to underwrite the balance of \$275. But both church and the Society were not always prompt, and the French family entered upon a period of real financial embarrassment.

"Our wardrobe is getting reduced," complained

the unhappy minister, "and we have no intimation that any of our friends are about to replenish it." He asked for a box of clothes which would fit himself and Mrs. French, "both above mediocrity in size", as well as garments suitable for three daughters "whose heights are respectively 5 ft. 2 in, 4 ft. 6 in, and 3 ft. 10 in." Such were the measurements of Lydia, Elizabeth, and Mary, three little girls anxiously awaiting a missionary box. It finally arrived, sent in care of Ogden and Copp, of Ottumwa. Then came days of fittings and adjustments.

When the Civil War broke out, French made a home for volunteers who were drilling in the neighborhood. In June, 1861, a hundred recruits left Knoxville for military service. "At the request of the captain," wrote French, "each of the ministers of the place had opportunity to preach to the company. It was a sort of protracted meeting of five services." Each soldier was then presented with a Bible and a New Testament. By October, some 400 volunteers, including a company of Home Guards, had left Knoxville and vicinity. "The sad effects of the civil war is sweeping like a tornado through this fair land."

By New Year's Day of 1862, French was out of funds and in despair. He wrote officials of the Home Missionary Society asking permission to

open a small school by which he might supplement his slender salary. He was refused. French thereupon applied for a transfer to another field. He ceased his labors in Knoxville on July 31, 1862, to begin work in New Haven, Washington County, on February 2, 1863. There he ministered to two country churches. He was then in the fifty-fifth year of his life and had been a minister for almost a quarter of a century.

Southern sentiment was strong in the pastor's new parish. Yet this did not deter French from uttering strong Union and anti-slavery sentiments. "Almost always in my prayers," he grimly reported to his superiors, "I remember the state of our country and pray for the overthrow of Slavery." Within a year he was quietly asking to be sent elsewhere, preferably to Tennessee or southern Missouri.

His last pastorate was at Blairstown where he was moved in 1864. There he organized a church, but feeble health prevented him from the strenuous efforts he customarily put forth. "I have suffered a good deal," he wrote, "in my winter rides over these broad prairies of Iowa . . . I presume my ten years residence in a tropical climate had a permanent effect upon my constitution, unfitting me for such severe weather as we sometimes have here."

Yet he determined to carry on. He purchased a lot in Blairstown and set his house upon wooden posts as he could secure no foundation stone. With his own hands, he fashioned a dug-out for a cellar. He preached regularly, waged war upon local saloon keepers and gamblers, and took delight in watching the operations of a new steam flouring mill.

"Our work here is just begun," he wrote in his final report to the Home Missionary Society. "In this vicinity there is but little leaven to leaven a large lump of heedless indifference and skepticism." He died on September 28, 1865, from an ailment which had first manifested itself in Siroor. Said the Dubuque *News-Letter*, "He won the respect and esteem of his fellow citizens as an indefatigable and earnest Christian minister, and has left the memory and savor of a godly life and conversation."

PHILIP D. JORDAN
I. H. PIERCE

Comment by the Editor

THE SOURCE OF LIBERTY

Self-preservation is the first law of nature. Every sign points toward the universal principle that each element in creation is meant to endure. That is the plan. In the world of things, matter is never destroyed, though it may be changed. Rooted deeply in the instincts of animals, the rule of survival forms the pattern of behavior. To most creatures the object of conduct is to eat and escape being eaten. Whatever the effects of circumstance may be, the basic fact is ever apparent: the nature of the universe centers in individual welfare.

Some men are more successful than others in the ruthless struggle for food and the certainty of future satisfaction. They tend to preserve their abundance and devise institutions to crystalize their gains in social habits. Privilege speaks in the name of a group, and so the interests of a class or a nation or a sect are placed above the needs of persons.

Against this doctrine of subservience, Christ taught the essential truth of individual worth. To every one, no matter how humble, the teachings

of Jesus offer the hope of human equality. If, in the sight of God, all men are noble, who then shall be consigned to servitude? The inspiration that flows from the promise of personal distinction is the source of liberty. As people strive to measure up to the dignity that is rightfully theirs, they rise above the level of humiliation and despair.

Inspired by the idea that every soul is precious, Christians like Ozro French have devoted their lives to teaching their neighbors to have faith in themselves. While saving others they sacrificed their own material welfare. Through sickness, poverty, and misfortune the spiritual pioneers kept their own integrity of purpose and lent generously from their fund of encouragement. If their particular influence sometimes seemed futile, the sum of their efforts nevertheless imparted a religious character of permanent value to our commonwealth. In the sermons of the missionary preachers may be found the roots of many social and political habits. They helped to create the will to be free.

J. E. B.

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