

THE LAST CONVULSION OF THE COPPERHEADS.

BY JUDGE THEODOSIUS BOTKIN.

There is often a poetic as well as a dramatic justice in the culmination of events, and it is to this fact that history owes much of the interest that is taken in its recitals. Three short years had barely passed since the last harsh sound of the civil war had died away on the border-land between the settlements of western Missouri and eastern Kansas, when an audience of more than two thousand people witnessed the spectacle of nearly twenty, smiling, ex-Confederate soldiers sitting calmly by and quietly enjoying the scene, while half a dozen malignant and unrepentant guerrillas sat in the shadow of the national flag at the funeral of the old mother of two of their number, and, surrounded by a crowd of old civil war copperheads from southern Illinois, listened to words of consolation from the old and well worn text, "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth." The preacher was the son-in-law of the deceased, and it was to his folly and the blatant copperheadism of the Illinois immigrants, that his two brothers-in-law, and their associates in crime, owed their present humiliation, and the other spectators, two hours of solid interest.

That Sabbath day in August, 1868, in McHenry's grove on Walnut creek dispelled from the mind of bush-whacker and Knight of the Golden Circle, alike, any lingering illusion as to the meaning of Appomattox, and brought peace and good order to reign in the place of discord and doubt. It was the last convulsion of the copperheads, and is worthy of a page in the annals of the Louisiana Purchase.

A Historical Location.

If we were to draw a straight line from Butler, in Bates county, Missouri, to Mound City, in Linn county, Kansas, we would find it crossing the Marais des Cygnes river at, or very near to, Dickey's ford. Then, were we to make the latter point the center of a circle, the radius of which is 35 miles, we would have inscribed a territory over which have swept many of the fiercest storms of human passion and frenzy, that ever blighted the peace and happiness of mankind. Within that circle have been made some of the most thrilling as well as the most brutal chapters of American history. To enumerate them all would require a volume, and my space is limited. Suffice it to say that within that circle old John Brown from his little log-cabin, or "fort", laughed at the impotent rage of President James Buchanan, and replied to the offer of two-hundred and fifty dollars as an executive reward for his apprehension and arrest, by a counter-reward of two dollars and fifty cents for

the apprehension of the president. Within that circle Brown's followers battled with Harney's dragoons at Fox's ford on Big Sugar; and afterwards from his hiding-place in Augustus Wattle's cabin-loft, Brown listened to the boastful talk of Lieutenant (afterwards General) Carr, not a rod away, who little imagined that the peaceful and industrious stone-masons at work upon the nearby wall were such characters as Kagi, Pickles, etc., and that the innocent tool-chests, close at hand, contained the arms and accoutrements of as determined a band of hunted outlaws as ever fought for the principles of human liberty. Within that circle Captain James Montgomery, returning with liberated slaves from Missouri, seized and smashed and stamped into the earth the ballot box and ballots at Sugar Mound as a defy to the territorial government of Kansas, and as a new declaration of war against the attempts of congress to force slavery upon the new land. Within that circle, Captain Charles Hamilton and his "Bloody Reds," fresh from the conference of slave-drivers at Pappinsville, corralled the 11 free state men at the old Choteau trading-post, and marching them into a nearby ravine, shot them down in cold blood, and furnished John G. Whittier the theme for his immortal, poetic prophecy—"La Marais du Cygne." Within that circle, and in retaliation for the Hamilton massacre, Montgomery's men literally fulfilled the Whittier prophecy, that

"On the lintels of Kansas their blood shall not dry:
Henceforth, the bad angel shall harmless go by."

Within that circle, began the military fame of such men as Harney, Lyons, Jennison, Carr, Shelby, Price and Raines; and there, where the beautiful city of Pleasanton now stands, the rough riders of Pleasanton, Moonlight, Benteen and Phillips, made that grand rush on October 25, 1864, which crippled forever the force and military energy of Old "Pap" Price's army, and swept Marmaduke and Cabell and their brave and devoted soldiers off to a northern prison. And down yonder from the bluff south of Pappinsville, Murry Botkin made the greatest long distance shot of the civil war, when, from his cover behind Charley Perrin's house, he picked from the saddle, a mile away, the commander of Price's rear guard, and that, too, at a single shot without the use of a globe sight. The battle of Mine creek substantially ended the war on the border; and from that time the residents within our proposed circle, though constantly on their guard, saw little of the frightful phases of the conflict. The storm that broke upon that fair region almost ten years before, began quickly to subside, and, with the news from Appomat-

tox, people began to realize the blessings of peace.

By the time the spring of 1867 opened, immigrants began flocking into the section of country adjacent to Dickey's ford, but they came principally from southern Illinois. They were an industrious, thrifty class of farmers, and by the summer of 1868 had obliterated the material evidences of the recent conflict, and were rapidly converting the dreary prairie waste into well ordered and productive farms. That is now one of the most beautiful and best cultivated agricultural regions on earth. Very many of their number were sorely afflicted with a sort of political dyspepsia, resulting from their failure to digest most of the war-measures of the general government during the rebellion. Some of this class had been active in discouraging enlistments, in encouraging desertions, and in fomenting trouble through the Knights of the Golden Circle. Their disposition to sell their old homes east of the Mississippi and start anew in a new country was very greatly strengthened by the return of the veterans at the conclusion of peace. The old Union soldiers had found time during their campaigning to keep tab on the "summer soldiers" and "sunshine patriots" at home, and were disposed to make things somewhat uncomfortable for the men who had been referring to them while at the front in uncomplimentary language. They had often sung the old refrain—

"When that is done we'll home return,
The home to us so dear, sir,
And soundly kick and cuff the curs
Now barking in our rear, sir."

Guerilla Ill-feeling.

All that part of Bates county, east of the Kansas line and lying between the Marais des Cygnes and Walnut creek, as well as for some distance south of the latter stream, is embraced in the municipal division known as Walnut township. Within its borders in 1868 were 17 ex-Union soldiers, and Captain Gentry West and the 20 surviving members of his company of Confederate cavalry. Among those old soldiers, from both sides, there was a warm feeling of respect that bordered upon the fraternal. They had all fought the fight, and with them the war was over, and its issues settled. But, beside about 30 of the politically dyspeptic fellows, there were in that community six or eight old guerrillas who had served with Quantrell, Anderson, and Clem. These latter were unrepentant and unreconciled to the results of the great war. They were vindictive and ugly tempered. Chief among them was an old Mr. Vaughn, whose heart and disposition were eternally soured against everything pertaining to the flag or the Union cause. To him the malicious copperheadism of the community looked for leadership. To add to the natural