

## AN OLD SONG.

There's a ballad of quaint love-longing  
That often I yearn to hear,  
For it sets the memories thronging  
And wakens a by-gone year.

The words were but simple and pretty,  
With a tender final fall,  
Yet I swear that this old-time ditty  
Still holds my heart in thrall.

It was sung by a girl whose fashion  
Can never grow stale nor old;  
But she and her young soul's passion  
Lie quiet in graveyard mould.

It was not the music, I fancy,  
Nor the story—but just the way  
She sang, and the necromancy  
Wrought by a dear, dead day.

At times they will play it to me  
Now—but my heart sinks low;  
It isn't the same that drew me  
There in the long ago.

I miss the meaning; 'tis broken—  
The spell of singer and song,  
I sigh for a vanished token,  
For a magic of yore I long.

For the place where the voice would waver  
And a sob rise up in the throat,  
For the little pathetic quaver  
That wasn't on any note!

—RICHARD BURTON.

**A POTATO PAPER.** The valuelessness of non-portable commodities is seldom brought to human notice. The fact that movement is essential to the conferment of value is scarcely ever in sight. The farmer whose plow slowly moves along the furrow and stirs the soil seldom reflects that his tardy motions with those of his snail-paced team are essential primary elements of the possible value of his coming crops. But after the soil has been thus moved, it is marked out for seeding by other moving implements impelled across it. Then the seed is moved into the ground and covered by more movement. The young plants spring up and those useful and unsharing partners of the husbandman, the rain and the sunshine, move upon and fertilize them until full fruition is accomplished. The ripened grain is moved from the field to the threshing machine, from the threshing machine to the granary or elevator, from the granary or elevator into wagons or cars, and by the wagons or cars to the mill, by the swiftly revolving machinery of the mill it is moved into flour, and then into sacks or barrels, and moved again by trains or ships into market. Thus when this staple food, which we handle and consume every day of our lives, is logically examined and found to be the result of such myriads of movements, both manual and machine, we begin to realize the value of the capability of being moved, of portability in all agriculture, manufacture and commerce.

The pioneers who settled upon the plains of Nebraska along the west bank of the Missouri river in 1854 and lived thereupon for more than ten years before any railroad touched the eastern

bank of that stream, fully understood the value of land to depend upon human effort, put forth upon it or in relation to it. They learned by experience that in and of itself, land had no more exchangeable value than air and water. These soils were as prolific then, as they are now. The crops were as generously satisfactory. But there was no method by which they could be profitably moved to market. And not being transportable they had a low value, limited or fixed by merely local demand.

There were no fears then of an invasion of Nebraska by bands of millionaires.

**No Scares.** There was not an incorporated dollar in the territory. Little children had then never been frightened by ghastly stories of the plutocrat and the hideous clawings and clutchings of the octopus. The plain people of Nebraska had then no special instructors in economics, nor self-constituted guardians of their right to liberty, life or property. Those halcyon days of innocence, rural comfort and rustic abundance were of course prior to the mastodon-sized crime of 1873.

More than forty-five years ago, when I came to Nebraska, in 1854, the shrill shriek of the locomotive could not be heard anywhere within three hundred miles of its boundary line. There was no railroad company organized for the invasion of farms and for the oppression of farmers, anywhere within that distance from my squatter's cabin. Neither did incorporated capital, in the fiendish form of banks, nor in any other ghoulish shape stalk up and down the land seeking whom it might destroy and devour anywhere west of the Missouri.

The first corn planted at Arbor Lodge in the spring of 1855 was dropped from the hand and covered with a hoe. The hand and the hoe were individual property. But capital came together and conspired to and did construct the Brown corn-planter and voracious incorporations devised check-rows and cultivators by which they crushed out the by-hand-and-by-hoe corn planting industry. The village blacksmith who made the hoe was driven out by the cruel inventions which capital conspired and combined to manufacture and introduce to general use for land tillage. This process of crushing out the primitive, and bringing into use, the improved and new implements, and machinery for agricultural development has continued by the combinations of incorporated money until the money power has made it possible for muscle power to plow, plant and till annually more than 8 millions of acres of corn in Nebraska. This enormous area produces an average of between 25 and 30 bushels to the acre each year and makes an ag-

gregate of between two hundred and fifty and three hundred million bushels of corn the annual output of this state.

With the hoe and the hand-planting, such a vast domain could never be tilled in that cereal. Only combinations of capital stimulating and utilizing inventions that are labor-saving, could make this miraculous corn production a possibility. Then came the imperative need of a new and cheaper method of distribution, to transport from producers to consumers, the results of those improved methods of agriculture. With the ox and mule transportation which first carried the farm products of Nebraska to market, the present production of the farms of Nebraska could never be marketed. Individuals could not build railroads; corporations could. No one man had enough money to construct lines and equip them with engines, cars and warehouses. But many men, contributing each from one hundred to one hundred thousand dollars, could and did associate, under laws providing for incorporations, to build and operate the existing vast system of transportation, and make them as common carriers useful public servitors.

And in the last 25 years the charges for railroad transportation have been reduced in the United States from an average of about two cents a hundred pounds per hundred miles to an average of about 8 mills per hundred pounds per hundred miles. These reductions have been gradually but constantly going on all over the republic. The denser the population tributary to each mile of a line of railway the lower the rates. Therefore in sparsely settled sections, traversed by railway lines, the rates for passengers and freights must be and are higher than in the older and more thickly settled parts of the country. A wholesale business is always done with less prices to the buyers than the retail. And where the common carrier gets passengers by the thousands, fares are less than where the carrier transports them by the scores. The same reasoning holds good as to freight rates. Not very many years ago the writer looked up the tributary population to each mile of the New York Central railroad and found it more than thirteen hundred, and at the same time it was ascertained to be less than 60 to any mile of railroad in the state of Nebraska. Nevertheless, there were statesmen and economists then, as there are now, protesting with great assumption of knowledge that rates in Nebraska logically and equitably should be the same as rates in New York.

However, in this paper, in order to be in unison with the principal discussion of this annual meeting of the State Historical Society, I propose to give only a single personal experience with the pioneer methods and costs of