

The  
**PALIMPSEST**  
JUNE 1922  
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## THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

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

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

*Superintendent*

## THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

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

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

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# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN C. PARISH

ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

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## The Attack on Corinth

### I

#### FIRST DAY

It was the evening of the second day of October, 1862, and the Iowa Brigade was "tenting on the old camp ground" near Corinth, Mississippi, after a brief but victorious campaign at Iuka. There was not a Confederate force within fifty miles of us, and probably not a Confederate soldier. So the wise folks told us, and so we fondly believed. In our regiment at least — the Sixteenth Iowa — there were to be no duties on the morrow, save a few absolutely necessary ones. Everybody was to rest and be happy. "Soldier rest!" was the watchword. With pleasant hallucinations we fell asleep.

"Get up! The long roll's beating!" was the startling alarm at daylight next morning.

We had heard the long roll at Shiloh, without knowing what it meant, but we found out its meaning on that bloody field. It was beating again.

“Fall in, men! Fall in! Fall in quick!” shouted officers everywhere, and the drums beat the assembly on the color line.

Every one jumped up, dressed in haste, belted on his cartridge box, grabbed his gun, and hastened to form line on the company parade ground. We then, with equal zeal, marched out and formed a regimental line. It was not many minutes before the entire brigade was in line of battle, and stood ready for orders. In the distance, and far to the right, heavy skirmishing began. A courier dashed up with orders, and we promptly moved at quick time in the direction of the firing. The morning air was stimulating, and tinged with the breath of southern autumn. Bugles sounded near Corinth, which lay much to the rear of us, and before we had gone half a mile we heard the roar of artillery ahead — not steadily, but at intervals. All around us pealed the opening notes of a general engagement. There was to be fighting, without a doubt, and with the coolness of veterans we marched out to bear our part.

In the preceding April, when we left Pittsburg Landing for the field of combat a few miles away, we cheered at the slightest provocation, sang war songs, and generally made an uproar. Now we marched in silence. Not a sound was heard save our steady tramp and the clink of bayonets. We had been at the front many months and knew that fighting was not a picnic. No school-boy bravado was indulged in. In its place was the business-like readiness for

battle characteristic of trained soldiers. Our course lay through a heavily timbered region destitute of undergrowth; and the trees were in gorgeous autumn regalia. When we had gone about two miles, firing ceased. As we saw no other troops, nor any signs of an enemy, an impression prevailed that only a band of guerrillas had collided with the picket line and been repulsed. We reached an earth fort that contained no guns or garrison. It was a part of Halleck's deserted, unused, and useless line of circumvallation that would have needed a hundred thousand men to hold — at least, to occupy.

Here we stacked arms and awaited an explanation of so serious a morning alarm. Our regiment formed immediately behind the fort. The other three regiments aligned a little to the rear of us. An artillery company soon joined us with four fieldpieces. One gun was wheeled into the fort and its muzzle pushed through an embrasure. Owing to the woods and hills we could see no troops in any direction, either friend or foe. We decided finally that we had been victimized by one of those sudden alarms that are common in war. All regiments stacked arms, and word was sent back to camp for the cooks to boil coffee and bring it out to us. After a long wait they arrived, their capacious kettles swung on poles in Chinese fashion. We had just filled our cups and commenced to quaff the amber beverage when a crash of musketry a mile or so to the front convinced us that we had come on no idle mission. Soon

afterwards a cavalryman rode in rapidly, with dispatches for headquarters, and hastily told us the news. A very large Confederate army was in motion — larger than Albert Sidney Johnston had had at Shiloh — and hot work could be expected. A Wisconsin battalion of six hundred men had been attacked the previous evening at a railroad station called Chewalla, and was then fighting in the woods, but before long would be driven over the intervening country toward us.

“Fall in! Take-Arms! Load at will — Load!” were commands quickly given, and we drove down Minie balls for the advancing host.

Nevertheless we stacked arms again, drank our coffee, and made as good a breakfast as we could. Charley Harl, our company cook, swore that he boiled coffee only in times of peace. He carried his kettles back to camp, returned with a musket, and before evening received a mortal wound. After listening to the firing a while we had orders to change position.<sup>1</sup> We left the fort and drew up on the brow of a heavily timbered hill, more directly in

<sup>1</sup> According to the reports of General Crocker, who was in charge of the brigade, and of the commanding officers of the regiments, the Eleventh and Thirteenth Iowa Infantry regiments formed in line first, supported by the Fifteenth and Sixteenth. In this formation the forenoon passed with only desultory fighting. In the afternoon the Fifteenth and Sixteenth took the position in the front line and these troops then received the desperate assault of the enemy.— *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Pt. II, pp. 359, 364, 365, 366.— THE EDITOR.

the path of the incoming army. No works of any kind gave shelter and we built none. The Fifteenth and Sixteenth Iowa formed side by side, and afterwards fought the Confederates in that order. Commanding the Fifteenth that day was Major Belknap, afterwards a brigadier-general, and still afterwards Secretary of War under President Grant.<sup>2</sup> The Sixteenth was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Add. H. Sanders, afterwards colonel and brigadier, who was severely wounded in this battle. Extra ammunition was dealt out to us, each man having sixty rounds in all.

The Eleventh and Thirteenth Iowa formed in line about fifty yards to the rear of us. The battery was ordered to Corinth, and started at once. In front of the right wing of our regiment was a complete camp — tents, baggage and all — but the troops it belonged to were gone. They had been moved out somewhere to meet the enemy. Not even a guard was left behind. It must have been ten o'clock when deadly fighting commenced directly in front of us — over in the timber.<sup>3</sup> The greater part of the firing we had heard up to this time had been by heavy skirmish lines, but now two lines of battle joined issue, and the terrible roar of musketry pealed through the woods. Till we heard it we had thought

<sup>2</sup> William W. Belknap had been promoted from major to lieutenant colonel on August 1, 1862.— *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, Vol. II, p. 895.— THE EDITOR.

<sup>3</sup> See note 1.— THE EDITOR.

our brigade was the only considerable body of troops in that immediate environ, and that only pickets and skirmishers were scattered along our front. Some other regiment was trying to hold the Chewalla road — probably the one whose deserted camp we saw — and was being roughly handled by the enemy.

We were close enough to hear the combat well, but not close enough to see it. Ridges and woods obstructed the view. We could see smoke floating in the timber, and in partial lulls of the firing could hear the excited commands of officers. The Union troops fought hard, but being greatly outnumbered, fought in vain. It seemed nonsense to have them there at all. A few heavy explosions of musketry broke on the air, in quick succession. Then followed victorious cheers that rang on the morning air with wonderful clearness. The Union troops fled in confusion toward us, the pickets and skirmishers near by joining in the stampede. The enemy followed a short distance, firing and yelling like Indians.

All this time we could see nothing for the ridges and timber, but we could hear so distinctly that we needed no information. The fugitives poured into view like scattered sheep, and reaching our line rushed on to the rear, scores of them being bloody from wounds. Ambulances hurried by, filled and crowded with wounded men, whose cries of suffering and groans of agony it was distressing to hear. Beyond, at intervals, rose the clear, wild cheers of the Southerners.



Then a death like silence ensued. Not a skirmish line was now between us and the enemy. We knew that preparations must be going on to attack us, and to stand idly there awaiting the onset was a trying ordeal — a test of manhood keener than fighting. If I had been richer than Croesus, I would have given a liberal part of my wealth had it not been my duty to be there. While we waited with intense interest and much anxiety the next move in what was to us a momentous drama, an appalling burst of martial thunder came from a locality a mile or more to the right of us. Musketry and artillery mingled in one awful and prolonged peal. It was not an affair of a regiment or two, but seemed like the collision of two heavy lines of battle, and the roar was incessant as long as I was conscious of listening to it. Our thoughts, however, were almost immediately concentrated on events in front of us. We were watching the opposite hillside. Bullets began to cut the air from the rifles of unseen marksmen. A little later a long line of rebel skirmishers came into view, and without haste, and yet without hesitation, marched silently toward us.

“Don’t fire on those men — they’re not rebels”, some one shouted. (Many of them wore portions of our uniform.)

Before this could be contradicted a Confederate brigade appeared, moving in splendid order. At this delicate juncture word came for our brigade to march to Corinth. It was too late for all to go,

without danger of disaster, and the two rear regiments marched from the field, and the Fifteenth and Sixteenth remained to check the enemy. While the Confederate line was moving down the opposite hillside in "battle's magnificently stern array", another hostile brigade appeared, considerably to the rear of the first one. Both marched at common time, in perfect silence, preserving faultless lines. In spite of the great excitement I was under, I admired the soldierly conduct of these troops. It would be impossible for infantry to march to battle in finer order or with firmer mien. On reaching the base of the hill, they marched up the slope toward us. The skirmishers in front of them entered the regimental camp I have spoken of, and began throwing down the Sibley tents that the line of battle might march over the ground without being disarranged.

We might have killed many of these skirmishers, for the tents nearest to us were not more than thirty yards distant, but as we desired the tents down also, we allowed the work to proceed undisturbed, and permitted the skirmishers to retire when the task was finished. When the tents were all flat on the ground, however, and the enemy was boldly moving in plain sight straight at us, and each moment was getting nearer, officers had extreme difficulty in keeping the men from opening fire. We had been ordered not to fire till the lieutenant-colonel gave the word, and it seemed that the word would never be given. Captains and lieutenants walked up and

down the front of their companies, sword in hand, striking up muskets that were being brought to a level by nervously impatient soldiers.

At length the front Confederate line was within fifty or sixty paces of us, and with perfect distinctness we saw the men of that line cock their muskets to fire. Ours were already cocked. We took deliberate aim, and with a crash we fired. That volley told with effect on the enemy. It was scarcely a moment before an answering volley hurled bullets among us. The Fifteenth Iowa fired at about the same time, and the battle opened with fury; but it was less trying to fight than to stand like statues waiting for the fray to begin. In a moment a wall of dust and smoke arose in front of us, and hid the enemy from view.

In our first battle we had sought shelter, as far as possible, behind trees and obstacles. On this occasion the result of incessant drilling we had gone through was apparent. A few men fought on one knee, but not a man lay down, and the great majority stood erect on the color line, and loaded and fired in drill-ground fashion. Habit is second nature. Men hit while fighting erect are less liable to have fatal wounds, than if struck while fighting on one knee. Once, while standing erect, I turned my left side to the enemy, to drive down a musket ball. The next instant a big bullet passed through my left pantaloons pocket, where I carried a package of ten rounds of ammunition. It tore the paper cartridges to pieces, but I was unhurt. Had I been facing

squarely to the front I would have had a mortal wound.

After we had been fighting awhile a gust of air partly blew the smoke aside, and we saw that the enemy's line was not in perfect order, but the second line came up and more than restored the tide of battle. As we fought at remarkably short range, many of us rammed down two Minie balls with each load of powder. There was little chance of taking exact aim, beyond calculating what would probably be too high or too low to hit a man, and under the circumstances two bullets were better than one. The direct attack of the enemy had been really checked, but flank firing opened on us, and indications appeared that an attempt would be made to capture us. Both regiments receded in slight disorder, falling back fifty or sixty yards or so. We couldn't whip the whole of Price's army.

The command was then given to cease firing, and a new and perfect line was formed. The enemy ceased firing also, and with "arms at a shoulder" we again silently tendered battle. For some reason the mute challenge was not accepted, no advance toward us was attempted, nor did skirmishers even annoy us with desultory shots. The fray being apparently over, for a time at least, and the sound of fighting elsewhere having almost ceased, we again had orders to march to Corinth. We moved off the field at common time, in perfect order, and so far as we could see, no one pursued us. Our dead we left,

and a very few of our wounded were captured, but fell into our hands two days afterwards. The other two regiments had marched out of sight. We saw no soldiers anywhere, friend or foe.

Retreating to town displeased us, for we knew nothing of the military situation. We had wondered greatly that half the brigade, and the battery, should be ordered away just before the action commenced. Reinforcements, we thought, should rather have reached us. We know that fighting had ceased everywhere; we had fears of disaster, and many believed our forces were hastily deserting Corinth. Utter disgust was expressed, and even rage, and I heard several officers prophesy that we would be on the road to Pittsburg Landing before nightfall. We had no definite ideas concerning the number of Union troops in Corinth and around it, nor did we even know what general was in chief command. Most of us thought Grant was. Concerning everything important we seemed to be in the dark completely. The army was falling back unnecessarily, we thought, and without a proper struggle. A catastrophe somewhere else in the country was the general explanation.

“Buell’s been cleaned out in Kentucky”, our second lieutenant said. Gloomy apprehensions prevailed.

For several miles we marched in silence through the woods, the occasional roar of artillery indicating that resistance to the enemy had not wholly ceased.

Suddenly, as we came to the verge of a timbered ridge, a thrilling spectacle burst into view. From that point to town the trees had been freshly cut away, and were lying as they fell, the long boughs being lopped off and strewn on the ground. On a hill crest opposite us was a newly built earth fort, and high over its ramparts a large and beautiful garrison flag waved — “Old Glory” in richest attire, tossing its folds in defiance of the foe. We burst into cheers, hailing the scene as evidence that the battle had not been lost but had only begun.

The sight awoke enthusiasm. As we came nearer town we saw that a semi-circle of earth forts had been hastily reared, and mounted with heavy siege guns that commanded all approaches. The gleam of arms could be seen in every direction as troops poured into the fortified semi-circle and aligned at their designated stations. Instead of consternation and retreat we beheld order, and formidable preparations for the foe. General Rosecrans rode up to meet us, and we greeted him with tumultuous cheers. In a brief address he promised us victory on the morrow, a promise that was gloriously fulfilled.

Our regiment was immediately assigned to support the Fifth Ohio Battery, on the extreme left wing of the army. Without halting a moment we marched to our place. Supporting a battery is not always child’s play. On the field of Shiloh we saw a captured Confederate battery where every cannonier was killed and every horse killed or wounded,

At Iuka the Sixteenth Iowa supported the Eleventh Ohio Battery. Van Dorn's Texan Legion took its guns twice, and made a third attempt to take them, but failed. Without assistance from other troops the Sixteenth took them back each time, and held them at last, winning the highest honors of the battle. Three guns were spiked by the enemy, and two were dragged some distance away, but were dragged back again. All the battery horses were killed or wounded, and of an artillery company of eighty men, only eight men escaped wounds or death.

The dangers of a mounted officer exceed those of a soldier. In two battles inside of fifteen days, every field officer of our regiment had been killed or wounded. Lawrence, our splendid young adjutant, had been killed, and our colonel, lieutenant-colonel and major wounded. The colonel had been sent north, Lieutenant-Colonel Sanders was in a hospital, and Major William Purcell (of Muscatine), despite a troublesome wound (his second in the war), assumed command of the regiment.

While we had been fighting on the Chewalla road, our tents, baggage, and equipment had been hauled to town, and at nightfall the enemy's troops slept on our old camp ground — the "fortunes of war".

## II

### SECOND DAY

Early in the morning of the second day the rush of Confederate shells and their explosions awoke us.

It was barely daylight. History says it was three o'clock. A field battery in the edge of the woods, about two hundred yards to the front of Robinett, opened a cannonade, and one of the forts replied. The southern guns were hastily dragged into the woods, and one was captured. Drums rolled and bugles sounded. We belted and got into line. In the woods opposite us a cloud of Confederate sharpshooters deployed. Crouching behind logs, stumps, and trees, they began blazing away at everything and everybody. Similar operations ensued no doubt all along the front of the army. We should have made rifle-pits the previous evening, but did not do so. Our line of battle stretched from one fort to the other, without defenses. A remarkable circumstance of this battle was that the Union troops faced to the north and the Confederate troops to the south.

At the extreme left of the Union line was Fort Phillips. Our regiment was on a low hill immediately to the left of it, supporting the Fifth Ohio Battery. The next fort to the right of Phillips was Robinett, which played a memorable part that day. It was not more than five hundred yards from us, and we could look across and see everything that took place inside of it, and could also see a part of the ground in front of it. This gave us opportunity, in due time, to view a more thrilling combat than ever took place in the gladiatorial arena of Rome.

The Confederate sharpshooters gave us much trouble. The Ohio battery opened on them finally,



but they treated the cannonade with contempt, wounded a few cannoniers, and dismounted the captain by killing his splendid war steed. A heavy detail was promptly made, and a considerable number of men scattered in the fallen timber at the front, and opened on the sharpshooters. I happened to be one of this party. We improved matters considerably, and a Confederate battery tried to drive us out with grape and canister. Fort Phillips intervened with twenty-pound shells and drove the battery into the woods. Thus hot skirmishing went on in different fashions all day long. At most localities it was not very far from one line to the other.

On battle days, where one excitement follows another in swift succession, time moves with rapid pace. On the extreme right of the Union army, movements of importance began. The Union forts and batteries in that quarter opened with fury. We had seldom heard such a cannonade, and knew that something startling was in progress. Clouds of smoke rose thickly above the firing, and ere long a frightful crash of musketry denoted that infantry had engaged. Our whole line in that quarter had fired a volley, which was immediately followed by the smooth roar of steady fighting. The enemy's troops had come out of the woods in a huge column shaped like a wedge. Under a fearful artillery fire they advanced in the most intrepid manner. Missiles tore through the ranks with hideous effect. Grape, canister, musketry — nothing stopped the storming column.

At the first shock eight or ten Union regiments broke and fled; Fort Richardson was taken, and Confederate soldiers entered the very tent of Rosecrans — but he was not there. At the head of his staff he had galloped among the fugitives, and brought them to a halt. At this critical moment the Fifty-sixth Illinois Infantry charged the enemy, fired a deadly volley at close quarters, and then used the bayonet till Fort Richardson was retaken and had opened its guns on the foe. Led by Rosecrans the rallied regiments hurried to the line, and then the whole Union right wing charged with thrilling cheers, driving the enemy, in panic and confusion, into the woods.

The enemy's plan had been for Van Dorn to assault Robinett at the same time that Price delivered his tremendous blow at our right wing. For some reason Van Dorn was not ready, and Price was hurled back with slaughter. Soon afterwards a storming column of four or five thousand men moved on Robinett. Colonel Rogers of Texas had the perilous honor of leading. From our station on the skirmish line we saw the charge — one of the most heroic affairs of the Civil War. With defiant yells the Confederates came out of the woods on the double-quick. Mounted on a powerful steed Rogers rode at their head, waving the lone star flag of Texas. Fallen timber everywhere rendered perfect lines impossible, and the column was soon somewhat disordered, but this proved immaterial. Rogers rode rapidly along a highway that led to the fort,

and his men followed closely, some in the road and others leaping over fallen trees and rubbish, intent on victory at any cost. The sharpshooters of the enemy quit firing, and stood on stumps and logs to watch the charge, and we on the skirmish line did likewise.

The moment the column came into full view, it was swept with terrible effect by the heavy guns of Robinett. Fort Phillips also opened, and each moment some additional fort or battery tried to train guns on the stormers. Smoke, dust, and the explosion of shells more or less concealed the column from view, but we could see that the storm of death was disregarded. The ground was strewn with dead and dying, but Rogers rode undaunted, and not one of the stormers faltered. Death or victory was their evident intention. We could see every move in and around the fort. Not a man left his post. The cannoniers loaded and fired to the last moment, then snatched up muskets and fought as infantry. Rogers reached the ditch of the fort, tossed his banner to a soldier, who planted it on the work. It waved there a moment and fell. Rogers fell also. The last cannon fired killed him and blew his horse to pieces.

On either side the fort Union infantry fought fiercely, and one regiment half-wheeled and enfiladed the front of the fort. The Confederates recoiled and crouched to the ground, but supporting troops came yelling to the rescue, brandishing arms and rushing to the charge. Blue and gray closed in a death struggle, and the fighting was brutal. The Sixty-

third Ohio stood next to the fort, on the right, and lost half its men in a few moments, but never gave up an inch of ground. The Confederates staggered back, stood irresolute, and then turned to fly. The cannoniers sprang to their guns, and, double-loading them, filled the air with missiles. The ditch of the fort was piled level with dead, and fugitives, throwing themselves among fallen timber, waved their hats for quarter. Firing ceased, and many prisoners were taken. Of the entire storming column, not five hundred got back to the woods. The rest were killed, wounded, or captured. Most were killed or wounded. A down-east historian says that "more than two hundred Confederates fell in this frightful assault". Not less than a thousand were killed in front of Robinett. The body of Colonel Rogers was given separate and honorable burial. A board was placed at his grave on which was inscribed his name and rank, and his fame filled both armies. No man ever led a forlorn hope with greater courage.

People who rave over the "horrors of war", and view soldiers with aversion, will find in the ferocity of the fighting at Corinth an object lesson for their teachings. Let us bear in mind, however, that if the armies of the North had been beaten in the Civil War, human slavery would have spread over the greater part of the western hemisphere, if not over the greater part of the world. This is to say nothing of the dissolution of the Union. To avert such calamities was worth all the blood it cost.

War would be "glorious", perhaps, if a soldier always won, and passed through dangers unharmed. How it feels to be on the other side of a "glorious" affair is seldom told by historians. An Alabama officer who took part in that desperate assault on Fort Robinett, and survived, and who kept a private journal, wrote out his experience that evening, with everything fresh in his mind. His vivid recital found its way into a Northern newspaper, probably with his consent. He thus portrayed the charge:

*"Saturday, October 4 — Eventful day! At four o'clock this morning our brigade was ordered to the left about a quarter of a mile, and halted. We deployed a skirmish line that kept up a constant fire on the enemy. A Confederate battery in front of the right wing of our regiment opened briskly, and the enemy replied in the same manner. The cannonading was heavy for an hour and a half. Our regiment laid down on the ground, and bore the fire nobly. The shells flew thick and fast, cutting off large limbs from the trees, and filling the air with iron fragments. Many shells burst within twenty feet of me. It was extremely unpleasant, and I prayed for forgiveness of my sins, and made up my mind to go through the tempest.*

*"Col. Sawyer called for volunteers to assist the Second Texas skirmishers. I volunteered and took my company. Captain Perkins and Lieutenant Munson being taken sick directly after the severe bombardment, I led the company all the time. I*

went skirmishing at 7:30 a. m. and returned at 9:30. Four of Captain Foster's men were killed, but none of mine. The enemy fired very fast. We got behind trees and logs, and the way bullets did fly was unpleasant indeed. I think twenty must have passed within a few feet of me, humming busily. Shells tore off large limbs, and splinters struck my tree several times. We could only move from tree to tree by crouching close to the ground. Oh! how anxiously I watched for the bursting of shells when the heavy roar proclaimed their coming.

“At 9:30 I had my skirmishers relieved by Captain Rouser's company. I sent my men to their places, and went behind a log with Major Furger. At ten o'clock the fight opened in earnest, on our right. In a few moments the left went into action, in splendid style, under Price. At 10:15 Colonel Rogers of Texas rode by, merely saying: ‘Alabama forces.’ Our regiment, with the rest of the brigade, then rose, unmindful of shot and shell, and moved forward about two hundred and fifty yards and, rising the crest of the hill, the whole of Corinth, with its enormous fortifications, burst upon our view. The United States flag was floating over the forts and over the town.

“We were now met by a perfect storm of grape and canister, cannon shot and Minie balls. O, God! I never saw the like. The men fell like grass. Giving one tremendous cheer, we dashed to the bottom of the hill on which the fort was situated. Here we

found every foot of ground strewn with large trees and brush. Looking to the right and left I saw several brigades charging at the same time. What a sight! I saw men who were running at full speed stop suddenly, and fall on their faces, with their brains scattered all around; others with their legs or arms cut off. I gave myself to God, and got in front of my company. The ground was literally strewn with mangled corpses. One ball passed through my pants and another cut twigs close to me. It seemed that by holding out my hand I could have caught a dozen bullets.

“We pushed forward, nevertheless, charging, as it were, into the mouths of cannon. I rushed to the ditch of the fort and jumped into it, and climbed half way up the sloping wall. The Yankees were only two or three feet from me on the other side, but could not shoot me for fear of being shot themselves. Our men were in the same predicament. There were five or six on the wall, and thirty or forty in and around the ditch. Catesby, my companion, was on the wall beside me. A man within two feet of me put his head cautiously up to shoot into the fort, but suddenly dropped his musket, and his brains were dashed in a stream over my fine coat, which I had in my arms. Several men were killed, and rolled down the embankment. [A Union regiment next to the fort had made a right half-wheel, and thus enfiladed the front of the fort.] Some of our men cried ‘put down the flag’, whereon it was

lowered or shot into the ditch. Oh! we were butchered like dogs, for we were not supported.

“Some one placed a white handkerchief on Sergeant Buck’s musket, and he took it to a port hole, but the Yankees snatched it off and took him prisoner. The men were falling ten at a time. The ditch being full, and finding that we had no chance, we, the survivors, tried to save ourselves as best we could. I was so far up I could not get off quickly. I do not recollect seeing Catesby after this, but think he got off before. I trust in God he did. I and Captain Foster started together, and the air was literally filled with hissing balls. I got about twenty steps as quick as I could, about a dozen men being killed in that distance. I fell down and crawled behind a large stump. Just then I saw poor Foster throw up his hands, and, saying ‘Oh! my God!’ he jumped about two feet off the ground and fell on his face. The top of his head seemed to cave in, and blood spurted straight up several feet. I could see men falling as they attempted to run, some with their heads blown to pieces, and others with the blood streaming down their backs. Oh! it was horrible. One poor fellow, being almost on me, told me his name, and asked me to take his pocket book, and if I escaped, to give it to his mother, and to tell her that he died like a brave man. I asked him if he was a Christian. He said he was. I asked him to pray, which he did with the cannons thundering a deadly accompaniment. Poor fellow! I forgot his request



in subsequent excitement. His legs were literally cut to pieces. As our men retreated the enemy poured into us a terrific fire. I was hardly thirty feet from the mouths of the cannons. Minie balls filled the stump I was behind, and shells burst within three or four feet of me. One was so close that it burnt my face with powder. Grape-shot knocked large pieces from my stump, gradually wearing it away. I endured the horrors of death for one half hour. Fresh Confederate troops advanced with cheers to storm the fort, but began firing when half way up, and I found myself under the fire of both sides. In the first charge our men did not fire a shot, but charged across the ditch and up to the mouths of the cannon. The men of this second line were shot down like hogs. They could not stand the storms that came from the Yankee's thundering guns. They had no chance whatever. All around me were surrendering. I could do no better than follow suit, but, thank God, I am unhurt. Nothing but a merciful Providence saved me."

Cheers of triumph and defiance rolled along the Union lines, and rang from every fort and regiment. The most reckless endeavors of the foe had been foiled, and thousands of prisoners had been taken. At daylight next morning, we started in headlong chase of Price's army.

CLINT PARKHURST

## A Letter

[The following letter is printed from the original which was loaned to the Society by Mr. W. T. Whitney of Waterloo, to whom it was written. It is of interest not only because of the writer, Mr. Theodore N. Vail, late president of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, but also because of its reference to the late "Pop" Anson who did his early ball playing on an Iowa team.—THE EDITOR]

Jan'y 1, 1917  
Jekyl Island Club,  
Brunswick, Georgia.

Dear Mr Whitney

How glad I am to hear from you. I often think of you and the old talks we used to have, for you were a philosopher and had an uncommon sensible grip on the realities of life, some of which I hope I assimilated.

From what you say you are just 10 years older than I am — I am 71 will be 72 this year in July. Waterloo was a curious dividing point in my life — just 21 when I went there — think of it 51 years coming March next. Sometimes as I look back I wish I had stayed in Waterloo and taken my chances there. Not that I have any reason to complain for my life has been busy and I have done my share of work, but when you get to a point where responsibility is loaded on you, and you are really conscientious about it, it makes you feel tired sometimes, and you wish you could shut down your office desk

lock your official door & just take a real rest once in a while.

I knew Dorsey very well; he was Senator from Arkansas when I was in the P. O. D. but never had any relations except official ones with him. I think probably you have heard of my relation with General Brady who was 2nd asst P. M. G. when I was in Washington & was brought into the P. O. scandal "Star Route" along with Dorsey. One of the most dastardly political acts ever perpetrated — but that is neither here nor there. Brady was in the Dept & after I went into the telephone loaned me 50000 to buy & carry some telephone stock — on shares, and both of us made money. Years after when they commenced to prosecute him he was broken in pocket, and because I loaned him money to defend himself their attorneys used to say that I must have been one of them but they never went so far as making any public accusation.

Dorsey was on trial at the same time with Brady & Ingersoll was their attorney. Some one told me the other day that Dorsey was still alive.

I am somewhat broken up this winter myself. Have had a very strenuous year. I hope some day it will be my good fortune to see you again, for there are few, if any, of those I knew when young that I think of oftener or more pleasantly than of you. Do you remember that on that Marshalltown trip *Anson* afterwards the famous baseball player was Captain of the team (Marshalltown). I have often wondered

if I would have become famous as he if I had stuck to baseball. I saw Miller at Los Angeles last year. You remember he was in the team and so was Mullan, after whose father, I suppose the street you live on was named. Good luck to you

THEO N. VAIL

## Comment by the Editor

### THE PASSING OF THE PRAIRIE

Within the last month we have had the pleasure of listening to and talking with two men who have portrayed in fiction the Iowa of an earlier day — Hamlin Garland and Herbert Quick. Each has seen with his own eyes the breaking of the original prairies and even had a part in the process; and each is stirred with the glory of the beauty of that life that passed with the coming of the plow.

They are temperamentally different — these two men — but each writes faithfully of the thing as he sees it. “I hate a cow!” says Hamlin Garland with feeling, and the “cinnamon hog” to him is anathema. Herbert Quick, however, is more sympathetic. In *Vandemark's Folly* he writes:

“Any stockman knows that a cow is a beast of very high nervous organization, but she has no very large number of ways of telling us how she feels: just a few tones to her lowing, a few changes of expression to her eye, a small number of shades of uneasiness, a little manner with her eyes, showing the whites when troubled or letting the lids droop in satisfaction — these things exhausted, and poor bossy's tale is told.”

But when Garland forgets these tame animals he has known and reverts to the wilder animals and the

untamed prairie, the beauty and sympathy of his descriptions are scarcely to be excelled. Witness these sentences from *A Son of the Middle Border*:

“Nothing could be more generous, more joyous, than these natural meadows in summer. The flash and ripple and glimmer of the tall sunflowers, the myriad voices of gleeful bobolinks, the chirp and gurgle of red-winged blackbirds swaying on the willows, the meadow-larks piping from grassy bogs, the peep of the prairie chick and the wailing call of plover on the flowery green slopes of the uplands made it all an ecstatic world to me. It was a wide world with a big, big sky which gave alluring hint of the still more glorious unknown wilderness beyond.”

Into these meadows came the breaking plow and Garland writes of the results with keen emotion:

“At last the wide ‘quarter section’ lay upturned, black to the sun and the garden that had bloomed and fruited for millions of years, waiting for man, lay torn and ravaged. The tender plants, the sweet flowers, the fragrant fruits, the busy insects, all the swarming lives which had been native here for untold centuries were utterly destroyed. It was sad and yet it was not all loss, even to my thinking, for I realized that over this desolation the green wheat would wave.”

And Herbert Quick, who laments the prairie as vanished forever, is stirred by the same deep appreciation of the beauty of the original Iowa country. Putting his own ideas into the thoughts of young Jacob Vandemark as he first looked out upon the

prairies of northeastern Iowa in the fifties, he says:

“I shall never forget the sight. It was like a great green sea. The old growth had been burned the fall before, and the spring grass scarcely concealed the brown sod on the uplands; but all the swales were coated thick with an emerald growth full-bite high, and in the deeper, wetter hollows grew cowslips, already showing their glossy, golden flowers. The hillsides were thick with the woolly possblummies in their furry spring coats protecting them against the frost and chill, showing purple-violet on the outside of a cup filled with golden stamens, the first fruits of the prairie flowers; on the warmer southern slopes a few of the splendid bird’s-foot violets of the prairie were showing the azure color which would soon make some of the hillsides as blue as the sky; and standing higher than the peering grass rose the rough-leafed stalks of green which would soon show us the yellow puccoons and sweet-williams and scarlet lilies and shooting stars, and later the yellow rosin-weeds, Indian dye-flower and goldenrod. The keen northwest wind swept before it a flock of white clouds; and under the clouds went their shadows, walking over the lovely hills like dark ships over an emerald sea.”

The ancient prairie, so real and wonderful to the first comers, has vanished, and with its passing have gone much that was wild and picturesque and beautiful, and also much that was a source of dread and anxiety. The buffalo and the bear were not alien to the Iowa country but their real home was farther

west and they can hardly be said to have waited for the coming of the settler. The deer, however, lingered in the land between the rivers and for many years the prairie chicken let the frontier slip past and the prairie wolf skulked reluctantly away from the advancing hordes of his enemies.

The loneliness of the wide prairies, away from the streams, for a time kept them unmolested but stout hearted pioneers ventured out upon the sea of waving grass and turned the prairie sod. And when the plow had laid out its black acres the prairie fire, with its fantastic and awful beauty, no longer found fuel for its devastating sweep. Even the pitiless blizzard lost many of its terrors when fences and windbreaks and frequent habitations spread over the land.

People and more people came, by wagon and finally by railroad, and acre by acre the primitive gave way. Yet here and there fragments of the prairie foliage still remain. Curiously enough the very factor that helped the invasion of the prairie land and made possible its widespread conquest is the one that has preserved these relics of the struggle; for the original flowers and sod of the old Iowa prairie, like prisoners of war, are to be found along the right of way of the older railroads.

#### IOWA FROM A CAR WINDOW

Recently we rode across a part of Iowa on a glorious sunny morning, when the landscape had been



freshly washed by a rain of the day before. The alternation of green and brown fields stretched wide under the blue sky. The corn was just creeping up into the sunlight. Here and there oak groves with wild flowers growing in the shade beneath whirled past us; and off toward the horizon the darker green of a strip of wood turned to a bluish haze where it met the sky.

The little towns and the clusters of farm buildings were but incidental to the general scheme of nature. The roads and fences did not so much interrupt as tie the whole scene together. True, one might see anywhere, surrounded by small round-bellied pigs, the "cinnamon hog", couchant upon a field of drab, but if one did not care for this particular heraldic design he could find a more idyllic pastoral scene in the next field where sheep grazed in the company of little wabble-legged lambs. Nor could one fail to note that the neighboring fence posts were surmounted by swamp blackbirds, gorgeous in their red and black livery, and by meadow larks warbling their happy hearts out as freely as did their ancestors on the swaying weeds of the unbroken prairie.

After all the changes have perhaps not been so great. Time will never change the arch of blue sky, nor will the cloud shadows that Vandemark observed cease to ride across the hills. The passing years can have little effect upon the winding streams and the smooth undulations of the landscape. And doubtless our children's children as they ride across Iowa will

still be able to watch the sunlight dance upon the rippling leaves of oak groves, while meadow larks and red-winged blackbirds sing the same song from the fence posts, and the wild flowers and grasses of the right of way whirl by in a riot of profusion and color — faithful reminders of the old time Iowa prairie.

J. C. P.

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