

REMINISCENCES OF OTTUMWA BEFORE IT WAS POLISHED—THE SECOND OF A SERIES OF ARTICLES DEALING WITH THE OTTUMWA OF EARLY DAYS

BY W. H. CALDWELL

The Courier today publishes the second of the series of articles by W. H. Caldwell, a former Courier publisher and pioneer citizen, who is now assistant state printer of Kansas.

Mr. Caldwell sends the following correction of a statement that appeared in the first letter:

Apology—I am corrected by my friend Samuel Harper in the statement that Teeney Aldridge married Phil Kaiser—that she did marry Jake Miller. That's so. Don't know how such a mistake could have been made by me.

Mr. Caldwell's second letter follows:

Don't shoot the Linotypist! The wonder to me is that he and the man or woman proofreader, who never get credit for the immortal work they do in making something out of nothing, I say the wonder to me is that they have so cleverly deciphered my hieroglyphics. I have received the copies of the Courier in which you have so kindly printed the installment of reminiscences, and take off my hat to the foreproofers for the clean reproduction; but I am not going to stand for the other fellows. You made me give devout old man Graves a Dutch front name, Herman, whereas it should be Heman. Don't I know? Well, if you had heard us band play on that name as often as I hear him, you'd never spell it Herman, and then, again, look out for Swabbe; you attached a y to the tail of his name that will cause him to sound G in the lower staff! Which reminds me of an itinerant actor who sang a topical song one evening in Taylor's opera house (the third floor of the Doc Taylor building), and drawled out, "Swab-scouse, grease your bow," to the tune that Carl was trying to follow him with that laid C up with hysterics.

I have a time down here trying to get the name of one of my daughters spelled right in the papers—the Heman and his right bower, the proofreader, evidently think I don't know how to spell it and invariably insert a letter wrongfully. Now, I shall try to be careful in writing names, for I know that that part of any manuscript is the most exasperating to the publisher, and makes it unintelligible.

Eagerly looking over the paper, I discover but very few names among the advertisers whom I remember—There's Wm. Cooper—I bought furniture from him. Wonder if he's as gray as I am. Then there appears the Martin furniture ad. Wonder if that's the same Martin that used to grind paint for the Baptist Worcester? Which also reminds me that Worcester brought a couple of nieces from England to Ottumwa, who also put in their spare hours in the recreation of grinding paint—their name was Blowers—one of the girls married Dave Whitehurst; the other one, Fannie, until quite recently, conducted the select and most prosperous boarding house here in Topeka. She married Mr. Patten, the superintendent of our city railway system. She died a short time ago. Whitehurst moved to Topeka and Mrs. W.'s sister came to Ottumwa. I do not know where they are now.

Speaking of Martin brings up a train of memories, and Macbeth like, I am stupefied watching their forms glide before me. There was Ed Martin, Doc Lewis, Alvin and John Lewis, Moses Walker, Lote and Sol Gray, Bill Nichols—the latter I heard studied under old Doc Caster in the art of rubbing life into the lame, the halt, the blind, etc., and right here I want to say that Bill Nichols and his wife were the kindest, most considerate neighbors we ever had, and I certainly wish him and her high seats in the kingdom to come.

Talking about Doc Caster reminds me that one of the most prosperous citizens of Topeka married his daughter. This party has been for years and is now the leading confectioner in the Kaw valley, and the name of M. F. Rigby is known everywhere. Rigby learned the candy business with Ben Boulton, St. Albans. "Oh, don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt!" Ugh huh—I can right now hear Ben singing that beautiful ballad in the clear, sweet voice he had. Oh, boys, don't you remember old Ben's bakery, though, and especially that cracker brake that got so many of us used to ride—just exactly like riding a rail, but we enjoyed it because Ben was such a good boy with us, but strictly business. Say, Ben, do you remember the turkey dinner we had in the old bake shop—roasted and cooked in the bakery oven—umm—I can taste it yet.

along, and never look around to see if anybody saw him tumble. The last I knew of Tom, he was driving bus for Con Lewis. He came and did wear the most comfortable language.

Old "Tay" Sinnamon! His name was Thomas, but being a great big, jolly, soulful Irishman, always pronounced his name as Tay. He was a character—always had some enterprise on hand, and did build quite a stunner of a house for a hotel that I believe Pete Ballgall afterward remodeled. Old Tom, or Tay, as he sounded the first letter of his given name, was very fond of ha-be-joyful, and frequently dabbled with the nectar; when he got so full he paraded the street bawling at the top of his voice, "I'm Tay Sinnamon and I've got more money than a mule can pack, be gawd!" One day about five years ago I was summoned to serve as a jurymen in the district court here. As I took my place in the box and was answering the usual questions, I noticed a jurymen eyeing me very closely and inquiringly, and he kept it up so assiduously that it got to be embarrassing. When court adjourned for the noon hour this person came up and exclaimed right in my face, "I'm Tay Sinnamon and I've got more money than—" he didn't get any further before I had him clinched and we fell into each other's arms—it was old Bill George, chief engineer of old Tay Sinnamon's horse-power ferry boat way back before de wa."

And Bill had served in the same regiment, the 26th Iowa, I as a private in Bill Mahon's Company E, and George as a private in Bill Clifton's Company H, same regiment of which C. W. Kirtledge was colonel and A. H. Hamilton major; Stephen K. Mahon (brother of both Bill and Sam), adjutant. If any of these people are alive I know that they will forgive me for the provincial manner in which I handle their first or given names. When we were all living in Ottumwa the politeness of society address had not inoculated us, and I have never been vaccinated with that virus. It would seem almost sacrilegious to say Mr. Samuel Mahon—it was Sam. And to try to enunciate Mr. Joseph Merrill would almost choke me—it was Joe then and shall be to the end of my time; and I know that all those whose names I have and shall use in this manner will welcome me on high. The name Merrill brings up a hilarious episode in my army life. Stevens Merrill, brother of Joe, was the quartermaster of our regiment. As sergeant-major of the regiment I was quartered with Stephen Mahon, its adjutant. One day Mahon told me to go to Merrill and get some stationery. Merrill, in pure fun, demanded that I bring him a written requisition. I went back and told Mahon, who became somewhat nettled, sat down and wrote out a requisition, signing his name to it. Merrill demanded that it be signed by the commanding officer of the regiment, who, at that juncture, happened to be Lieut.-Col. E. M. Drake (afterward governor of Iowa) not very well liked by Mahon. This demand was refused and I was ordered back with that refusal, and so demand and refusal were banded back and forth until my feet were sore, then it became somewhat personal between the two—alliant officers and resulted in a challenge to duel. I think coming from Mahon, it had become so serious that I declined to accept any further and did my best to mollify Mahon, but his Irish was up and nothing would appease him until Lieut. Col. Kirtledge (his brother-in-law) happened in camp and at once quelled the turbulence. It was all a joke on the part of Merrill and myself that we both recognized, for it was a long time before Mahon would even speak to Merrill. I felt it the more keenly because Steve Mahon and I were always chums before the war and we bunked together in the regimental headquarters until the disastrous defeat of our army at Moro Bottom, in which engagement Mahon, with many others (Major Augustus H. Hamilton among them) were compelled to surrender, and were made prisoners of war. I never saw either of the Stevens afterward that I now remember. Merrill was a practical joke-master, and what he couldn't confide up for hilarity, no one need try. I liked both men and now yield a sigh in their memory. Steve Mahon was pretty slick on a flute himself and frequently went out on serenading occasions.

In letting my pencil run along at random, I find that I do not close up my gaps. In the proper place I should have remarked that Bill George and I met the first time that they met since we were mustered out of service in September, 1865. He is a prosperous farmer out about twelve miles from Topeka. He recognized me, after hearing my name, but I would never have recognized him in his abundant gray hair and much weathered countenance, only when he got out that boast of old Tay's his voice and it fetched me to.

DR. BULL'S COUGH SYRUP. The People's Remedy for Coughs, Colds, Whooping Cough, Bronchitis, Grippe, Croup, Hoarseness, etc. It is safe and sure. TRIAL BOTTLE FREE. Write for it and mention this paper. Address A. C. MEYER & CO., BALTIMORE, MD.

In the previous paragraph I mentioned Major Hamilton. If there ever was a square man, old Gus was him. I hope the Lord has spared him to a good old age. If he is still alive, please ask him if he remembers the one-eighth gallon that he presented me with from that demijohn that he got from friends in Cleveland, Ohio, while we were in camp at Little Rock, and that Col. Kit got away with before I even had time to sample it. That is an interesting incident in itself, but would take too much time and space to relate.

Then there was Lieut. E. M. B. Scott. Scott and I were very close, intimate friends. One evening in Little Rock, he and I attended the theater. It was a rude affair, thrown together mostly by the soldiers after we had captured that city. The seats were of long boards set up on an incline, an aisle running between. An alarm of fire was given, and sure enough the stage soon after blazed out. The audience ran, scrambled, jumped and choked that little aisle—Scott jumped up and was about to jump down into the surging crowd that was bailed at the inward swinging door. I caught him and yelled, "for God's sake, sit down—we'll get out!" But he was frantic and did make the leap, about ten feet down right in the surging mass. Just at that moment the door gave way and Scott fell on it and went tobogganing down the stairway. When the crowd had thinned out I quietly got up and walked leisurely out. I found Scott in the street, badly shaken up, disheveled and clothing badly torn. One side of his uniform coat was torn completely off, in the tall pocket of which was a roll of \$50 worth of postage stamps that he had bought at the postoffice for the boys of his company. E, that was lost, and we never found it.

And I must turn now to the ludicrous. Gaston was the first man to brave the dawn of civilization in a tall leaver hat. He was quite a top in those days—dressed neatly and nearly always wore low cut shoes. There were no sidewalks, excepting here and there a board or two laid lengthwise over a mud-hole or swampy place, and the street crossings were provided with stones set up on end, about sixteen inches apart. One evening Gaston came out suddenly and was nearly run over by a horse-drawn wagon. He was so frightened that he fell on his face, and he was so badly hurt that he was taken to the hospital. He was so badly hurt that he was taken to the hospital. He was so badly hurt that he was taken to the hospital.

Speaking of the bits calls to mind E. W. Pettit, the first hand-made man in Ottumwa, who presented me with a fine blue hat on the occasion of my marriage in 1868. I have racked my brain to recall the name of the "Bessie Hill" who was Pettit's chief clerk. He was a very good fellow, but I do not remember his name. Then came on the "fenny" element, Frenchman tailor who cut the cloth and fitted Emperor Bonaparte, by and by all right there in Pettit's store. The first tailor that I now remember was a quiet little Jew who tailored and lived in the little frame building right across the street opposite the wonderful 3-story brick that Neville built, and which was occupied by the Courier and postoffice when I left. At Barnes was chief clerk in the postoffice—that's Major Hamilton was running the Courier and was postmaster, and among all of them I am sorry that I cannot recall the name of the chief engineer at the crank of the old Taylor cylinder that ground out the Daily Courier. Well in time there came, I think, Elmendorf, as a tailor (or was it he who owned a drug store in which Bill Koontz was high-muck-a-muck?) At any rate the tailor now comes to my mind, he just escaped from the German army. He tried to teach us youngsters to step and walk like a Dutch soldier, first touching the floor of ground on the ball of the foot, letting the heels come down noiselessly. He could do it, and always walked that way. Can you? I never became proficient at it—one reason, perhaps, I most always had stone bruises on my hoofs; then, again, it was impracticable to consume time in such exercise when most of my time was put in scratching postoriatus, to cure which my step-mother would spend hours in swabbing me and my brother Bob with red perchicope and other like unctions—I doubt if a rose by the same name as itch-cure would smell as sweet. Let's see—that's sixty years ago and "red perchicope" has its fangs in my nose yet. Oh, well, you needn't think that our family monopolized the scourge—we were simply in the general procession, and not near the head, either. It was no uncommon sight to see strings of men and boys sitting on the pretentious wharf that was built out into the river at the foot of Court street for a steamboat landing, fishing and scratching. Now, near that wharf, and on the spot where Neville built, Charley Lawrence conducted a store in a one-story frame building, for years and years—I guess up to the time that he razed the little one-story brick that was occupied by Lawyer Bronsfield—

and erected a fine 3-story brick, in which he and Wey Garner conducted a wholesale dry goods store. I used to milk Lawrence's cow when he lived on the street that Washburn's family lived on. Strange that I cannot recall the names of but very few streets—anyhow that was the street that ran up the hill upon which the Fishers lived and fronted, and over in the hollow, you remember, Chilton and Fox lived—they were stone quarrymen. Fox became bridge superintendent of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific railway. His family lived in the street just east of the present office in which I am employed. I saw him most every day up to the time he died recently.

Let me see! When I was in Ottumwa last, it was the firm of Egan, Harper & Co., I think. Tim Egan, Bill and Sam Harper. I can't remember—did they buy out Daggett or Edgerly? Speaking of Daggett—he was nominated for councilman. I tackled him at once and got his pledge to support me for city clerk, and then I got busy with enough other members to get elected. It was a surprise judgment, but a more surprised man you never saw than was Dr. Thrall, the then clerk. I had understood that he would not be a candidate, and I so told Daggett. Hardly had Daggett promised than Thrall asked him to support him. Daggett came to me and in a gentlemanly way asked me if I had so understood, or was I taking advantage of politics. I had him and Thrall go and meet Dick Warden, who said: "Mr. Daggett, Billy has not lied to you; you would not, that you told me that you would not be a candidate," to which Thrall demurred a little, saying, "didn't I say that I wouldn't run after it?" upon which Daggett turned to me and said: "I'll keep my promise to you," and he did. I was elected and served, I think, three years, and while thus serving, was elected auditor of Wapello county, serving two terms, and declined a third nomination, although Dr. Olney of Chillicothe, insisted in the convention that I should take it. Say, I just injected this personality here to recall one of the most tempestuous meetings of the city council that I can remember. I am groping in the dark now as to the occasion; but as I read the minutes, giving the vote of each separate member, one of them, don't remember who, denied that he had voted as I had him recorded, upon which Bill Littleton, who was mayor, said: "I know that the clerk has so recorded correctly." Thereupon was a talk over more or less acrimonious, which was no more than quieted, when I read Durfee voting the same way. He yelled, "You're a liar, I never voted that way!" He had not polished off the last word, because he couldn't—I grabbed the inkstand and hurled it at his head, luckily missing him, excepting to fill his mouth with ink, and ink was strewn around there promiscuous like—a streak of it being left on Littleton's front. I thought Brad (Durfee) recorded correctly. Thereupon was a talk over more or less acrimonious, which was no more than quieted, when I read Durfee voting the same way. He yelled, "You're a liar, I never voted that way!" He had not polished off the last word, because he couldn't—I grabbed the inkstand and hurled it at his head, luckily missing him, excepting to fill his mouth with ink, and ink was strewn around there promiscuous like—a streak of it being left on Littleton's front. I thought Brad (Durfee) recorded correctly. Thereupon was a talk over more or less acrimonious, which was no more than quieted, when I read Durfee voting the same way.

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