

## Reminiscences of a Wayfarer

Some of the Important Events of the Pioneer Days of Richardson County and Southeast Nebraska, as remembered by the writer, who has spent fifty-one years here.

### THE DISTURBING QUESTION IN ANTE-BELLUM DAYS.

"Whoever speaks to me in the right voice, him or her will I follow. As the waters follow the moon silently, with liquid footsteps, anywhere around the globe."

Walt Whitman, who was responsible for these head lines, was a strangely brilliant thinker, poet and philosopher of the latter half of the nineteenth century. In appearance, as I have seen him on that world famous thoroughfare in the Federal city, Pennsylvania Avenue, he looked something like a cross between an old-clothes-man and a mendicant friar, but with a face that reminded me of paintings that I had seen in the Art Galleries of Washington and New York, of some of the old unshaven and unkempt haired prophets, in those far away ages when the high priests were the mighty men in old Jerusalem. It took two hundred years for the world to understand and appreciate Shakespeare, and it may take as long for the slow plodding brains of the masses to grasp in their true grandeur and greatness, the ideas, the style, and the poetic fire that that nondescript waif of a war, the drudge of a political department, and the hanger-on of newspaper offices, in uncouth slovenliness and dirt, scribbled and cast into time, to float or sink as accident, or the ignorance of men, might determine. It was said by a very eminent authority that there has not been at any time these twenty-three hundred years, more than a half dozen people who could read and understand the works of Plato, (probably a very great exaggeration), and yet they have been published and kept extant all those weary centuries, for the benefit of that exceptional half dozen. An idea of real value once given out in the world, can never perish, nor become lost. It is for that reason, and not the capacity of an accidental few, that the works of the great Athenian have been cherished by thinking people as time and the world has grown older. Walt Whitman belongs in a class with Homer, Shakespeare, Burns and Byron, and will never die.

"Whoever speaks to me in the right voice." This presupposes the existence, or the possible existence, of a wrong one. In that peaceful summer of 1858, the red letter year in world history, when those profoundly ignorant fellows wanted to be elected members of the legislature from this part of the territory, there were two voices in clamorous antagonism in the American Republic, and both noisily claiming to be the right one. It was everywhere in the minds of the people; in congress and out of it; in the newspapers and current publications of the day, and had been made the theme of one of the most dramatic works of fiction that ever appeared on this continent. It had never been discussed with any kind of moderation or good sense. To most people who knew nothing historically of the institution of slavery, it was treated as something of very recent origin, and at deadly war with every civilizing influence in the social fabric. In the north, the opposition to the institution as it existed in the southern states, where it was maintained because of its profitable character, was one of sentiment only; but it is probable that if its votaries had been content to confine it to the limits of the states where it then was, and had not tried to spread it into the territories of the Union, out of which new states

were to be carved in the future, the deadly conflict which afterwards ensued, would not have occurred when it did, nor in the manner it did.

It is largely believed that slavery was the controlling cause of our civil war. It is not true. That it was the efficient excuse for the people of the south in rebelling against the lawful authority of the United States, there is certainly no doubt, but the real and all controlling reason lay deeper under the surface and hidden from the people at large. It was known to President Jackson as far back in our national history as 1822, and very probably before. About that time Mr. Calhoun and his followers asserted the right of a state to nullify an act, or in fact any act of congress that its people did not approve of. The doctrine of nullification was based on the idea that real governmental sovereignty resided in the states and not in the United States. That notion had come down from colonial days, and was the cause of the vigorous opposition of some of the states, notably Virginia, to the ratification of the constitution of 1787. Many of the Virginia statesmen, Jefferson among them, did not like the constitution, nor the government formed under its authority, and though that eminent citizen held many offices of trust and power in that government, vice-president and then president, for eight years, among others, he yet was opposed to the centralization of power under the provisions of that instrument, as contradistinguished from his idea of a diffusive government through the instrumentality of the states as the primal source of governmental authority. That idea or policy in its last analysis, is made manifest in the Calhoun nullification resolutions in South Carolina, in the decade of 1830, and the civil war in the decade of 1860.

President Jackson, when confronted with the doctrine of state nullification of a law of congress, thus formulated and amplified in the South Carolina resolutions, expressed the belief I have referred to, that there was an element of opposition in the country to the government itself, and that there would come a time when some specious excuse would be put forth to destroy it, and in his judgment, the question of slavery would be selected, to do duty in the treasonable enterprise.

The discussions that followed the admission of Missouri into the Union, were not conducted on lines of this kind, but were confined to those of moral sentiment, and humanitarian considerations, almost exclusively. Out on these tenantless prairies of Nebraska, a profound silence was maintained on the whole subject, and if it was mentioned at all on the hustings, or in the legislature, it was done in the most cursory manner and pretty generally in harmony with the policy of the administration in office which was known to be dominated by the slave power of the south. It was certainly not referred to by the coterie of small-bored politicians I heard haranguing the people for their votes on the occasion mentioned in my last paper. If they knew anything about the disturbing question, beyond the trouble over it in Kansas, which is doubtful, they said nothing about it, but confined their appeal for the suffrages of the people, to what they would do,

or attempt to do, in their interests in the way of local legislation, and it is very certain that very little, if anything, was said about it at the ensuing session of the legislature, but there was significant action by that body concerning it, at the next session held in the winter of 1859-60.

Intermediate these dates, three things happened of the highest significance, though their far reaching effect was not understood until some time afterwards. The first occurred on the 16th day of June of that same red letter year, 1858, at the capitol of one of the great middle western states. It was on the occasion of one of the political conventions of the country, and the one all absorbing question before it, was the aggressive policy of the south, aided by its friends in the north, to extend its yecular pet institution into the western territories. On that day there stepped from out the obscurity of the people, a tall, angular, sad faced, homely man, who spoke in a voice that has since been demonstrated to be the right one, and the people speedily came to follow it, as the waters do the moon, silently, on their errand of mystery all around the world. What he said was not, so far as words themselves are concerned, particularly original, but the application he made of the familiar illustration, that a "house divided against itself cannot stand," was so new, so apt, and so thoroughly descriptive of the situation of affairs in the country, that it became a new figure of speech and what followed, the dullest of the dull, could easily understand. That this nation must become all one thing, or all the other was the conclusion of the great man who was talking, and though such a result would follow such a premise as a syllogistic conclusion, seemed self-evident, yet the mass of men took it as a real revelation, and felt that, while they had vaguely known it all the time, it required the terse statement of the fact they had just heard, to give it form and substance, as a truth established, in their consciousness.

It was a new departure, for it told every man his own secret, and all wondered that it had never been told before. Later on in that same year, the same obscure man threw down the gantlet to the mighty leader of the opposite idea, met him in a series of joint discussions through the state, and left not a shred of the fallacy of the so called popular, or squatter sovereignty doctrine, that so much noise had been made about, for more than four years. He not only destroyed and wholly wrecked the political fortunes of his antagonist, but he also ruined the great party that for forty years had nursed and pampered the institution that had come to be the monster disturber of the peace of the American Republic, and which Mr. Lincoln said must become lawful in every part of the country, North as well as South, or cease to exist in any part of it. It took only the five following years to make that prophecy a fixed and eternal fact.

The next significant event occurred in October of the next year, 1859, out on the western coast of our continent. I refer to the murder of Senator Broderick near San Francisco, California, by Judge Terry, a violent champion of the south, and its institutions. The encounter that resulted in the death of Senator Broderick was called a duel, yclept an affair of honor, but its real name was murder. Broderick was a follower of Stephen A. Douglas, the long time acknowledged leader of the democratic party. Douglas lost caste with his party over the admission of Kansas as a state. He would not consent to making

it a state with a constitution the people had not adopted, and which they did not want. The ostracism of Douglas democrats became general and Broderick was one of them, and it was determined by the southern democrats in California, who were largely in the majority in that state, that Broderick must go, and it was agreed that a certain set of men should each in his turn, challenge Senator Broderick to mortal combat, till one of them should succeed in killing him. Broderick was not a duelist, or an expert in the use of firearms, and his opponents knew it.

Broderick was killed at the first fire, and, as showing his skill in the use of a pistol, the ball from his own pistol struck the ground, between him and his antagonist.

Thus, another firebrand was added, to the rapidly growing flames of that terrible conflagration which, at a later date, blazed upon the world with effects more disastrous, than those produced by the French Revolution, near the close of the preceding century.

It only needed the election of Abraham Lincoln in the following year, to complete the tale of fateful events, which, for nearly half a century has been inflaming the blood of those North American descendants of the Norse Kings, and of Hengist and Horsa, to the fever heat of war, and it came.

The other inflammable event, was that maniac raid of John Brown at Harper's Ferry, in Virginia, at a later date, in the same year. They hung the old crazy fanatic in Virginia, and his broken body was buried near his old home in New England with something more than the honors of war, and from that lonelygrave up among the hills of New Hampshire, there went out a battle song, more inspiring than the German Die Wacht am Rhine or the French Marseilles Hymn, and his body is still on its everlasting march to be ended only, when the point of perfect liberty and justice shall be reached in the fullness of time.

All these events affected us in the wilderness quite as much as they did the people in the older communities, and we followed them with the same absorbing attention given them anywhere. And now, after the grass has been green on those memorable fields, where the deadly conflict was fought out and ended, for forty odd years, and the vast majority of the heroes who struggled then in defense of the life of the government of Washington and his illustrious compeers, have gone to their silent bivouac, on "fame's eternal camping ground." I feel somehow, that of all the crowding ghosts of things that have been, that present themselves in memory claiming recognition, the recollection of these stirring days, with their fears, doubts and hopes, are the most interesting, and which I reproduce with the most satisfaction.

And now a word about slavery itself, that disturbing element that one way and another, worked so much mischief in this nation. This, be it remembered, is not reminiscence but a glance at the historical and philosophical side of a question, which, I have before said, was never considered with the good sense and moderation its importance deserved. In the first place I remark, that it was one of the strongest forces employed in the civilization of the human race.

This is putting it as strong as strong as I know how, but it is as true as the sun. To begin with, in its first inception, it was a substitute for murder. In the darker ages of the world when man's principal business was war, prisoners taken in battle were invariably put to

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death. In the progress of time it occurred to conquerors that the prisoners could be put to better use than to kill them, and so they were made slaves of, and compelled to do the work of their masters. The warriors were too proud to work, and before the slave came, the women, as among the North American Indians, performed that service.

Out of this alteration in the tribal life, came, in time, the institution of labor, and with it the institution of marriage. The slave could not own any property or other valuable things, but it occurred to him that he could take a woman, and by mutual consent, live together after the order of nature, and their children would be their own in spite of all the conventions, or laws of men. That was the commencement of the most beneficial social institution that has obtained in the civilization of the world.

Without it, neither property, nor the social fabric could exist for a day. Slavery in this country had become wrong, or more properly speaking, useless as an auxiliary to man's social redemption, as it was simply a wornout or cast off garment of an earlier age, like the clothes of a boy, who, having come to man's estate, he can no longer wear them.

It is agreed by those who have considered the point with attention, that all the great reforms in history have not been effected by doing something new or unusual, but by undoing something that was old, or become useless, and therefore, wrong on that account. Slavery had become wrong in this country because it was out of harmony with the genius of the age, and the time had come to throw off the slough of an older order. The institution in this country civilized the black race,

but it was rapidly debasing and brutalizing the white man, and it had to go, and it did.

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### Celebrates Eightieth Birthday

Last Sunday was the eightieth birthday of Mrs. Henrietta Riechers, one of Humboldt's oldest and most respected citizens. A nice family dinner was enjoyed and some out of town guests were present. Mr. and Mrs. Tom Davies of Falls City, and Miss Lulu Schram of Wichita, Kas., the two ladies being granddaughters of Mrs. Riechers, were in attendance and the day passed in an enjoyable manner. A post card shower was also given to their aged relative by the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.—Humboldt Leader.



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