

# The **P**ALIMPSEST

MARCH, 1922

## CONTENTS

**Our First View of Vicksburg 69**

CLINT PARKHURST

**The Lake of the Taensa 84**

JOHN C. PARISH

**Comment 95**

THE EDITOR

PUBLISHED MONTHLY AT IOWA CITY BY  
THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER JULY 28 1920 AT THE POST OFFICE AT IOWA CITY IOWA  
UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24 1912

### 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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PRICE—10c per copy: \$1 per year: free to members of Society  
ADDRESS—The State Historical Society Iowa City Iowa

# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN C. PARISH

ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

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VOL. III

ISSUED IN MARCH 1922

NO. 3

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## Our First View of Vicksburg

Know ye the land where bloom the citron bowers?

Where the gold-orange lights the dusky grove?

High waves the laurel, there, the myrtle flowers,

And through a still blue heaven the sweet winds rove.

Springtime of 1863! The long-drawn-out Vicksburg campaign was in progress, more stubbornly than ever. Floods along the Mississippi — a deluge, in fact — cut a figure in the matter, on the Louisiana side especially, and often had effect on the movement of troops. The water rose higher than had been known for years. At that period of our country's history (and perhaps now), the difference between high and low water on the lower Mississippi was from twenty-five to fifty feet. One seventh of Louisiana was inundated — a great part of the low country. Swamps, rivers, and bayous overflowed. Our canal operations at Lake Providence and just above Vicksburg had aggravated matters immensely. Guerilla bands and the enemy's cavalry cut dykes

and levees wherever it would do us most harm. Many dangerous crevasses occurred in this way.

Our division of the Seventeenth Army Corps was on reserve, a circumstance we thought humiliating. We tarried on a big plantation twelve miles directly west of Vicksburg.

“Napoleon always put his best troops on reserve — the flower of his army”, an officer told us.

“Rats!” bellowed a cynical sergeant. “We’re keepin’ the lines open to the supply boats above Vicksburg. Lookin’ after the hard tack and ammunition. That’s it, me boy.”

This diagnosis was correct. All we had to do was to keep reasonably near the gun stacks, be ready for anything that might happen, and wait for orders.

It is not entirely unpleasant, however, to be on reserve after you have met the enemy a few times and had an ample draught of the ruddy wine of glory. Afar you hear the rumble of the guns; the clamor and exultation of victory reach you; those of the enemy you see are captives, whose dejection and unhappy situation awake your sympathy. You view the wreck of war, and the boastful signs of triumph. Before you reach a scene of combat the dead have been buried, and most repulsive sights have disappeared. You see war as many a general, historian, or politician sees it.

Much around us awoke admiration. Beautiful groves fringed the glassy bayous. Trees in countless varieties thrived in semi-tropic luxuriance —

the magnolia, ash, pine, holly, cypress, beech, and hickory. Sweet-gum flourished and live oak towered. Everywhere the stately trees were hung with trailing plumes of Spanish moss.

On April 29th tremendous cannonading continued for hours, attracting the attention of all. It seemed a long way down the river. News came that Admiral Porter was bombarding Grand Gulf, and having a great fight there. The next day McPherson crossed the river lower down and moved inland. There was a battle at Port Gibson, the enemy was beaten, and hasty evacuation of Grand Gulf ensued. This left the Union fleet in control of the river from Port Hudson to Vicksburg.

On May 5th a battalion of Confederates trudged by who had been captured three days previously at Port Gibson. It was soon observed that many of them were old friends of ours, having fought against us at Corinth. Captain Williams, who was wounded in that battle, the first day, walked up to one of them and said:

“I believe you are the gentleman who captured me at Corinth.”

Mutual recognition and a cordial hand-shake followed, and the Captain handed him a much needed five-dollar bill. We treated them well, gave them what little food we could spare, and assured them that as soon as they got through to the supply boats they would get everything they needed in abundance. A good deal of fun passed back and forth.

“Boys, you’ll never get Vicksburg”, they told us.

“We’ll stack arms on the levee there before summer is over,” we answered — a boast that came true. The unanimous belief in the Union army that Vicksburg would fall was something remarkable.

A tough looking crowd they were, many being barefooted, and all of them in rags. One of them shouted merrily:

“We can’t dress as well as you, boys, but you know we can shoot as well.”

I saw many old men among them who had “seen better days”, an air of refinement not being obliterated by old clothes. The southern Conscription Act respected neither gray hairs or youthful bodies. A day or two afterwards General Sherman rode by at the head of the Fifteenth Army Corps. We hastened out to the roadside to silently greet so famous a leader — one destined, in another year, to command us all on another great field of action.

A detachment of the First Heavy Artillery of the regular army also went by with a battery of siege guns which had helped repulse the foe on Sunday evening at Shiloh, and afterwards, at Corinth, had thundered from Fort Robinet, when a desperate assault was made on that earth work. As a large part of the rebel garrison in Vicksburg — most of it, in fact — consisted of Price’s veterans, it seemed funny to see the same old guns coming so far to trouble them once more. Sixteen strong oxen pulled each gun.

On May 11th our division left the Holmes plantation at sunrise; we marched rapidly; by eight o'clock we had covered ten miles. Crossing a nameless bayou, we stacked arms along the Mississippi River front — below Vicksburg, of course. On account of intense heat we rested in the shade of the groves until four in the afternoon — then marched again. At New Carthage we saw a wooden gunboat which had been very thoroughly peppered with cannon shot in the Grand Gulf engagement. Its guns, machinery, and hull, to all intents and purposes, remained uninjured and ready for battle — an indication of hurried marksmanship by the enemy. A large field hospital at the roadside was filled with sick and wounded. I was sorry to find among these lads a school boy friend of mine who had been shot through the thigh with a musket ball at Port Gibson. A funeral was in progress as we marched away. Innumerable snakes infested every wayside spot, and we killed great numbers of them. Fourteen-foot alligators swam in the bayous. Dismayed by the presence of so many human beings, they fled from one lagoon where hundreds of us went in bathing. A low, flat, hot, swampy country was around us.

“It's hotter than Hades”, our Major observed.

“Yes, I think it's hotter than Hell”, an officer answered. Perspiration often penetrated waterproof knapsacks.

All along the route we saw the smoking ruins of splendid plantation homes, costly sugar-houses, cot-

ton gins, warehouses, and enormous barns, for we moved through one of the finest and richest sections of the South, and all this property was being cruelly and uselessly destroyed, in defiance of the rules of civilized warfare. How could we blame Southerners for hating us? This vandalism was perpetrated by the division of troops that marched immediately ahead of us, and was explained on the ground that a large number of those men came from Missouri, Kentucky, and other border States. They justified their conduct on the plea of retaliation. They had received many letters recounting atrocious deeds at their own homes perpetrated by Confederate guerrillas and raiding bands of cavalry. They claimed to be "only fighting the devil with fire".

On the following day our course lay away from the Mississippi, and we marched for fifteen miles along Lake St. Joseph, the opposite side of which was green with vernal woods that rose from the edge of the waters. The lake was a lovely sylvan-flood, and around its fertile shores had been one of the garden spots of Louisiana. Even as we gazed the country to the rear was one vast field of sugar cane and Indian corn, which in the distance resembled the green waves of the sea. Only the day before, expensive homes, sugar mills, and cotton plants of great cost looked out upon the placid lake in proud serenity. Now, where we marched, were smouldering ruins, and for miles ahead we could see smoke and flames wrapping roofs and walls that

towered high. I saw but one white civilian that day. Men, women, and children must have fled to the woods and fields — hidden away. These homes had been sumptuously furnished, several pianos being often seen near one of them. Little plundering was done, scarcely any — almost everything was burnt. Our division commander, that morning, had given orders that any man caught firing property along the route should be immediately “stood up” at the roadside and shot. The troops ahead of us either had full license to burn, or so fierce a determination to do so, that efforts to prevent proved unavailing. The burning went on. This most barbarous spectacle reminded us of what we had read in Gibbon concerning the passage of the Danube by the northern barbarians, whose advance was traced by the blaze of Roman villas. Cruelty has no effect in deciding military operations. Neither has destruction of private property, except in special cases covered by absolute military necessity. The loss inflicted along Lake St. Joseph was enormous. Wrongs perpetrated in Missouri and Kentucky by irresponsible outlaws were wiped out in Louisiana by trained soldiers.

Early the next day we marched eight miles and reached the Mississippi again at Hard Times Landing—a spot that did not belie its name. It gave us a fine view, however, of the captured fortress of Grand Gulf. When we embarked, and rapidly steamed down and across toward it, previous interest was

intensified. Bluffs loomed from the water's brink. A new Vicksburg might have been created there, had not the enemy's plans been frustrated. Everywhere on the sides of precipitous cliffs and lofty hills we saw forts, breastworks, and rifle pits. Only a little more time was needed. In the capture of the place our troops got several brass fieldpieces, five heavy siege guns, two battle flags, and a thousand prisoners. Painted in white on the siege guns was an assertion that Admiral Porter captured them.

Without land forces Grand Gulf might not have been taken in a thousand years. Porter's fleet fought five hours and a half; transports ran the blockade as they had done at Vicksburg; then ferried troops across the river by thousands. At Port Gibson a Confederate army was beaten, and the enemy fled from Grand Gulf that night to avoid capture. Nevertheless the gunboats fought bravely, as they always did.

The day before we reached Grand Gulf the enemy was defeated again at Raymond. McPherson then scattered another force and entered the capital of Mississippi, capturing twenty pieces of artillery. The army was now said to be in the rear of Vicksburg. After we disembarked at Grand Gulf I made a visit to the forts. In one was a large siege gun that no cannonade had been able to silence. The reason was now apparent. On either side of the muzzle of the gun a strong post was deeply set in the ground, to which a negro slave had been chained,

and a Confederate officer had stood near the pair of unfortunates with a drawn revolver, and forced them, under pain of instant death, to load the gun. When a negro was killed, another one took his place. How many perished in this way we had no means of knowing. The officer was finally blown to atoms. I saw the posts, chains, and manacles. Grand Gulf commanded not only the Mississippi River, but also the mouths of Big and Little Black rivers — it dominated three rivers, and was a citadel moulded by Nature's hand.

Our immediate command, the Iowa Brigade, went into bivouac on a sandy flat, suffering from intense heat, and, like the rest, having a wretched time of it. The atmosphere that rose from swamps, rivers, and bayous under a sweltering sun engendered disease among some other troops. Rations were scant. We scarcely had enough to eat, but cheerfulness prevailed, for the situation was known to all. A great campaign was in rapid progress; quick movements outranked everything else. The boats were loaded with rations, above Vicksburg, but the trouble was to get them to us, for moves and changes occurred incessantly. Great numbers of us went bathing in the swollen tides of the Mississippi, which were treacherous and dangerous. One soldier was drowned, being drawn under by the headlong currents. Bathing when over-heated injured many men, and the surgeons tried to stop the practice, but everyone was hot and nobody cared for orders. All

civilians had fled from town. We did not blame them.

On May 14th I wrote: "In the shade of the trees on the heights of Grand Gulf I view the glittering Mississippi, dotted with transports and iron clads. At the foot of the bluff are the rude camps of the soldiers. Strewing the hillside are cannon shot, fragments of shell, bursted or dismounted guns, and the remains of blown-up magazines which had been plated over with railroad iron. Even the monuments of the town cemetery have been shattered by missiles, with two or three graves dug out by solid shot — skeletons, coffins and all. The sun glows as if in the tropics, and, in the distance, all we view is robed in livid green. The woods around are in utmost splendor — in foliage of deepest dye. Like another Egypt, Louisiana lies 'in the midst of its waters' — a land of fertility — of corn, oranges, sugar cane, cotton, rice and tobacco — a land of flowers, fanned by breezes from the Gulf, or from the tropics — a land of prodigious richness, overhung by the double pall of human slavery and civil war. At twelve o'clock last night the drums beat an alarm. Our regiment and another one hurried to the picket line, and performed grand-guard duty till morning. Rifle pits are now being constructed around the rear of the town by the First Mississippi Infantry, which is composed of escaped slaves commanded by white officers promoted from veteran regiments. Thousands of fugitive slaves of both

sexes have poured into Grand Gulf. For the first time without a master, and herded like animals in a long ravine, their demoralization is deplorable. Vice is rampant."

On May 16th I was one of a party of forty detailed to guard a small wagon train on a foraging expedition. Our course lay through a wild and romantic region. The highway was walled on either side by abrupt hills covered by trees in richest robes of green. Vines hid the trunks of trees; tall grass grew till it drooped and lay on the ground; thickets were impassable because of density. The birds, blossoms, flowers, and the aroma of southern Spring aroused admiration. The road at times led along the steep sides of hills, and when we reached a summit, the view of fields, woods, glistening bayous, and wide, baronial plantations, almost banished thoughts of war. The odors of the pear, the orange, and the nectarine, floating from blossoming orchards, filled the breeze with perfume. Everywhere was "fruit, foliage, crag, wood, field and vine." After marching five miles we came to a big plantation and loaded our wagons with corn. No tedious formalities attended the transaction. No money passed, no receipt was given. The owner lost his corn because there were forty of us and only one of him. Not a guerrilla came up to protest against "the good old rule, the simple plan," or fire a shot from copse or jungle. The slaves treated us with lavish hospitality, offering us milk, corn-bread, honey, preserved

fruits, and other foods that seemed to us luxurious. We needed this increase of rations, for each day our stinted fare grew more slender. These black people lived in great abundance as regarded food, and the quality was far better than many northern white people enjoy to-day, but their clothing was utterly worn out. The attire of some of them was unworthy of human beings, but in spite of ragged garments and rawhide shoes, most of them were fat, jolly, and apparently without a care on any subject. Their cabins appeared cosy, clean, and homelike. Not one of them could read, but they thoroughly understood that the war deeply involved their future fate. Their "religious instruction" had been mainly confined to sermons on such texts as these: "And God cursed Ham," "servants obey your masters," etc., etc. By the terms of the Emancipation Proclamation every slave was now free, but the proclamation had little force outside of our military lines. The male slaves of the region we were in all had muskets and ammunition, which they had picked up on adjacent battle fields. On this plantation I conversed with handsome young female slaves that were so nearly Caucasian that they had red cheeks and blue eyes. They were the children of their owner, undoubtedly, and variously called themselves creoles, quadroons, and octoroons — a comment on the "divine institution" of Slavery—that "sum of all villainies". I thought of the conflagrations along Lake St. Joseph, and of the Biblical warning: "I will repay, saith the Lord."

The more intelligent of these girls were gloomy and unhappy. They had little to live for. Without untoward incident we returned to our camps on the Mississippi.

In the middle of the night of May 19th the rattle of drums awoke us. "Fall in for Vicksburg", was the startling cry. Cheers rang among the battle-rent hills of Grand Gulf, and floated far over woods and waters. By the light of the stars the Iowa Brigade embarked on steamers, and moved up that broad and perilous flood. The dark shores teemed with possible dangers. The shots of a single fieldpiece might wreck the whole fleet and drown the expedition. Mines or torpedoes might underlie the tide, or some newly invented implement of war be waiting for experiment. We little appreciated the dangers of that campaign. Few or none of us thought of them. Huddled and crowded together, to a degree intolerable, we found that sleep was impossible. The steamers plodded along cautiously, keeping the middle of the river, and making only about three miles an hour. By sunrise we had got only half way to Warrenton. The bands played gayly and the soldiers cheered. The booming of cannon ahead sounded incessantly. The forenoon wore tediously away. At noon, from the upper deck, we could see the deserted Confederate forts at Warrenton. Several gunboats came down to convoy us, and in so doing found a masked battery in the woods below Warrenton, and shelled it from position. We had been

moving steadily toward it. While this artillery fight was in progress, our transports hurried over to the Louisiana shore, and all the troops disembarked. At the end of several hours we went aboard again, and the fleet slowly steamed up in the direction of the Vicksburg canal.

It was late in the afternoon, and few of us forget the first view we had of Vicksburg. Its spires glittered, and for miles its warlike hills shone in the blaze of the western sun; high in air could be seen the bursting of innumerable shells; white circlets of smoke floated above the fated city, and then disappeared; the forts and fleets, in furious combat, exchanged missiles that hissed and screamed through the air; the quick flash of artillery on the lofty heights resembled the lightning's flash; clouds of dust arose a hundred feet high as some tremendous and well directed explosive struck the broad front of a fort; huge guns could be seen shining behind works that were suddenly rent; answering missiles would strike near the black gunboats; and slender, shining jets of water would dart straight up in the air, and fall back in showers of spray; like uneasy monsters the ironclads kept in constant motion, firing from one side and then swinging slowly around, and firing from the other, and moving restlessly up and down stream, never keeping still a moment; white clouds of smoke floated off from hotly engaged batteries; the booming of a thousand guns, softened by the dis-

tance, was musical and grand, and past that magnificent and indescribable panorama of war, the great river flowed as tranquilly on as though pouring its smooth tides through the heart of a wilderness.

CLINT PARKHURST

## The Lake of the Taensa

How often it happens that incidents in history — though they may be recorded in detail and with great authenticity by men of the time — leave no trace upon the scene of their enactment. New generations live upon the spot in utter ignorance of the early happenings, and often the record itself — hidden away in old documents — is almost lost to the knowledge of man.

There was a small, crescent-shaped lake a few miles from the Mississippi River on whose banks two and a half centuries ago lived the Taensa Indians. Their buildings and their mode of life moved Tonty — the Man with the Iron Hand — to deep astonishment when he first visited them in 1682; and Iberville, coming up from the mouth of the river in the spring of 1700, spent several days at the village and records in his journal a series of events on the shores of the lake that are among the most weirdly dramatic in all the annals of Indian life.

With this in mind it is with great interest that one reads in Mr. Parkhurst's article in the preceding pages on Vicksburg these descriptive lines:

On the following day our course lay away from the Mississippi, and we marched for fifteen miles along Lake St. Joseph, the opposite side of which was green with vernal woods that rose from the edge of the waters. The

lake was a lovely sylvan-flood, and around its fertile shores had been one of the garden spots of Louisiana. Even as we gazed the country to the rear was one vast field of sugar cane and Indian corn, which in the distance resembled the green waves of the sea. Only the day before, expensive homes, sugar mills, and cotton plants of great cost looked out upon the placid lake in proud serenity. Now, where we marched, were smouldering ruins, and for miles ahead we could see smoke and flames wrapping roofs and walls that towered high.

Little did Mr. Parkhurst and the men of the Sixteenth Iowa Infantry realize that they were marching over historic ground. But it so happened that Lake St. Joseph was the identical lake on whose banks the Taensa Indians had lived and the smoke and flames that now wrapped the buildings on the shores were only a modern counterpart of the scenes of a wild night of destruction in the days of King Louis the Fourteenth and his colonial ventures. The story of the Lake of the Taensa is preserved in the ancient journals and reports of Tonty and Father Membré, of La Harpe, and Pénicaut, and Montigny, and Iberville; and it seems well worth retelling.

In the latter part of March, 1682, La Salle was descending the Mississippi on his memorable trip to the sea. The banks of the river were drowned by the spring floods and fogs hung often upon the water. They had paddled far south of the farthest explorations of Marquette and Jolliet, and were now

journeying in a strange country, but at the Arkansas villages they had been given guides to show them the way to the villages of the Taensa. Beside a swamp on the west shore of the river they halted and camped while Tonty and two other Frenchmen with the Arkansas guides, pushing through the swamps to the lake, paddled across to a village on the west shore.

Introduced by the Arkansas guides they were given a most friendly reception, and found the village one of absorbing interest. The buildings were like none that Tonty had seen in all his wanderings. The first one into which they were ushered was the lodge of the chief. It was forty feet square, with thick walls made of sun dried mud rising to a height of ten or twelve feet and surmounted by a dome-like roof of matted cane. Inside they found themselves in a single large room in whose center a torch of dried canes was burning. There were no windows but the light of the torch fell upon gleaming shields of burnished copper and Indian paintings which adorned the walls.

The chief sat upon a couch with his three wives beside him, and opposite him were sixty old men dressed in white robes made from the bark of the mulberry tree. To do him honor the old men, standing with their hands upon their heads, burst out in unison with the cry "Ho-ho-ho-ho". He spoke to them and they seated themselves. A man of great dignity was this chief. He was dressed, like the old

men, in a fine white robe, and a dozen pearls as big as peas hung from his ears. Unusual honors were paid to him. He commanded and was obeyed like a royal potentate. Slaves waited upon him, and he ate and drank from individual dishes made of well glazed earthenware.

As Tonty sat upon his cane mat in the lodge, a little Indian child started to pass between the flaring torch and the chief, whereupon his mother seized him hastily and made him walk around the torch. Such was the respect paid to the living chief, and when a chief died it was the custom of the Taensa to kill a number of his followers in order that they might accompany and serve him in the next world.

Across from the lodge of the chief was the sacred temple, a similar structure but with an enclosing wall of mud surrounding it. Into this mud wall were fixed spikes upon which were placed the heads of their enemies, which they sacrificed to the sun. Over the roof of the temple were three carved eagles facing toward the rising sun. The inside of the temple was somewhat bare, but in the midst of the room was an altar at the foot of which were placed on end three logs of wood, and here was kept a sacred and perpetual fire attended by two old men who guarded it day and night. In this holy temple also were preserved the bones of departed chiefs.

When Tonty told the chief of his own white leader encamped beside the Mississippi, the Taensa chief decided to pay him the courtesy of a visit, and the

next day with high pomp he set out in a pirogue to the camp of La Salle, accompanied by many canoes loaded with provisions of which the French were in great need. He drew near the camp to the sound of the tambour and the music of his women. A fine robe of beautiful white cloth adorned his person and he was preceded by six men who swept with their hands the ground over which he was to pass and spread out a cane mat for him to sit upon. Two men with fans of white feathers accompanied him, either to drive away the evil spirits or to prevent the gnats from biting; and a third bore plaques of highly polished copper. Gifts were exchanged by the two chiefs and then the Taensa, grave and dignified to the last, withdrew in state to his village upon the lake.

La Salle and Tonty and their adventurous company continued their journey to the sea and took possession of all the land on behalf of King Louis of France. In the years that followed Tonty made several visits to his new acquaintances on the lake. In 1686, when he went to the mouth of the river to look for La Salle, he stopped to see them and on the shores of the crescent-shaped lake they sang the calumet to him. Again when he made his valiant expedition to the southwest to try and rescue the ill fated survivors of his murdered leader, he turned west from the Mississippi at their village.

Many years rolled by and missionaries from the north began to push down into the lower Mississippi.

Father Montigny came to make his home at the Taensa village. About the same time Iberville and Bienville came in ships to the Gulf of Mexico and — more fortunate than La Salle — succeeded in finding the mouth of the great river. And Tonty, still holding sway in the fur trading posts of the upper valley, came down the river to meet and greet his countrymen on the shores of the Gulf.

They talked over the situation in the valley and Iberville determined to visit the tribes west of the Mississippi, leaving the river at the Taensa village. So in the spring of the year 1700, setting out with several of Tonty's men for guides, he came on the morning of March 14th to the border of the Lake of the Taensa. Signal shots from the guns brought four Indians in whose canoes they embarked to cross the lake. About noon they reached the village where they found Father Montigny and two other Frenchmen happy to greet them.

The village was much the same as when Tonty had first found it. The old men in white robes, and the cane-roofed lodge of the chief, the imposing temple, the sacred fire and the two men who guarded it, were there as of old. But where was that dignified and mighty ruler, the chief himself? Montigny could tell, and the Frenchmen who had been with him in the village. They did not forget the day that the last chief had died.

Among all the customs of the Taensa tribe perhaps none was so firmly established as that which

provided an escort for the chief when he ended his earthly career. He who had received their constant and devoted attention while he was alive should not be allowed to go alone to find his way to the great beyond. So when the last chief had died they began to make preparations to kill a number of his followers that they might accompany him. But they killed no one this time for Father Montigny had come to live in their village and he protested, with horror in his face, against such a sacrifice. In spite of the customs of the tribe and the insistence of the disappointed medicine man the long robed French priest had his way and for once at least in the history of the Taensa village a chief went alone and unaided to the far country of the dead. And to this day of the coming of Iberville, the old medicine man had nursed his resentment over the desertion of the ancient faith.

On the night of the 16th the rain came down in torrents upon the cane domes of the village lodges and ran down the streets toward the lake. With the night it did not stop but thunder deep and terrible roared overhead and lightning played in the dark heavens. Suddenly came a terrific crash that woke every Indian and white visitor in the village. As if in answer a flame leaped up from the roof of the sacred temple. Out from every lodge came frightened Indians to gather before the doomed building of their faith.

The cane roof burned like tinder and on the outer

wall the skulls of their enemies must have seemed weird and taunting in the glare of the flames. Full of terror and tumult the crowd of savages swarmed about the scene, tearing their hair and raising their arms to heaven as they invoked the spirit to extinguish the flame. They cried aloud above the crackling of the fire, then they gathered handfuls of earth and rubbed on their naked bodies and faces.

Presently they saw the wild figure of an old man gesticulating and heard him calling above the tumult:

“Women, bring your children to offer to the Spirit as a sacrifice to appease his wrath.”

It was the old medicine man who had sulked since the last chief had died. Now, he said, was their punishment come for the Spirit was angered that no man or woman of the Taensa had gone the dark and lonely way with the chief when he had passed out of their village. Now they must appease him, and again he cried out to them to bring him their children.

The flames licked the sacred building like a hideous spirit and the carved eagles from their high perch looking out over the lake tumbled down into the fiery ruin. Indian women in a frenzy came running up with their babies and handed them over to the medicine man. Five of them he took and tossed into the glowing fire before the white men rushing up could stop the terrible sacrifice. But the fire still raged

and utterly consumed the temple and the altar and all the sacred possessions.

The tragic night gave way at last to a wet and dreary day, but in the village of the Taensa excitement still reigned. The five mothers who had sacrificed their children were taken in great honor to the lodge of the one who was to be the new chief. There they were showered with praise and clothed in white robes. A huge feather was stuck in the hair of each one and they were seated on mats beside the medicine man at the entrance of the chief's lodge which was now to serve as a temple. All day long they sat in this post of honor and at night they retired into the lodge to sing weird songs, taking up their posts by the door again when morning came.

Each day, toward sunset, a curious ceremony was carried out. Three young Indian men gathered bundles of dry wood and piled them in the open space between the burned temple and the new chief's lodge. Then an old man who guarded the sacred fire came with a torch and lighted the fagots. As he touched the flame to the wood the medicine man who had been waiting observantly in the door of the chief's lodge walked slowly out followed by the five heroic women. In his left hand he held a pillow of feathers covered with leather and he beat upon it with a stick which he held in his right as if to beat time to the chant which they sang as they advanced.

Three times the old man and the women, singing lustily, circled about the fagots, then they threw

themselves upon the burning wood and with great handfuls of wet moss put out the flames. This done the women went to the lake to bathe, returning finally to take up their chants in the lodge of the new chief.

After a few days Iberville and his men departed. Father Montigny, expecting a missionary from Canada to replace him, moved on to the villages of the Natchez. The missionary from Canada, however, did not come, and in 1706, harassed by the Yazoo and the Chickasaw, the Taensa gave up their village home on the lake and moved south to the region of Mobile Bay. The sacred fire died out, the mud walls and cane roofs vanished, and the canoes of the white men no longer slipped past the lazy alligators in the Lake of the Taensa.

A century and a half went by on slow wings. White settlers had come into the region and found its soil fertile. Sugar plantations and fine homes had appeared beside the shore, and the lake had come to be known as Lake St. Joseph. Then came the Civil War. The savage Indian tribes were gone, but warring white men passed here and there and often left a trail of fire. Such a trail had marked the shores of Lake St. Joseph in May of 1863. Following this path of destruction came the Sixteenth Iowa Infantry marching to the river landing to join the armies that were investing Vicksburg.

For fifteen miles they passed along the edge of

the lake amidst smoldering ruins and flame wrapped roofs. But though the feet of Clinton Parkhurst and his comrades may have trod the very site of the ancient temple of the Taensa Indians, there came to them no visions of the dignified chief dressed in a robe of white mulberry bark, nor did the flames of the modern devastation bring to their minds any picture of that wild night when these same shores of the crescent-shaped lake were the scene of a blazing shrine and the fanatical burning of human sacrifices.

JOHN C. PARISH

## Comment by the Editor

### THE PASSING OF THE EXPLORER

Columbusing as a general practice has become almost obsolete. To the explorers of 1492 the biggest part of the world lay undiscovered; and they merely led the way. In the fifteen hundreds hardy seamen like Drake or Frobisher could make wonderful finds simply by sailing around in boats. De Soto and Coronado, not content with cruising, took to the interior and marched tremendous distances with proportionately small results.

During the next century adventuring in the new world was quite the vogue. And in the seventeen hundreds monarchs whose intrepid men had rambled over the new regions began to contest in earnest for these spots. They sent out more adventurers and followed them with armies; and as the century drew to a close nations came to a rough division of the spoils and began to ask what their possessions were like.

More chance for the explorers. They set out upon the westering waters in search of trade routes. They moved in canvas topped Ninas and Pintas and Santa Marias across the interminable plains in search of gold. More prosaic settlers came and filled in the intervening spaces.

As the Twentieth Century came in the people of the world began to see the limits of discovery. Scarcely any region remained except a few islands in the South Seas, and the North and South Poles. Now the poles have been found and the islands of the ocean explored, and the dark skinned Eskimos and the dusky southern belles have somewhat lost their novelty. The world has been discovered, and adventuring Columbuses are faced with unemployment.

#### VERTICAL EXPLORATION

Nevertheless, there is hope. Horizontal exploration is waning but the vertical quest is hardly begun. The explorers have turned from the ships of the sea and the plain, and interested themselves in the pick and shovel. They have taken to intensive discovery. Under the sands of Egypt, beneath the tangle of tropical foliage in Central America, buried on the hill tops of the Andes, or underlying the plains of the Mississippi Valley are the new lands they hunt.

The discoveries are astonishing. In Egypt within a very few years buried cities have given up enormous quantities of papyrus manuscripts — among them a Biblical manuscript a century earlier than any before known. The clearing away of underbrush and soil reveals the wonderful city of Machu Picchu in Peru and the ancient pyramids and writings of Central America.

Under the soil of the North American Continent lie the remains of ancient man and the signs of his culture. And scattered and hidden in the old wallows and tar beds are the still more ancient bones of the mammoth and the sabre-toothed tiger. But a Columbus nowadays must be more than a hardy adventurer. Archaeology has become a fine art and the tar beds, and burial mounds, and effigies, and cliff dwellings must be explored by those who know how, or the results are worse than useless. In several of the States archaeological surveys have been begun under scientific auspices. Iowa offers an exceptional field for intensive exploration.

#### RAILROAD HISTORY

It seems a far cry from prehistoric relics to the era of railroad building. But even that recent era is full of haze and oblivion. Back in the early days of railroad promotion and construction, companies were started which have long since been forgotten. The stakes on old lines of survey have rotted away, the long straight embankments of abandoned work are overgrown with weeds or perhaps have been obliterated. And even the beginnings of surviving companies are indistinct in memory and record.

The publication of some railroad material in the January number of the *PALIMPSEST* has brought interesting responses. We have since had the pleasure of looking over a *Corporate History of the Chicago*,

*Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company* prepared by W. W. Baldwin, vice president. It is a large volume of nearly five hundred pages and it is notable, among other things, for the care with which the salient facts have been gathered and presented, together with separate maps, for each one of the 204 companies which had a part in building the network known as the Burlington System.

We understand that the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad Company is preparing a history of that organization in connection with the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the initial operation of trains in 1852. It was this line from Chicago to Rock Island which the old M. & M. Railroad Company was organized to extend. A reference by Mr. Usher in one of the letters printed in January to the effect that Mr. Farnam, the road-builder of the Rock Island road in Illinois, finished his contract a year ahead of time and was running it on his own hook for that year, brings this comment from a son, Mr. Henry W. Farnam of New Haven, Connecticut, in a letter to Mr. A. N. Harbert of Iowa City:

It is true that the firm of Sheffield and Farnam, in which Mr. Joseph E. Sheffield of New Haven was associated with my father, contracted to build the Chicago & Rock Island Railroad and finished it about eighteen months in advance of the time specified and I believe that the contractors had the right to run the road for their own profit during that time. But, in point of fact, they did not. The first train

passed over the road from Chicago to Rock Island February 22nd and on July 10th the road was formally turned over to the company. Mr. Usher's letter was written May 8th so that I presume my father was actually running the road at the time, but he ran it for less than five months and not for a year.

#### THE ANTOINE LE CLAIRE

The coming of the railroad to the east bank of the river in 1854 turned men's thoughts to bridge building, but the first locomotive to cross the Mississippi did not wait for the completion of the bridge. It came over on a flatboat and was christened the Antoine Le Claire. In the article on the M. & M. Railroad in the January PALIMPSEST this event is given as occurring in July, 1854, in accordance with various printed statements to that effect. However, this antedates the fact by a year as we have since been able to determine. Conflicting statements sent us back to contemporary sources. Newspapers are not always the most authentic records, but in fixing the chronology of events happening at the time and not then subject to controversy they are apt to be more accurate than later secondary accounts. The *Keokuk Gate City* for July 25, 1855, prints an item chronicling the arrival in Davenport of the Antoine Le Claire, and comments on this coming of the first locomotive to Iowa.

We would give much to know the later history of the veteran engine. The first printing press to run

off a newspaper in Iowa stands in state in the museum of a neighboring Commonwealth, which it also served. But perhaps the locomotive, being of a more adventurous spirit and a more dangerous occupation in life, came to a violent end, and disintegrated into unhistoric scrap iron.

J. C. P.

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