

Clint Parkhurst

Henry Clinton Parkhurst, a man of brilliant mind, a prolific author of fine prose and poetry productions, has in consequence of a tangle of circumstances, almost sunk into oblivion, yet the memory of him is fresh in the minds of a few of his former acquaintances who have made unavailing efforts to learn his recent whereabouts.

It was a happy incident that *THE PALIMPSEST* published in a recent number a few of Parkhurst's *Martial Memories*, in which the private of the Sixteenth Iowa Infantry tells the graphic details — spiced with humor and some self-mockery — of the terrific Battle of Shiloh where he received his first and lasting impressions of war, for by that publication the interest in the author has been revived.

Where Clinton Parkhurst is living — at an age of 76 or 77 — the present writer does not know. Neither has he much knowledge of his doings after he left the Iowa Soldiers' Home at Marshalltown, of which he is reported to have been an inmate since 1895. As a matter of fact he probably spent comparatively few years at the Home for during that period he was for a longer or shorter time in various parts of the country — East, West, and South. But of the earlier years much can be told and the following account is an attempt to contribute some of the missing fragments of the "biographical mosaic".

The village of Parkhurst in Scott County, where Clint was born in 1844, and the neighboring village of LeClaire, which in 1855 were consolidated under the name of LeClaire, have been centers of intellectual life from their earliest days, and Mr. and Mrs. Lemuel Parkhurst, the parents of Clinton, were prominent in that society. His mother early recognized the bright qualities of her son and granted him every advantage for their cultivation. In later years he wrote of his mother:

Ignore the common goal, she said,
Leave fools to gather rubbish vile;
Lift thou thine eyes to heights o'erhead,
And seek to bask in Glory's smile.
The sluggard perishes in shame,
The Shylock's pomps with him expire.
The hero leaves a deathless name
For countless ages to admire.
Strong be thy will — as iron strong,
To cleave a path to grand renown,
And, peerless in the fields of song,
To millions shall thy name go down.
Let proud ambition sway thy mind, —
To live, that when thy race is o'er,
Resplendent tracks shall glow behind.

Clint had his early training in a select school in LeClaire, taught by a Mrs. Mary Marks, a highly educated English lady, the wife of an Episcopal minister. In Davenport he first attended the public

school, then Iowa College, and after its removal to Grinnell, the Griswold College. He is said — and probably truthfully — to have been full of harmless pranks. He had a peculiar way of translating phonetically some silly Latin sentences: for instance, “Pastor ridebit” he would give in English “Pastor, ride a bit”, and for “Puer juraverat” he would say “The poor jury ’ve a rat”. This sort of linguistic sport, however, was not always appreciated by the teacher. From early youth he evinced a remarkable gift for beautiful prose writing and also for versification which augured a great future.

In February, 1862, at a little over seventeen years of age, he enlisted in Co. C of the Sixteenth Iowa Infantry and on March 20th was sent with his regiment to St. Louis. There the raw recruit was equipped with a glittering rifle and other paraphernalia and was sent a few days later to war, the horrors of which he immediately experienced in the bloody Battle of Shiloh. Never shirking from duty, or avoiding the perils of battle, he participated in all the important events of the various campaigns up to the battles around Atlanta, when he with the greater portion of the gallant regiment was captured and held a prisoner by the Confederates.

From the beginning of his military service he kept a daily record of all he saw and participated in, continuing it till the war ended, not ceasing to write secretly in the deadly stockades of Andersonville, Millen, and Florence. Thus he accumulated much

highly valuable material which was later elaborated in a large number of war sketches and also furnished a delicate coloring for his different epical works.

Parkhurst was mustered out of service in July, 1865, and became a reporter on the *Davenport Democrat*, but soon shifted to a paper in Le Claire, thence to Rock Island, Moline, Muscatine, Des Moines, and other places. In one or two of these papers he had even acquired a pecuniary interest. He never stayed long in one position, nowhere finding an opportunity that would suit his particular ideals of journalism, and he quit. He turned to writing magazine articles and other forms of literary work. For, as he says of himself:

From his very boyhood days
Fame had been his constant dream.

It is difficult, almost to the verge of impossibility, to follow Clint Parkhurst's much twisted meanderings. One month he might be in Chicago or New York, and the next in San Francisco, St. Louis, or Tacoma, doing for a short time some editorial or other literary work, or he would spend weeks and months in the Sierras to gather new inspirations. In 1874 and 1875 he was in Mexico and Nicaragua, and the fruit of this jaunt was an extensive epos entitled "Sun Worship Shores". In 1876 he came from California back to Davenport, where in De-

ember of that year he was admitted to the bar of Scott County.

The subjects of his writings were almost exclusively historical — biblical or secular. Numerous sketches from the Civil War have been published in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Chicago News*, the *Davenport Democrat*, the *Davenport Times*, the *Davenport Leader*, the *Omaha Bee*, the *Galveston News*, the *Boston Investigator*, the *Marshalltown Register*, etc., either over his real name or the nom de plume "Free Lance". Several of the above named papers printed also large extracts from his epics, "Shot and Shell", "Judith", "Voyage of Columbus", "In Custer's Honor", "Pauline", "Sun Worship Shores", "Death Speech of Robert Emmett", and others. As a sample of his mode of treatment of biblical themes the following paraphrase, entitled "Solomon's Lament", may find a place:

O Shulamite return, return —
My heart is lone, no joys can cheer;
The very stars have ceased to burn
With wonted rays, and chill and drear
The breezes come from mountains bare
To moan to me in low despair.
They miss thee as the stars have done,
Thy roses swoon beneath the sun;
All nature sighs, all fair things yearn
For thee — O Shulamite return.

Return, return, O Shulamite —
I cannot stay my grief with wine;
I cannot through the day or night
These wasting thoughts of thee resign;
No more my wonted joys delight,
No more I bow at Pleasure's shrine,
Nor bask in halls of glory bright —
How long, O sweet, must I repine?

A kindred one I cannot meet
'Mong all Judea's joyous throng;
O whither stray thy joyous feet,
Thou princess of my mournful song?
O peerless idol of my mind,
Thou sweeter than the breath of dawn;
O fairest of all womankind —
Queen of my heart, where hast thou gone?
Hath love yet lore thou hast not taught,
Or lore I have not deigned to learn?
Then be all lore save thine forgot —
O Shulamite return, return.

Several times Parkhurst lost large parts of his manuscripts, in two instances a whole book. Portions of them he resurrected from newspaper files, and in filling the gaps he also improved these works. In the winter of 1904, in his old home city, and with many of his literary notes and treasures around him, he again prepared his writings, including a new epos of about 1200 lines entitled "Tamerlane Victorious or the World's Desolation", for a book. When com-

pleted, it went up with other matter in flame and smoke.

Newspapers generally are not inclined to print much rhyme, or long poetry. They view original verse with disfavor. But they were generous to Clint Parkhurst, giving much space to extensive extracts from his works, and these, at least, could be lifted out of their graves.

With book publishers he was much less successful. Byron once gave his publisher a splendidly bound Bible, and the recipient was proud of it until he happened to discover that his friend donor had altered the last verse of the 18th chapter of St. John (Now Barrabas was a robber) so as to read: "Now Barrabas was a *publisher*."

Parkhurst came to the conclusion that most of the American publishers were Barrabases. He has named many a publishing house of prominence which has injured him. He has also publicly pilloried several distinguished authors who have appropriated, literally or with slight changes, large portions of his manuscripts when temporarily in their possession. In this respect he fared worse than the poor devils of young Frenchmen who wrote good stories for the great Dumas, who put his name upon their front pages. But they were paid, however miserably, for their slave-work. Clint did not get a cent for the productions stolen from him, but was treated with abuse when he remonstrated.

In newspapers may often be seen advertisements

like this: "Cash paid for bright ideas." When a writer without a name subjects such ideas to the advertiser they are kept for awhile and then courteously declined, but after some little time they appear, somewhat masked, in a book, perhaps, under some famous person's name. Clint once replied to an advertisement in a New York paper offering literary employment, and was invited to an interview, in the course of which a bulky manuscript was produced, which he was only permitted to glance at for a few minutes. He could only gather that it was a maritime narrative. The advertiser said: "The material is good, but the book doesn't suit us exactly. We want it reproduced in a little better style. What can you do the job for?" Clint was very poor and needed a little money badly; but he declined to "do the job"; he did not want to assist a leech to suck another poor fellow's heartblood.

In 1896, in his temporary Tusculum, the Soldiers' Home of Virginia, he wrote an historical romance concerning the Black Hawk War, entitled "A Military Belle". It was a book of love and adventure, and inwoven was the story of the proverbial unlucky man, for whom the author himself was the model. Under disadvantages and persecuted by the management of the Home, who attributed to him certain derogatory newspaper letters which he never wrote, the manuscript was finished after about a year. A publisher was found in New York, and the outlook was fine. Because of some one's blunders several

letters of the publisher did not reach the author who never saw a proof, and the publication was long delayed. Parkhurst finally went to New York, where he learned that the book had already been stereotyped. But it abounded in grievous errors, and numerous plates had to be cut and cast over. At last, in 1899, the *Military Belle* made her bow, and an encouragingly large number of books were sold. But the publisher failed, and Clint got only about \$9 from the debacle.

The last and probably the greatest of his many literary misfortunes was blended with the one of the city of San Francisco. In Davenport he had gathered from many newspaper columns a large portion of his poetical writings, which he re-arranged, carefully improved, and incorporated in a manuscript ready for the printer. This manuscript he sent in 1905 to his daughter Mabel in San Francisco — as usual without keeping a duplicate. On the 18th day of April, 1906, that beautiful city was visited by earthquake and conflagration. His daughter did well enough to save her life, but all her belongings and the manuscript of her father were destroyed.

Parkhurst outlived this shock as he had many previous minor ones. In January, 1908, a Davenport friend received from him a hopeful letter out of the Missouri mountains. He wrote that he had taken up the life of a literary hermit. "I came to the wilds of the Ozarks last summer," he wrote, "and the venture has been a success. I own an acre

of ground, have a good house on it, have a library of fifty choice volumes, and several dozen magazines and daily papers, and have every want supplied. My pension has been increased to \$12 per month." He was enthused over the "glorious sceneries" and the "incomparable climate." His health was good; for "anybody's health is good here." But the solitude there could not suit him for any great length of time. He returned to the Iowa Soldiers' Home, where he was in company with his old commander, Col. Add. H. Sanders. From that place he disappeared in August, 1913, after having spent there, off and on, periods of various duration. Nothing has of late been heard of any more literary work of his.

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