

Comment by the Editor

TWENTY KINDS OF MEAT

What shall we have for dinner? though forever asked and answered daily, never seems to be decided permanently. The quandary appears to be universal — as pertinent to savage tribesmen as to sophisticated dilettantes, as prevalent in England as in India, as perennial among butlers as bachelors. Of course the nature of the menu depends primarily upon whether the question arises from famine or surfeit or appropriate diet. At the dinner in honor of the completion of the railroad from Davenport to Muscatine in 1855 there were twenty kinds of meat!

According to imagination and tradition the food of the pioneers was simple and frugal. Corn bread, salt pork, and hominy are supposed to have been the principal items of sustenance, though potatoes and gravy were staples in season. If a hungry farmer's appetite were not appeased with these he could have johnny cake, hulled corn, and spare ribs. For variety's sake the ingenious cook might serve maize purée, dodger a la corn, frumenty in milk, and belly of swine adipose garnished with dandelion greens. But at the Muscatine railroad celebration the guests had a choice of twenty kinds of meat!

No one has ever supposed that the pioneers were

epicurean. While they indulged their healthy appetites freely, the manner of their eating was not fastidious. Dainty dishes rarely graced their board. If salad was devised at all it was apt to be passed in disdain as an alien concoction. The people who conquered the prairie wanted bread to eat and plenty of meat—food that had substance and stayed a man's stomach from noon until night. Assuming that hunger was natural, the whole family ate boldly and with relish—nor stopped to count the calories or balance a ration. Starch, protein, vitamins, and iron they consumed in ignorance and bliss, but most of all they relished the protein. It must have been so because just seventy-four years ago the citizens of Muscatine provided the banquet table with twenty kinds of meat, including turkey, quail, and venison!

J. E. B.