

DEMOCRATIC BANNER

PUBLISHED BY A. J. PICKENS.

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Historical Sketches--No. VII.

BY J. M. PECK.

The recent unusual rise in the "Great River"--for this is the true Aboriginal name Mississippi, (as Marquette first wrote it), furnishes occasion for some historical sketches of former floods.

While De Soto and his party were at an Indian village, on the western bank of the Rio Grande, as the Spaniards called the river, which, from its elevated position, indicates the site of Helena, in Arkansas, in March 1542, there was a rise in the river so as to cover all the surrounding country as far as the eye could reach. In the village, represented to have been on high ground, the water rose from five to six feet above the earth so as the only place of shelter was the roofs of their cabins. Both the Indians and Spaniards went in cones from house to house. It remained at this height for several days and then subsided rapidly. The historian does not inform us where their horses found footing and subsistence, of which they had about three hundred that survived the flood.

The earliest authentic account of the American Bottom being submerged is in 1724. A document is to be found in the archives of Kaskaskia, which consists of a petition to the Crown of France, in 1725, for a grant of land, in which the damage sustained the preceding year--(1725,) by the rise of the water, is mentioned. The villagers were driven to the Bluffs on the opposite side of the Kaskaskia river; their gardens and corn fields destroyed, and their buildings and property much injured. We have no evidence of its exact height, but the whole American Bottom was submerged. This was probably in June.

There was a tradition among the old French people thirty years since, that there was an extraordinary rise of the river between 1740 and 1750, but I find no written or printed account of it.

In the year 1772 another flood came, and portions of the American Bottom were again covered. Fort Chartres, in 1756, stood half a mile from the Mississippi river; in 1776, it was eighty yards. Two years after, Capt. Pittman, who surveyed the Fort in 1768, states:

"The bank of the Mississippi, next the Fort, is continually falling in, being worn away by the current, which has been turned from its course by a sand bank, now increased to a considerable island, covered with willows. Many experiments have been tried to stop this growing evil, but to no purpose. Eight years ago the river was fordable to the island; the channel is now forty feet deep."

About the year 1770, the river made further encroachments; but in 1778, when it inundated portions of the American Bottom, it swept away the land to the Fort, and undermined the wall on that side, which tumbled into the river. A large and heavily timbered island now occupies the 'sand bar' of Capt. Pittman's time, between which and the site of the Fort a slough runs.

The next period of extreme high water was in 1785, during which Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and large portions of the American Bottom were submerged. The late Gen. Edgar informed the writer that in Kaskaskia the water rose to the surface of the doornail of the house of the late Robert Morrison, Esq., but that in one place where the Court House stood a few years since, the ground was above the water. That season the inhabitants passed by means of water craft through the prairies and lakes from Cahokia to Kaskaskia. This flood destroyed all the crops, and did much damage about the French villages on the American Bottom.

There were high waters so as to overflow the low grounds, and fill the lakes and sloughs on the American bottoms, at other seasons, subsequently, but none that deserve attention in this sketch until that of 1811; which is in the memory of many of the inhabitants now living. It was in the summer preceding 'shakes' as the earthquakes were called.

This flood was in part from the annual rise of the Missouri, as were the preceding ones noticed, which is not the case with the present high water. The flood in the Missouri always occurs between the fifteenth and thirtieth of June, and is caused by the snows melting in the mountains at the heads of the Main Missouri. In some seasons the Yellow Stone, which is in a more Southern latitude, pours out a flood which reaches St. Louis about the last of May or first of June. The present rise of water in both the Missouri and Mississippi, appears to be caused by unusual rains in the North while in this latitude it has been unusually dry.

DEMOCRATIC BANNER

"UNITED WE STAND--DIVIDED WE FALL."

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The rise in 1811 spread over the low grounds of the American Bottom, and covered the cornfields attached to the French villages. The 'common field,' belonging to Ste. Genevieve, were on the bottom land adjacent to the river, much of which has since been swept away, and the steamboat run now over the same spot. The water entirely submerged the field and nearly covered the growing corn. Father Maxwell, the priest, as some of the inhabitants of Ste. Genevieve narrated the story more than thirty years since, was waited on by the panic-stricken inhabitants to pray away the water. He gave no encouragement at first, until he perceived the water at a stand, when he proposed to the corn growers to drive off the waters by saying masses, for a share of all the corn they raised. The bargain was struck, the masses were said, and to the faith an astonishment of the owners, the waters suddenly retired from their fields. The ground was soon dry, the corn looked green, and priest shared in the luxuriant crop. The American settlers were such heretics as to think the waters would have subsided, and the corn have grown without the masses of Pere Maxwell, who could 'play' all sorts of 'tricks' and 'turn up a trump' for himself.

That season proved a very sickly one throughout the country.

In 1824, which was an unusually rainy season, from April to the last of June, the river overflowed its banks opposite St. Louis, and arose in the lower room in the old store at the foot of Oak street, (then kept by Mr. John Shackford,) about five feet. It overflowed all the low grounds about Illinois-town. The next rise was of the same height, in 1826. Many of the citizens of St. Louis will recollect when the East bank of the river opposite Oak street was where the Island now is, which was farther up the river and nearer the St. Louis shore. There was a village of some twenty small houses at and about where the dike joins the Island, and a ferry of the French fashion, (two canoes with a light platform over them,) crossed the village to the foot of Oak street. Let any one now look from that street, across the river, and he will see it some yards above the dike. At least one-third of the width of the river on the Eastern side has been swept away since 1820. It is the general law of the Missouri and the Mississippi, that the more confined is the water, the deeper will it excavate its own channel and the less danger is there of its overflowing the adjacent bottoms. And as the banks are widened, and bars form in the channel and in the time of flood, the surface water is raised in proportion and the banks are overflowed. The great flood of 1844, is so recent that no notice of it is necessary in this article.

Good Joke on a widower.

A correspondent at Holly Springs, Mississippi, tells the following, and vouches for its truth. It is the best joke we have heard of lately:

It appears that a widower in that town, of a somewhat gallant disposition, had been accustomed to visit the residence of widow M---, whether to see the amiable widow herself, or her lovely daughters, our informant did not know. One evening he found the family party hard at work on some garments of cloth. The girls were sewing, and the widow was pressing the seams. The widower "hung up his hat," as usual, and took his seat by the fire; just at this moment it happened that the widow had done with the pressing iron, (vulgo, tailor's goose.) She set it down on the hearth, and called to her negro man in a loud voice--"Jake! Jake! come and take out this goose."

The widower started up with astonishment, not knowing what to make of this abrupt order. "Jake! do you hear me?" again exclaimed the widow.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. M.," said the widower, with visible agitation, "but pray, don't call Jake--if you wish me to leave your house, I will go at once, and without the interference of servants."

The ladies roared with laughter, and it took some moments to explain to the chagrined widower his mistake. He has not been known to visit the widow M., since that memorable evening.

EXTRAORDINARY ESCAPE.--We find in the last Abingdon Virginian the following account of one of the most remarkable escapes probably on record. It was most miraculous:

The children of Mr. George Hickox, a citizen of Scott county, were playing together in a field, and near the mouth of a fathomless sink hole. In their gambols, one of them, about eight or ten years of age, pushed his little brother about four years old headlong over the edge and down into the deep dark pit below. It was some time after the child was missed, before any

certain information could be drawn from the other as to what had become of him; and it was only threats of severe punishment that finally overcame the tears of, and exorted from the boy who did the deed, confession of what happened. An effort was made immediately to ascertain the situation of the little fellow, & afford him relief if he was not beyond its power. Ropes were tied together, with a stone attached to one end, and an attempt was made to fathom the depth beneath; but more than sixty feet of rope were employed in vain; no bottom could be reached. A lighted candle was then let down, but its light gave no hopeful indication, except that the pit was free from damp or impure air, as far down as the candle descended. Night came on, and all further efforts had to be for the time abandoned. On the next day, further trials were made of the pit, but with no better success. In despair, the frantic parents were about to give up all hopes of recovery or relieving their little innocent, and preparations were being made to close up the mouth of the pit, to prevent a like occurrence in the future, when it was suggested that another and a final effort should be made by letting some individual down by ropes to examine the nature of the abyss and ascertain if there was any encouragement for further efforts to be found below. A brother of the lost child undertook the fearful task. Cords were fastened around his waist and limbs, and one to his wrist by which he might indicate to those above, his wishes either to descend or to be drawn up. He was lowered, until having gone to the depth of about fifty feet, he looked below him, and there shone through the thick darkness two glistening eyes intently looking upward. In another moment he was standing on a shelf or angle in the shaft, with the child clasped to his bosom. He fastened the little fellow to his own body, and bidding him take the rope firmly in his hands, the signal was given to draw up. The child hung convulsively to the rope, and in a few minutes they rose within view of the hundred anxious spectators, who had assembled to witness the result, and when the first glimpse of the little fellow alive caught their eager gaze, screams and shouts of joy from the excited multitude filled the air, and big tears of sympathy started from the eyes of every beholder. After the first paroxysms of delight had subsided, the child was examined to see if it had sustained any injury, and, extraordinary to tell, with the exception of a little bruise on the back of its head, it was perfectly sound and unharmed. The only complaint it made was that it was hungry, being nearly twenty-seven hours under the ground. To inquiries made of it, it replied that it saw a light and heard it thunder. From the nature of the pit it appeared that the little fellow had fallen a perpendicular distance of 40 feet, upon a slope or bend in the shaft, and from that place had slid down 20 feet further to the spot where he was found, leaning against a sort of pillar or wall, gazing upward. How he escaped instant destruction is beyond all account.

MATRIMONY MADE EASY.

The editor of the Portland Transcript, who must be a bachelor, from the way he talks, makes the following suggestions relative to the united state of matrimony:

GETTING MARRIED.--This very interesting event in a woman's life must be very trying to the nerves of some of our delicate young ladies! No doubt your buxom widow, who has buried her third husband, thinks it a very trifling affair, but she has lost the freshness of her feelings, and is not to be spoken of in the same breath with a blooming maiden. As the result of much philosophical investigation, (for like Washington Irving, we have "speculated much about matrimony," but never experimented,) we incline to the opinion that a person can experience the sensation of getting married but once! However this may be, we are glad to be able to state to those who have serious thoughts of committing matrimony, that it is in our power to give them a valuable hint as to the best mode of getting through the ceremony. We have heard of getting married by steam and telegraph, but we have now to propose a most original plan, which may be called marriage made easy. We recently overheard two young ladies talking on this subject. One said she was sure she would faint, but the other said when she got married she intended to take chloroform! This is decidedly better than the dashful man, who would slide into matrimony by degrees. A handkerchief applied to the nose at the moment passed in a blissful dream, and you awake in the promised land! Getting married by chloroform will undoubtedly become very popular with sentimental young ladies.

Nothing humbler than ambition when it is about to climb.

A CURIOUS HISTORICAL FACT.

Some hundred years ago a number of the Professors of the Edinburgh University, attempted to publish a work which should be a perfect specimen of typographical accuracy. Every precaution was taken to secure the desired result. Six experienced proofreaders were employed, who devoted hours to the reading of each page, and after it was thought to be perfect, it was pasted up in the hall of the University, with a notification that a reward of £50 would be paid to any person who could discover an error. Each page was suffered to remain two weeks in the place where it had been pasted, before the work was printed, and the Professors thought that they had attained the object for which they had been striving. When the work was issued, it was discovered that several errors had been committed--one of which was in the first line of the first page. If a case of this kind should occur after all the precautions which have been used, after full and ample time had been given for a correct and thorough reading, and that by daylight, carpers at errors in morning newspapers should have some little excuse for those compelled to read proofs at two or three o'clock in the morning, and then in a hurry in order not to miss the mails.

SAN FRANCISCO.

We conversed yesterday with a gentleman who left San Francisco on the 15th of last month, eleven days after the devastating fire of the 4th. Already there were nearly five hundred new tenements in various stages of erection, many of them so far completed as to be occupied. This rapidity may be accounted for by the fact of a great quantity of building materials being for sale, ready framed and quickly put together, and the presence of a great number of mechanics. [Nat. Int.]

A PUZZLED PROFESSOR.--In a class in college there was a member noted for his waggery. One day the Professor of Logic was endeavoring to substantiate that a thing remains the same, notwithstanding a substitution in some of its parts. Our wag, who had been exercising the Yankee art of whittling, at length held up his jack knife inquiring:

"Suppose I should lose the blade of my knife, and should get another made and inserted in its place--would it be the same knife it was before?"

"To be sure," replied the Professor.

"Well, then," the wag continued, suppose I should then lose the handle, and get another, would it be the same still?"

"Of course!" the Professor again replied.

"But if somebody should find the old blade and the old handle, and should put them together, what knife would that be?"

We never heard the Professor's answer.

Sensible Motto.--There is an Italian phrase which, translated, is--"Do everything, and say nothing." It is worthy of being remembered. How many open themselves to ridicule by prating of schemes ultimately unsuccessful! How many cut their own throats with their own tongues! sufficient time is afforded to cackle after the egg is laid.

VALUABLE INFORMATION.--About 2 o'clock on a December night, when the thermometer stood in the neighborhood of zero, a party of wags halted a farm-house in a very boisterous manner. The farmer sprang out of his warm bed, drew on a few articles of clothing, and ran out to see what was wanted, when the following dialogue occurred:

"Have you any hay, M--?"

"Plenty of it, sir."

"Have you plenty of corn?"

"Yes."

"Plenty of meat and breadstuff?"

"Yes."

"Well we are very glad to hear it, for they are very useful in a family!"

The party then drove off, leaving the farmer with his reflections.

"Lizzie," said a little curly headed boy of some five summers, "Isn't Bill Stiner a waster?"

"Why, John?"

"Because the grammar says, positive bias, comparative buster, and I did see him give you such a positive buss." Lizzie lamented.

Among the contributions at the World's Fair from Virginia, is a piano which discourses delightful music with a violin accompaniment, played by machinery.

Our Life-Time.

When the world was created, and all creatures assembled to have their life-time appointed, the first advanced, and asked how long he would have to live.

"Thirty years," replied Nature; "will that be agreeable to thee?"

"Alas!" answered the ass, "it is a long while. Remember what a wearisome existence mine will be; from morning until night I shall have to bear heavy burdens, dragging corn-sacks to the mill, but others may eat bread, while I have no encouragement nor be refreshed with anything but blows and kicks. Give me but a portion of that time to pray!"

Nature was moved with compassion, and presented to him but eighteen years. The ass went away comforted, and the dog came forward.

"How long dost thou require to live?" asked Nature, "thirty years were too long for the ass, but will thou be contented with them?"

"Is it thy will that I should?" replied the dog. "Think how much I shall have to run about; my feet will not last for an long time; and when I have lost my voice for barking, and my teeth for biting, what shall I be fit for but to lie in a corner and growl?" Nature thought he was right, and gave him twelve years. The ape then approached.

"Thou wilt, doubtless, willingly give the thirty years," said Nature; "thou wilt not have to labor as the ass and the dog. Life will be pleasant to thee."

"Ah no!" cried he; so it may seem to others, but it will not be! Should puddings ever rain down, I shall have no spoon. I shall play merry tricks, and excite laughter by my grimaces, and then be rewarded with a sour apple. How often sorrow has concealed behind a jest! I shall not be able to endure for thirty years.

Nature was gracious, and he received but ten.

At last came man, healthy and strong, and asked the measure of his days.

"Will thirty years content thee?"

"How short a time!" exclaimed man; "when I shall have built my house, and kindled a fire on my own hearth--when the trees I shall have planted are about to bloom and bear fruit--when life will seem most desirable, I shall die. Oh, Nature! grant me a longer period!"

"Thou shalt have the eighteen years of the cat besides."

"That is not yet enough," replied man.

"Take likewise the twelve years of the dog."

"It is not yet sufficient," reiterated man; "give me more."

"I give thee, then, the ten years of the sparrow vain without craves more!"

Man departed dissatisfied.

Thus man lives seventy years. The first thirty of his life are his human years, and pass swiftly by. He is then healthy and happy--he labors cheerfully, and rejoices in his existence. The eighteen years of the ass come next, and burden upon burden is heaped upon him; he carries the corn that is to feed others, and blows and kicks are the wages of his faithful service. The 10 years of the dog follow, and he loses his teeth, and lies in a corner and growls. When these are gone, the ape's ten years form the conclusion. The man, weak and silly, becomes the sport of children.

In Iceland, if a minor commits an offence, the parents are arrested, and unless they can satisfactorily prove that they have afforded the child all necessary opportunities for instruction, the penalty of the crime falls upon them, and the child is placed under instruction.

Clerical Advice.

A young clergyman once visited old Dr. Bellamy with the inquiry, "What shall I do to supply myself with matter for sermons?" The Doctor quaintly replied, "fill up the cork--fill up the cork; and then if you tap it any where you will obtain a good stream. But if you put in but little, it will dribble, dribble, dribble, and you must tap, tap, tap, and then you will have but a small stream after all. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, and out of the abundance of the heart thus stored with Scripture truth, the hand will write and the lips speak."

INTERESTING QUESTION.--It is said that the difference between eating strawberries and cream and kissing a pretty girl, is so small that it cannot be appreciated. There is some dispute on the point however, and we are about, in a becoming spirit of self-sacrifice, to offer to institute a series of experiments in order to test the matter thoroughly. Bring on your strawberries and cream, and the other things! Hovey's Seedlings, and young ladies dressed in the Bloomer costume would be preferred in Yankee blade.

PLANK ROAD NOTICE.

On Friday, the 15th day of July instant, a meeting of the stock holders in the Louisiana and Middletown Plank Road Company will be held at the Court House in Bowling Green, for the purpose of organizing said company, and transacting such other business as may be necessary to the interests of the company. As a called meeting of the County Court will be held on that day, a full meeting is earnestly requested of all stockholders and friends to the Road.

MANY SHARE HOLDERS.

The July session of the Grand Jury of the Sons of Temperance for the State of Missouri, will be held at the city of St. Louis, on Wednesday, the 20th day of July, 1851, at 2 o'clock, at the residence of J. H. Thompson, G.