

In Search of A Location

The emigrant's guide to the western states of America, or, Backwoods and prairies

John Regan

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“ All ye woods, and trees, and bowers ;
All ye virtues and ye iwwers,
That inhabit in the lakes,
In the pleasant springs or brakes,
Move your feet
To our sound,
Whilst we greet
All this ground.”—*Fletcher.*

Description of New Orleans—Excisemen—Up Stream—St. Louis—Arrival at The Desmoins Rapids—First excursion in The Woods of Iowa—Deer Stalking extraordinary—Pick-Nicking by the Mississippi—A Deserter—Steamboat on The Rocks—A Regular “Fix”—Collision..

New Orleans is situated on the left bank of the Mississippi—112 miles above its mouth— 960 miles below the mouth of the Ohio—1920 below Pittsburg—and 1200 below the mouth of the Missouri. It is built on a bend of the river, on the concave side of the bend, and is hence sometimes called “ The Crescent City.” The extent of steamboat navigation by the Mississippi and its tributaries, is estimated at 20,000 miles. The river before the town is about a mile wide, and fifty fathoms deep ; its extensive harbour is, especially during the winter and spring months, crowded with every description of foreign vessels and river craft, steamboats, keelboats, flatboats, broad horns or arks, timber rafts, &c., which bring down an amazing amount of produce from all points of the great valley above. Here may be seen flatboats which have floated down from the upper waters of the Ohio, Missouri, Arkansas, Red River, Illinois, Desmoins, and the Mississippi Proper—some of them upwards of 2000 miles—laden with wheat, flour, maize, beef, pork, lard, whisky, hemp, bagging, tobacco, cotton, bale-rope, peltries and lead, apples and potatoes in barrels, cider and cider-royal (or cider that has been strengthened by boiling or freezing), cattle, hogs, and poultry ; and, in short, large samples of the industry and ingenuity of the agriculturist and artizan of the whole upper country of the West.

There have been counted in the harbour at one time no less than 1500 flatboats. Steamers are moving about in all directions, leaving for, and arriving from, places up the country almost every hour. In the amount and value of its exports, the city is second only to New York, and very little inferior to it. Its exports have been estimated at from 12,000,000 to 15,000,000 dollars a-year. Situated at the sea level in 30 deg. N. latitude, the climate is hot, and unhealthy to strangers, and on this account all intercourse with the city is abandoned as soon as the hot weather sets in, and the greater number of its more wealthy citizens remove to the various watering-places in the Northern States. In the end of the fall, the winter, and the spring months, when the business is greatest, the population is estimated at 100,000, including a floating population of 20,000. The yellow fever visits the city nearly every year, and the deaths from the disease vary from 100 to 700 in the season.

The ground on which the city stands is lower than the surface of the river, which is confined within its channel by a raised embankment called “ The Levee,” which cost a great expense, and extends about fifty miles. As the ground is soft and spongy, the houses are without cellars, and even the graves, shortly after being dug, are filled with water, and the coffins have to be sunk by placing stones or other heavy bodies upon them. Those who are averse to this mode of interment, may enclose their dead in structures above ground, in which, with the excessive heat of the summer, the bodies are soon dried to a crisp. Such is New Orleans, a city of the first importance to the Western Settler, as communications are held with it from all portions of the great valley above, and it offers a ready market for every species of marketable commodity.

On Monday we had the excisemen on board. They would open one or two of our chests, and the rest were marked “ searched,” without opening. We experienced the greatest civility from these functionaries, who performed their duties in the least annoying manner possible, cracking jokes with all and sundry, and communicating such little hints as might prove useful in our voyage up the river, and final settlement.

But the reader, like myself, will be impatient to get to the end of the journey. Well, then, on Wednesday, having got all things arranged to our satisfaction, we set sail up the river in the *General Pratt* steamer, Capt. M’Guire, one of the largest size, for St. Louis, 1200 miles up. This distance we accomplished in eight days. The journey up was of the most animating and splendid description. Day by day the moving scene was passing before our eyes with all the splendid array of a gorgeous panorama. The huge and resistless river under-foot—the towns and villages upon the river banks—the various and infinite craft floating upon its bosom—the millions of clearings breaking in upon the ancient forest shades—and the sound of the English tongue on every hand—while the loud bellows of the breathing engine resounded through the primeval forest in a tone which promised to carry the dominion of man through all its recesses ;—all these combined to fill the soul with such feelings as make one rejoice that he also is one of that vast fellowship whose mission it is to fill up these western plains with the arts, industries, and improvements of eastern lands—that himself and his children may engage with heart and energy in remunerating labour—not as the mere beasts of burden, doomed to labour and drudge, that all but the bare necessities which labour demands to prolong existence may be sacrificed to the fierce competitions of an over-crowded people.

Our passage money from New Orleans to St. Louis, 1100 miles, was four dollars exclusive of provisions. When we got to the latter place several persons came aboard from the town making inquiries for workmen.

“ Look hyar—hev ye got any bricklayers or stonemasons in this crowd,” says one.

“ Gentlemen, I’m in search of carpenters, if you’ve got any here let him speak out,” said another.

A decent-looking man accosted me, and wished to engage me in the house and sign painting business. During the voyage I had been engaged for a few days in painting a sextant, a telescope, compasses, parallel ruler, &c., on a chart box of the captain’s, &c., and the passengers thereafter took me for a painter by profession. I told him I did a little for amusement, but was quite ignorant of the art and mystery of wall and door daubing, though I did not doubt but that I could paint a sign.

“ Come right along” said he, “ an' I'll get a feller to tote your plunder, an' I'll give you a job. I'm horrid badly off for hands.”

“ I thought so” said I, “ or you would not be so fond of taking one who knows nothing about the business. I believe I'll not stay, I'm bound farther.”

“ You may go farther and fare worse,” said he, “ I'd give you decent wages.”

“ How much do you give to a regular hand ?”

“ Twelve dollars a week and board.”

“ What's the board worth ?”

“ Three dollars. You'll Bot go with me then, Mister. See here, if you don't succeed where you're a-going, come right back and I'll engage you.” So saying, he went off.

At this place we had to take a small steamer for the Upper Mississippi. We embarked, accordingly, on board the *Indian Queen*, and on Saturday evening stopped for the night at the small village of Keokuk, on the Iowa side of the river, at the foot of the Desmoins rapids. Here the greater part of the vessel's lading, including our more heavy chests, had to be removed into keelboats, to allow the steamer to pass up the rapids, as the water in the principal channel was not over four feet deep, though the river here, at 1500 miles up, is as wide as at its mouth. The rapids are caused by the river flowing at the rate of eight or nine miles an hour over a continuous bed of limestone rock, extending twelve miles to Montrose. On Sunday morning, all things being ready, before we got breakfast, the captain requested the men passengers, of whom there were about fifty, to take a short walk round the bend along the river side, as the river being at a low stage, his vessel would be so much lightened. This we were willing enough to do, but urged we had not yet got breakfast. “ Oh, you'll have the better appetite ; you'll be on board again in an hour.” We sprung on shore, and set off through the Iowa woods. This was my first excursion in the American forest, and I was highly pleased. The portion we were now passing over belonged to the Sac and Fox Indians, and has been purchased from them lately by the Government, although the Indians had not yet removed West. We passed several log cabins, and surprised more than one drove of hogs.

Five or six of our party, armed with guns, having gone before the rest to have a shot at whatever might turn up, presently we heard all the guns discharged in a running fire, and immediately after a herd of twenty-five or thirty deer came bounding among us through the hazel brush—the brush being thick and in full leaf—they were in such trepidation, we were not seen till they were fairly upon us. A huge buck jumped within a yard of where I stood. It would be hard to say which of us felt the more amazed. A moment he stood panting in almost breathless wonder, then giving his head a majestic toss, vanished into the depths of the forest. “ The deer ! the deer ! —track the wounded deer !” was heard resounding through the wood. “ I have him ! all right !” was heard in reply. In an open space, clear of brushwood, under a stately cotton-wood tree, two men had got their knees planted upon a prostrate deer, while the rest of the party were crowding in to the death. The shot had taken effect only in the fleshy part of the thigh, and the animal showed full signs of life. An Irishman, named Pat Flynn, claimed the honour of having brought him down. Pat boasted of having killed more than one in his day, and entered with great minuteness upon the manner of taking aim, though some of us thought he had shut his eyes. “ Anyhow,”

said Pat, “ there he is, and we’ll have a fair divide.” A clasp-knife performed the offices of bleeding and skinning, and as there was no appearance of the steamer we determined to have our breakfast at a little village called Nashville, about half-way up the rapids. As we entered the village, the people turned out to have a look at us. We were truly a motley group of invaders, each carrying a piece of venison in his hand, impatient to have it cooked. As there were but eight or nine houses in the place, we determined to start three or four fires by the river side, while we deputed some of our number to make search for bread among the houses. The good lieges had not been quite prepared for this descent upon their means ; but in about an hour, we had got together about half-a-dozen Indian corn cakes, shaped like cheeses, about 7 lbs. weight each, called, by way of eminence, “ Corn Dodgers ;” several piles of buck-wheat cakes, dough nuts, pancakes, wheaten bread in twenty various forms, and skim and buttermilk in four good sizeable water pails. We roasted our venison upon hazel switches, and ate heartily. This noble repast, all of which we could not consume, cost us less than a picayune [1] a piece. We had certainly arrived in a land of plenty, and this was the first sterling evidence of the fact.

But all this time what had become of the steamer ? By dint of listening, we could at intervals hear her puffing off her steam below the bend ; and being satisfied she was there, and could not pass without our knowledge, the greater number continued on in the direction of Montrose, at the head of the rapids, while others lingered about the village. John Adams, Thomas Sugden, a young Englishman, and I, went on towards Montrose by ourselves. As we were proceeding, Sugden, who carried a gun, which, he had obtained from another passenger for a pair of boots, let us understand that he was fully acquainted with the manual and platoon exercise. He had, in fact, deserted his regiment shortly before emigrating, and said that we must no longer call him Tom Sugden, but Tom Verity—the former being only an assumed name till he should get upon American soil.

As we passed along we gathered some wild gooseberries, very small and sour ; but of course they were not yet ripe. A little farther on, we saw a steamer lying dismantled within a few yards of the river bank. A plank reached to her from the shore, and we stepped aboard. A considerable quantity of water lay in the hull, and the most of her fittings had been removed. A countryman passing informed us she had run in here in the early part of the previous spring in a high freshet, at night, and the river falling soon after, she could not be got off.

Arrived at Montrose, which might contain about 200 inhabitants, we loitered about the place for two hours, but still no appearance of the steamer. Here we were informed that it was quite likely she had got fast on the rocks, and might have to remain there for a day or two. This was rather unlooked-for information, and we at once set off down the river, to ascertain her position. About a mile below Nashville, there she was, hard and fast upon the rocks, sure enough, toward the Illinois side of the river. We immediately hired a skiff and got on board. She had got fast by the head, and the men had out beams on each side in front, standing perpendicularly on the rock ; to the upper end tackles were made fast, and these connected with strong timbers on deck. Sometimes the men hauled upon the ropes, and sometimes a turn was taken round the engine shaft. Two anchors were out about fifty yards a-head, to hold against the stream, if the beams should succeed in lifting her off. The “ deck hands,” as they were called, seemed to take the business very coolly—never at any time making a very desperate struggle—whether from incapacity or laziness, I will not say ; but they kept humbugging at it till Wednesday. On the morning of that day we saw a steamer coming down with lead from Galena. Her own speed, and that of the current united,

brought her down at a fearful rate. She appeared to be bearing right down upon us. The channel where we were was doubtless narrow, and her velocity, if she swerved to the shallow water, would have fixed her immoveably on the rocks till the next spring freshets. Down came the vast moving structure, menacing destruction to the helpless *Indian Queen*. Every soul held his breath in intense suspense. No word arose from either vessel. Down ! down ! escape was inevitable ! The blow was struck ! Our star-board keelboat, about 100 feet long, and strongly made, received the full force of the collision ! It was the work of a moment. A tremendous crash ! and the huge mass swept past apparently unscathed.

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“ Thus long they traced and traversed to and fro,
Seeking by every way to make some breach.”—*Spenser*.

Fresh Trouble—Man Overboard—Steamer Extricated—Camp by The River—The Rapids Surmounted—Land At Burlington—Our Host’s Advice—The Dickens To Pay—Tour of Exploration.

The keelboat, fortunately, was about level with the “ guard” [2] of the *Queen*, and being driven under it the force of the stroke was somewhat broken. The violence, however, with which the steamer herself was shaken showed that this had not entirely obviated the crushing effects of the stroke. In gushed the waters by numerous breaches, and the entire boat had a fair prospect of soon going down. I had three heavy chests in it, and I determined they should not go down without a struggle. John Adams was at my side in a moment. While every one was scrambling for his own, in an incredibly short space of time we succeeded in getting two of them upon the guard. We wrought with desperation. I then set John to dragging those two on to the inner deck, while I should get the third, which was the smallest, up to the gunwale of the keelboat. I had just got it up, and was holding it by the ear rope to balance it upon the gunwale, when, in the horrible confusion, a passenger leaped upon it from the steamboat, and immediately both passenger and chest were in the Mississippi. The fall sunk the man sufficiently to carry him clear beneath the paddle-wheel. He rose, however, immediately after, and, being a swimmer, struck boldly up the stream. No living man could make way against that desperate current. The small boat, which was made fast at the stern, was immediately manned, and went off in pursuit. The poor fellow, by wisely swimming with the stream, had managed to support himself till he was picked up. He had received no injuries by the accident, but seemed to suffer considerably from fright and exhaustion. My chest got entangled in the paddle-wheel, and, after some exertion, was rescued. By the aid of a few blankets and three or four pounds of tallow candles the leaks were stopped, and willing hands soon baled out the water which had got in.

As the concussion had removed the steamer somewhat off her former bed, and all were impatient to get away, ten or twelve tons of salt in bags were taken out of the hold that evening, and put into the keelboat. Our luggage was again put in, and the boat and all the passengers towed over to the Illinois bank, distant about fifty yards. The steamer was then at dusk got once more into the channel, and ready for starting in the morning. We got our chests ashore, and encamped for the night on the banks. Reader, do you wish to know how *we* did it ? Well, then : I had a large chest and two smaller ones ; these two I placed side by side, with their ends abutting against the side of the large one. This formed a sleeping platform. A few bundles of grass served to smooth the descent from the big chest to its smaller neighbours : the mattress then

was laid on. But still we were in the open air—we must have some protection from the dews. A piece of driftwood, five feet long, was now set up at the centre of the bed head, and another at the foot. A large bed quilt was stretched over all, and at the gable ends other soft wares were exhibited. Thus defended on all sides, our bed was comfortable enough. But after we had got fairly in, we were unable to sleep, from the noise of our fellow-passengers. The women objected to lie on the ground, for fear of snakes for they had not all three chests at their disposal. At last, as sleep became more urgent, they sunk minor differences, and by and bye we were all at peace. During the night a few cows and a drove of hogs paid us a visit, which caused some little commotion, from the dangerous exposure of the provision baskets, &c. This new annoyance was tided over also ; and in the morning—the dew having fallen heavily during the night, our sheltering quilt was saturated with moisture.

“ Well, well,” thought we, “ there are fortunes in wayfaring as well as in war, and they who cannot manifest a little fortitude in the midst of the evil should not set out.”

By sun-up we were again on board the steamer, and, without anything peculiar happening, landed at Burlington, Desmoins County, on the Iowa shore, twenty-two miles above the rapids.

We had now got as far as 41 deg. N. latitude, as far north as I thought would be agreeable in the winters, and here I left my wife in company with Mrs. Wamsley, who still kept with us (although at St. Louis she had an offer of employment as a school-mistress in Tennessee), and set out, with my faithful John Adams in company, in search of “ a location.” This was about the middle of May, and although it was only the beginning of summer, it seemed as if a summer had already passed over us that year, we had had such a long succession of good weather.

The night before we started, our little party were busily engaged poring over the maps of Iowa and Illinois. Our landlord strongly recommended us to turn our attention to Iowa. “ I tell ye what, strangers,” said he, “ there aint no State in all this western country can begin to compare with Iowa for nat’ral advantages, for either wood, water, or prairie, not by a long chalk. Illinoy’s little better than a blamed ma’sh from en’ to en.’ Fever and ague by gauly’s all the go for more’n one half of the year, and it takes t’other half to recruit and do up the chores. [3] Iowa’s the word, I say. You’ll find here the neatest timber, either for lumber or rails, in all creation. As for the water, there aint no describing the beauty and number of rivers and cricks, and you’ll hardly see a slough in a day’s travel. Talk of land ! why now, strangers, it’s a’most too good to be named on the same day with your Illinoy, Indiana, and Wisconsin flats, and if it wa’nt what I say you wouldn’t ketch me hyar now, I tell you. See hyar, wife, hand me down Plumbe’s book. Listen, men, what this says about the State.”

He then read—“ It is an ill wind that blows nobody good. The recent troubles in Canada induced many of the peaceably inclined and intelligent residents of the provinces to look out for a spot where they could enjoy life with less interruption. Accordingly, an association has been formed, styled the Mississippi Emigration Company, said to contain upwards of fifty thousand members. They appointed a delegation to visit Iowa, and the Toronto (Upper Canada) *Mirror* thus refers to the subject :—

“ ‘ The Iowa Delegation went on a special mission to the ‘ Far West,’ and have returned after the accomplishment of the design for which they had been sent. They found a country on the west side of the Mississippi which, for beauty and fertility,

surpassed all their expectations ; a country consisting chiefly of high *rolling prairie*, which implies an elevated country with an undulating surface, easily cultivated ; a country abounding with navigable rivers, running far into the interior, and interspersed with numbers of tributaries, affording abundance of mill power—while in almost every part of the country there existed an abundance of the finest springs of the purest water ; a country which not only from its natural features might at once be inferred to be salubrious, but which the *uniform testimony of the settlers*, from the ‘ Great River’ to the remote interior, pronounced to be so ; a country, the character of whose inhabitants, so far from being *licentious, poor, and miserable*, would bear a comparison with, and would stand higher in the scale of intelligence and morals than would the same class in Upper Canada. The Eastern and Middle States, from which the population of Iowa chiefly came, have never produced a race of young men that will be poor and miserable in a country presenting every incitement to sobriety, to industry, and to enterprise, and which affords a much larger reward to the cultivator of the soil than any of the older States or the Canadas.’ ”

Notwithstanding all this I had made up my mind not to settle west of the Mississippi.

Those who have read Dickens’ “ American Notes,” will doubtless remember what that great sketcher, whose genius appears to have stayed at home at Cockaigne, when he set out on his travels, has said of the Mississippi. The passage is short, but characteristic of a certain class of travellers.

“ But what words shall describe the Mississippi, great father of rivers, who (praise be to Heaven) has no young children like him. An enormous ditch, sometimes two or three miles wide, running liquid mud, six miles an hour its strong and frothing current choked and obstructed everywhere by huge logs and whole forest trees ; now twining themselves together in great rafts, from the interstices of which a sedgy lazy foam works up to float upon the water’s top ; now rolling past like monstrous bodies, their tangled roots showing like matted hair; now glancing singly by like giant leeches ; and now writhing round and round in the vortex of some small whirlpool, like wounded snakes. The banks low, the trees dwarfish, the marshes swarming with frogs, the wretched cabins few and far between, their inmates hollow cheeked, and pale, the weather very hot, mosquitoes penetrating into every crack and crevice of the boat, mud and slime everywhere, and on everything ; nothing pleasant in its aspect but the harmless lightning which flickers every night upon the dark horizon.

“ For two days we toiled up this foul stream, striking constantly against the floating timber, or stopping to avoid those more dangerous obstacles the snags or sawyers, which are the hidden trunks of trees that have their roots below the tide. When the nights are very dark, the look-out stationed in the head of the boat knows by the ripple of the water if any great impediment is near at hand, and rings a bell beside him, which is the signal for the engine to be stopped ; but always in the night this bell has work to do, and after every ring there comes a blow which renders it no easy matter to remain in bed.

“ We drank the muddy water of this river while we were upon it. It is considered wholesome by the natives, and is something more opaque than gruel. I have seen water like it at the filter shops, but nowhere else.”

When a dandy sets out on his travels, a man of such importance generally takes considerable baggage. With a portentous trunk or two surfeited with creature com-

forts, a writing-case with the due supply, and a head crammed with bright ideas, all having a homeward tendency, he rushes forth like a jolly tar on shore, to “take possession of all lubberland.” Some unthinking and outlandish object pushes hard on his attention. He is offended, in fact disgusted—he never, no he NEVER saw the like before. ’Tis most shocking—intolerable. He is determined the world shall know of it—that those interested in the matter shall smart. Every one else smiles at the man’s afflictions, but he is not going to be “put down” in that way. If his *compagnons du voyage* will not sympathize with him, he shall write of it, and let an indignant world know the true state of affairs. So once upon a time Charles Dickens paid a visit to the “Great Mississippi,” deemed by everybody the most extraordinary river in the world, as also the most important and grand. What everybody else believed, Boz would not, not he. As another traveller in a hurricane on the greatest ocean in the world cried out to his shipmates, “By the powers do ye call *this* the Pacific?” so our western traveller would show a noble independence of mind by tabling his protest against the greatness of the greatest river. The vast spring floods were at the time sweeping down from the Ozark and Rocky Mountains. The snows of the Chippawau were no doubt pure enough, but there were vast and fertile savannahs to traverse before the Missouri debouched into the Mississippi, twenty miles above St. Louis. If the plain had been a desert of bare rocks and barren sands, there is no doubt the flood would have been clear enough of every unsightly object. He who for the first time sails up the Thames, will, to be sure, encounter many a dead dog and cat—

“With mair o’ horrible and awfu’,
Which even to name would be unlawfu’.”

Well, I suppose, a man of ordinary shrewdness would say “these are the products of the upper country. They do a good deal in the dog and cat line up there, as well as other things.” When, therefore, Boz saw the great trunks of trees and whole trees tossing about in the tumultuous waters, if common sense had been anywhere within call, it might have suggested the idea in such an inventive head. “These, with the mud too, showed the character of the upper country—they were so many messages sent down from the plains of the Platte, the Yellowstone, the Kansas, the Kaskaskia, the Illinois, the Iowa, and hundreds of others, to proclaim to the great human family, whose vast tide was surging upon the central river, that there were fields and forests far away to the north and west, as fertile as any, and here are the proofs!” But, no;—in his bilious attack upon the river, the very foam, the mosquitoes, the temperature, the mud and slime, must be duly catalogued to swell the peck of troubles.

After all he swallows the camel; for he “drank of the muddy waters of the river,” which the *natives* assured him was wholesome enough. This statement of the “natives” must have been very “astonishing,” indeed, to the fretful patient. The “oldest inhabitant,” that very credible informant, must have been certainly present to have made the assurance go down before the water.

I will return to this witty novelist on the subject of the United States. Meantime I will say in summary:—

The Mississippi possesses all the attributes of a great and noble stream. Receiving contributions from such a variety of large and far-reaching branches, it is not to be wondered at that its waters are not of the most limpid description. Flowing through a champaign country, unequalled in point of beauty and fertility in the universe—through forests dusk with the lapse of centuries, and which yet resound with the yell of the aboriginal Indian;—under every variety of climate, from the snows and wild

rice lakes of the north, it traverses the whole of the temperate zone, till it heaves forth its amazing volume of waters at the line. The primeval forest, the fairy islet, the hoar and castellated crag, the silent prairie, the mysterious sepulchral mounds of a shadowy race long since passed away, the dwellings and works of civilization, the advancing wave of an energetic people, destined to go forth from the first meridian and encompass the world ;—these are features worthy of a river such as the Mississippi. And while its wild luxuriance remains unchecked and unmodified by the hand of man, it is not strange that its occasionally erratic waters should, under a burning sun, send forth pestilential exhalations, destructive, in some instances, to life itself. Such evils will disappear before the improvements of the white man. His industry will behold one of its rewards in the subjection of those undoubted hindrances to many, who, these things apart, would rejoice to fill up a region which offers so many decided advantages to themselves and their offspring.

I should have at once determined to settle down on the river, had it not been that on this and on all the western streams, fever and ague more or less prevail, while at a distance of three or four miles, that disease is comparatively less common.

I allowed myself a week to take a survey of the neighbouring counties of Henderson, Warren, Macdonough, Fulton, and Knox. These all lie between the Mississippi and Spoon river, a tributary of the Illinois.

On a Saturday morning we set out on this exploring expedition. Two lads ferried us over the river in a skiff, which was nothing more than a square-bottomed box narrowing to a point in front. We preferred this to a “ Dug out,” (that is, a log hollowed out in the manner of a canoe) which was placed at our service. The river at this place was about a mile and a half wide, and quite clear and sparkling, which is the general character of the stream above its confluence with the Missouri, that huge and turbulent rival.

“ Now, then, Johnny Adams, here we are upon free American soil. I suppose we may settle it in our minds that here we are to make our home ; and since it is so, let us make ourselves as much at home as possible. The people appear to be friendly ; let us show the same disposition.”

Johnny was little more than seventeen years of age, fair-haired, and stoutly made, though not tall. A chubby face, blunt manners, and a cheerful disposition, added to a rather dry style of address, made up a whole which could not fail to please.

Away we set eastward through the woods that fringe the Mississippi, with light hearts and vigorous limbs. What a fresh and invigorating coolness pervades these gorgeous forest scenes. Hush ! what singular noise is that coming from the pond, resembling the clang of ten thousand tiny bells ? Why, it is only the frogs holding holiday. What large bird is that, majestically sailing round and round ? 'Tis the great turkey buzzard, scrutinizing the earth below, in search of the carcass of some dead animal ; a useful bird is he in such a climate as this—injure him not ! Our old familiar friends, the trees common to old Scotland, are strangers here. We look around to try if we can discover among the many sylvan lords any straggling ash, beech, birch, or even fir. We look in vain. That lofty and umbrageous tree, whose upper branches have the appearance of the bark being stripped off, and of being bleached white in the hot sun, is the sycamore, delighting in the cool moist places of the forest, that stately tree with the dark corrugated and Herculean trunk, is the black walnut ; that other with a wooden trough at its foot, the sugar maple. Then there are the black, white, and red,

oaks, and jack and scrub oaks ; the white, red, and slippery elms, hackberry, buck-eye, the towering cotton-wood tree, and smooth and shell bark hiccory, mulberry, peccan, and honey locust, bass wood, or Linden, butternut, and an occasional cedar. Here we behold grape vines hanging in festoons from the lofty trees, wild plums, crab-apples, cherries, goose-berries, black mulberry, hiccory, hazle, and walnuts ; with wild strawberries and blackberries in great profusion. Multitudes of parasitical plants, but no woodbine or ivy. Our

“ Wee modest crimson-tipped flower,”

the daisy, is unknown here—so is its steady companion, the buttercup ; but then there are thousands of other floral beauties strewn about the forest and woodland, mostly unknown, but all beautiful. How the thoughts of home waft across the mind ! The voyage and its many and moving incidents look like a strange dream : but here, in the depths of the unsubdued wilderness, surely is reality. The brown squirrel scampers up the tree, looking at us over his shoulder as he goes, and chattering among the branches—the wood-pecker taps upon the decayed limb—the blue-bird flits from tree to tree—the dew trickles—the frogs in the distant ponds hold loud concert—the cow-bell tinkles on the neck of its wearer ;—all these sights and sounds break in agreeably upon the fearful silence, but still there is the feeling of solitude and loneliness gushing into the heart from every object around. Hope and freedom make the heart bound nevertheless. Everything around has a pleasing aspect—everything invites to rest and security. To be lord of one of these forest domains, would be no difficult matter—a, moderately light purse could command the privilege ;

“ And I thought, if there’s peace to be found in the world,
The heart that is humble might hope for it here.”

By and by the forest began to thin, and we emerged upon the “ Prairie.” We ascended arising ground to the right, to take a survey of this celebrated feature of the western landscape. Before us, far far to the east, lay one vast plain of verdure and flowers, without house or home, or anything to break in upon the uniformity of the scene, except the shadow of a passing cloud. To the right and left long points of timber, like capes and headlands, stretched in the blue distance—the light breeze of the morning brushing along the young grass and blue and pink flowers—the strong sunlight pouring down every where—and the singular silence which pervaded the scene—produced a striking effect upon the mind. My feelings, indeed, were of the most elated and enraptured description. I had heard of Eden and Elysium. Was it possible that their beauties could surpass these ? The light breeze wafted perfumes—the air was balmy and invigorating—the resplendent hues of myriads of flowers spread effulgence far and wide—the shadows chased each other across the plain—the butter-fly flaunted—the bee hummed—and it would have required but a slight effort of the imagination to have supposed ourselves looking upon a world fresh from the hands of its Maker, before sin had cast its withering blight to mar the surpassing beauty of the glorious creation of God.

This prairie extended eastward for about twelve miles. We then entered upon a strip of woodland, through which a small river or creek ran. We suffered from thirst in crossing the prairie, and drank heartily of the waters of the brook. We called at a cabin in the timber, to rest, and make inquiries. The goodman of the house was busy before the door making shingles (wooden substitutes for slate). “ Good morning, gentlemen, how do you do ?—have you come fur this morning ?” “ Only from Burlington.”

“Wal, I guess that’s pretty considerable of a walk this warm weather ; please to walk into the house.” He accompanied us in-doors, set chairs for us, and then turning to the good woman, who was spinning wool—“Wife, I calc’late it’s pretty well on for noon ; these gentlemen came all the way from Burlington this morning, an’ I reckon they’d *ought* to have some dinner.” The wife immediately set about preparations for the noon-day meal. The landlord then took a chair, set it about a foot and a-half distant from the log wall, seated himself, then leaning the back against the wall, planted his feet upon the front rails, and thus established himself for a chat. A boy of thirteen or so, was seated in one corner shelling Indian corn—that is, stripping it off the cob or stalk that runs through the centre of the ear. Two girls sat near their mother’s wheel, knittings while one or two of the more juvenile members clung by their father’s chair, casting sundry inquiring glances at us from under their eyebrows. A buffalo robe [4] hung upon a peg near the door. A couple of rifles, with powder-horns to match, rested upon pegs in the vicinity of the fire, to keep them in good condition. A badger’s skin with the claws on was nailed upon the door. A tame squirrel scampered about the floor, and upon every one ; and a huge cat reposed in undisturbed possession of the bed. The furniture was plain and substantial, and everything indicated comfort and abundance.

“How fur may you be going this way ?” began the back-woodsman, catching at a chip, and beginning to whittle with his knife.

“We are immigrants, who have lately come up the river, and are out in search of a place to settle in.”

“I want to know ! [5] well I can tell you, you could not have come to a better part of the state than this, an’ if I can be of any service to you, I’ll be happy to serve you — you’ve only to say the word.”

“We are certainly obliged to you, Sir, but we have no intentions of settling for a little, till we have seen some more of the country. How long have you been settled in these parts ?”

“Wal, about six years next fall.”

“Where did you reside before you came here, may I ask ?”

“Wal I guess I came from Ohio.”

“Do you find this to be a better country than that ?”

“Yes, *Sir*, no two ways about that. In Ohio a feller has to fight hard for every inch o’ ground he gets, and when the ground is once cleared off, it can’t begin to compare with this soil, all clear and slick to your hand.”

“Perhaps, Sir, you may think us rather inquisitive?”

“Why, no, strangers ; it’s just what I did myself when I first came out. I’m happy to see you ; and, if you aint pa’ticular minding about going further to-day, I’d be glad to have you stay with us over Sunday. After dinner, you can have a look at my little improvements.’

We thanked him for his kind offer ; but, as we had promised to our people to be back in a week, we wished to make the most of our time, and get over, at least, other twelve miles before dark. Since he seemed willing to be communicative, we requested him to give us a short account of his removal to this State, and progress since he came. He gave us the following statement :—

“ My wife and I are natives of Old Connecticut. We set out for the State of Ohio twenty years ago. We bought a small farm there, wrought hard, and got along pretty smart. The young folks began to increase upon our hands mighty fast, and as many of our neighbours were inclined to try the West—cleared land could be had so cheap for their children—we took the notion we would come out too. I bought a section [6] of land here ; more’n I had ought to bought at once. Indeed, this was the foolishest thing ever I did, for it left me without means to carry on business for many a day. I built this log-cabin when I came, and I haint been able till within the last year to get up a decent house for my old woman and the young uns. I have now got one nearly finished, all to a couple of dozen of shingles, and we expect to move in next week. I’ve got two yoke of oxen, and a span of horses, half-a-dozen cows, forty sheep, and I don’t know how many hogs. Besides I have this year about 100 acres under crop, and I guess now we’ll git along after a fashion.”

Dinner was announced. We had Indian corn bread and wheaten bread, smoked ham, and abundance of fresh eggs, apple, pumpkin, and peach sauce, pickled cucumbers ; parched wheat, ground, served for coffee, as the stock was done, and none nearer than Burlington. Every thing was both excellent and abundant, and we ate with a good appetite. Our kind host would accept of no remuneration for his hospitality. He said he would be glad to see us on our return ; and still more so, if we should, after we had looked round, think of settling near him. The kindness of Lyman Baldwin neither of us will soon forget. With many good wishes, we bade this unostentatious but generous family adieu.

[1] Pronounced *Picky-oon*—value 6¼ cents., or 3⅛ d.

[2] The “ guard” is a projecting part of the deck, running forward from the paddle-boxes, narrowing towards the vessel’s head.

[3] *Chores*—Little odd jobs of household or farming economy, such as may be performed in odds and ends of time.

[4] The dried hide with the hair on.

[5] This is a common exclamation of surprise with the New Englanders.

[6] A section is a square mile, or 640 acres.

The emigrant’s guide to the western states of America, or, Backwoods and prairies (1852)

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