

# JACOB WEBER PRUSSIAN REBEL AND NEBRASKA PIONEER

How a Boy Born Amid the Romantic Scenes of the Rhine Valley Finally Found His Way to Nebraska and Became a Factor in the Building Up of a Great Commonwealth.

THE village of Whurms, Germany, is romantically situated in one of the beautiful valleys of the Rhine. The few houses, built along a single, narrow, crooked street, are of an ancient style of architecture. Built of stone, with sagging tile roofs and wooden shutters, they look as though they were weary with age and a surfeit of experience. They look like old people whose day is past and who find no pleasure in the frivolities of a new generation. The Rhine province is today populous and active in industry. But the Rhine province in history has been a stage on which some of the greatest of the dramas of the world have been enacted.

In one of these old, sleepy-looking houses a pioneer of Douglas county was born: It seems almost sacrilege to jump from that romantic country with a history of centuries to the newness of Nebraska. April 9, 1833, there was much visiting from the several houses of Whurms to a certain sag-roofed house where there was a new baby. The child was Jacob Weber, who has been a resident of Florence, Neb., for more than fifty years. His father was a farmer of a few acres of the beautiful country around the village.

Well might the crooked old houses look sleepy and wearied, for they had witnessed great things in their day. They had seen mighty armies sweeping over the country. They had witnessed the conflict of men for centuries. The Rhenish province abounds in history and legend. Only a few miles away is the city of Bingen, whence came that great soldier who, in the poem, "lay dying in Aigiers." To the east lies Frankfurt. To the north fifty miles is Cologne with its great cathedral. Brussels, Paris and other cities of world importance are within half a day's journey. The boy grew up in the little village, playing in the narrow streets or venturing out into the broad fields and sometimes down to the swimming hole in the Rhine. (Think of having a swimming hole in the Rhine.) But there was one spot to which the village boys never ventured. On an island in the river a few miles to the south stood a ruined castle, its crumbling battlements covered with the growth of centuries. This, it was whispered, was "where the rats chewed the bishop." The boys might venture upon the island, but they always gave the castle a wide berth. In hushed voices they told each other the terrible story of how the Bishop Hatto in the year 914 received his just deserts. That was the year of the great famine. No one had food except the bishop, whose granaries were full of corn. The people begged him for enough to sustain life, offering him anything in return. Finally he announced that on a certain day he would distribute corn to all who gathered in his great barn. The people rejoiced and gathered in crowds. When all were within the barn the bishop locked the doors and set the barn afire. Then he went grimly back to his house. Horrors! as he entered his home he saw a number of rats gnawing a picture of himself from its frame. He turned away in terror. The rats followed him. He ran shrieking to the river. Looking back from time to time he could see a great army of rats, thousands of them, pursuing him. He leaped into a boat. The rats followed, swimming in the river. Gaining the castle he shut himself into the tower. Sharp teeth were at work in a moment on the stout floor and soon the little black avengers came pouring through, sprang upon the hapless bishop and devoured him.

### Early in a Rebellion

Young Weber was to get a taste of the turbulent romance of his birthplace. He was hardly 16 years of age when the great period of unrest which had settled upon the fatherland while the waxlike Frederick William IV. occupied the throne burst all over the empire. It was the dissatisfaction which threatened to disrupt the country and the emergency which raised up the great Bismarck shortly afterward. Delegates were sent from the Rhenish province to Berlin to state the grievances and to threaten secession unless their demands were complied with. These Frederick received with grandiloquent promises, but nothing more. An army had been quietly organized and a considerable body was stationed at the village of Whurms. And Jacob Weber, less than 16 years old at the time, carried the drum and beat out the music to which the sturdy patriots marched. A detachment of the imperial troops was stationed at Mainz to the northward. From Mainz the "Paris high road" runs to the southwest, passing through the village of Whurms.

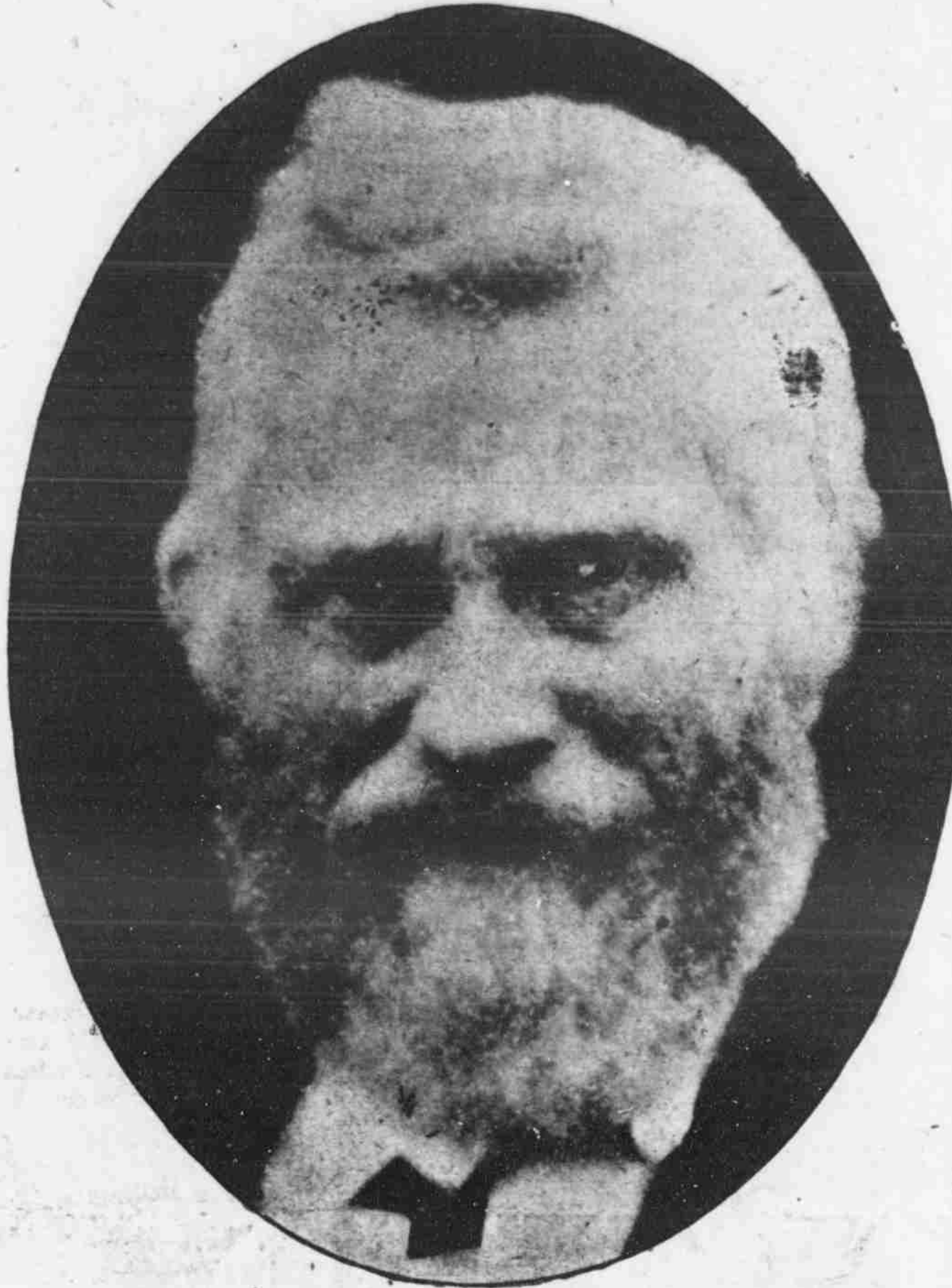
Down this road one day in March, 1848, started the imperial troops. The revolutionists heard of their coming and made preparations for resistance, though in a pitiful minority. On one side of the road stood the village cemetery, surrounded, according to custom, with a seven-foot stone wall. On the other side was a similar enclosure used for a different purpose. Loopholes were quickly cut in the part of the wall commanding the road and the troops were placed within. With these stern looking men was one whose boyish face caught the eye of the commander, Major Silage of Mainz.

"How old is that boy?" he demanded. When he was told he ordered him back to his home at once. And the boy went, though protesting fiercely. And he only saw from a distance what happened when the Prussians swung in between those two stone walls filled, like the great wooden horse of the Greeks, with armed men. He saw, with a cry of joy, the demoralization of the splendid body of imperial soldiery when the unexpected fire burst upon them. He saw the tumult, the breaking up of the well-formed military body, the rushing hither and thither like ants, the writhing bodies on the ground. Then he saw them reform, saw them move in two flanks upon the stone enclosures, saw the fight at the rear gate of the cemetery, saw the gleaming helmets of the imperial soldiers disappear swiftly within the wall. The bloody conflict that took place there had to hand above the graves of the silent sleepers he did not see, though he later helped bury the bodies of his dead fellow townsmen in the blood saturated ground of the little cemetery.

### Leaves Under Amnesty

The revolution of the Rhenish province resulted in a conference at Frankfurt, where certain concessions were made to the revolutionists. Among these concessions was the privilege of leaving the fatherland without giving military service and without a royal permit. Young Weber took advantage of this when he was 19 years old. Had it not been for the revolution he would have been compelled to remain and give his services to the army for the time demanded by law. Bidding goodbye to the family in the crooked stone house, he walked down the green hills to the banks of the Rhine, where he took the boat bound north. Down the beautiful stream he drifted day after day past many an historic castle and city until he arrived at Rotterdam. There he took a coast boat for Havre and at that port embarked on the sailing ship St. Dennis, bound for New York. The little vessel was beaten about on the Atlantic forty-nine days, and during some of that time the few passengers prepared themselves devoutly for death, for it seemed the vessel could not weather the storm. But it did and sailed into the harbor one sunny day in the spring of 1852. Young Weber disembarked and took the train at once for Columbus, D., where he remained only a few days and then went on to London, O., where his uncle was a baker. There he remained three years learning the business.

There he learned also the English language, in which task he received material assistance from a charming young daughter of the fatherland. She was Miss Amelia Rattler. Having learned his trade, the young folks decided to make a venture for themselves. They were married and moved at once to Bloomington, Ill., where Mr. Weber opened a bakery. One afternoon a stranger came into the store. He had been west and was on his way back to his old home in New England. "A mighty fine country is the west," he said in response to a question. Then he enlarged and particularized. He said the finest locality of all was a place called Florence, just across the Missouri river. It was a booming place and bound to



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become populous and a commercial center. That evening the matter was talked over by the Webers and they decided to sell out and venture farther into the west.

The man who could not see a brilliant future in Florence in 1857 must have been a pessimist, indeed. It took but one look to make Mr. and Mrs. Weber decide enthusiastically in favor of the locality when they arrived in June, 1857. Mr. Weber started his bakery at once and bought one-third of a lot for \$200. Upon this he built a three-room cottonwood cottage at a cost of \$600. Six months after his arrival the panic swooped down upon the young community; he was forced out of business and secured work in the sawmill operated by Alexander Hunter. For more than a year money disappeared absolutely from the community. Mr. Weber received his wages in cattle, while his employer sold lumber or bought logs with the same medium of exchange. Grains or other necessities of life were used for the same purpose. During this time the people lived without coffee, sugar and similar luxuries. As a substitute Mr. Weber roasted rye, barley and wheat. They made a coffee with this, and when the hard times were over they found they had lost all taste for coffee and it was some months before they could cultivate a taste for it again.

Hunter, the owner of the sawmill, sold the lumber for the building of the ferryboat across the Loup river near Columbus, and young Weber made several trips overland with loads of lumber. On one of these trips he was resting one day when an Indian appeared with

his two squaws. The Indian was evidently a chief. Mr. Weber found later that he was Stick-in-the-Mud of the Omahas. Mr. Weber more garrulous than most Indians. He had a club into which were driven a number of gold-headed tacks. As he and Mr. Weber were smoking the pipe together he proudly exhibited the club, explaining that the tacks indicated the number of Pawnee scalps he had taken. He showed a supply of loose tacks which he kept ready to drive into the club whenever he should take more scalps.

### Effect of High Water

There was great rivalry between Omaha and Florence in those early days, and Mr. Weber declares that it was only a straw's weight that made Omaha the city and Florence the village. Had it not been for the fact that the Missouri river was very high on a certain day he believes the great city would now stand on the site of Florence. This fateful day was the time when James Durant, genius of the Union Pacific road, with Engineer Day, drove out to Florence in a carriage and looked that site over with a view to the location of the Union Pacific bridge. The railroad men had been bought out by James M. Parker the banker, member of the firm of Cook, Sargent & Parker of Davenport. Durant, Day, Parker and Weber stood down where they could get a view of the Missouri. It happened that the river was considerably out of its banks and did not present an encouraging outlook for the erection of a bridge. Had the water been within the banks, Mr. Weber believes the bridge would have

been located there. This would have been the entering wedge for all that came afterwards and built the city.

One day soon after Mr. Weber reached Florence a large party of people was seen approaching the town from the south. As they came nearer they proved to be men, many of them in frock coats. They were, in fact, members of the legislature of Nebraska who had "seceded" from that body in session in Omaha and traveled to the town on the north. They looked around for a place to meet immediately upon arriving in Florence. An empty store building was selected and the lawmakers found seats on boxes, kegs and other things. The entire town turned out to attend the session of the state legislature. Florence even dreamed of becoming the capitol, but within forty-eight hours the trouble had been patched up and the "secessionists" had returned to the authorized state house in Omaha.

### Baked for the Mormons

In the trading which was incident upon the Mormon movement Mr. Weber took a part. He operated his bakery during a considerable portion of the time of the immigration and sold many hundreds of dollars' worth of bread to be distributed among the faithful. He traveled through Iowa for a time purchasing cattle, which he sold to the Mormons for use in drawing the overland trains. This was after the push-cart days. He saw many a line of the faithful start out from Florence up the hill to the westward and out to the land of promise lying somewhere across the prairie and mountains 1,500 miles away. Just east of the mill where he worked during his first years was a large tabernacle built of trees and thatched with green boughs, in which services were held each evening at sundown and there special services were held to ask a blessing on those about to start upon the perilous journey across the plains.

Mr. Weber fell a victim to the western fever and started once for Pike's Peak in company with Alexander Hunter and George Haag. They had a wagon drawn by three yoke of oxen and loaded with the necessities of life, arms, ammunition and mining tools. They had seen many wagons going through Florence, and upon their white canvas was painted the brave legend, "Pike's Peak or Bust." They pursued their journey toward the west until they arrived at a point a short distance this side of Fort Kearney. It was a place known as "the great turntable." A large camp was found there of men who had become discouraged over the prospect and were resting, either undecided or preparatory to returning to the east. There they, too, turned and painted upon their wagon the cheerful watchword of the eastbound, "Busted, by Gosh."

### Building Up His Home

Mr. Weber pronounces this turning back the best thing he ever did. Upon reaching Florence again he and George Haag rented a farm three miles northwest of the town and began farming. Between this man, George Haag, and Mr. Weber there exists a friendship which is like that of David and Jonathan. They met soon after reaching Florence. Mr. Haag having been there a year before the arrival of Mr. Weber. They struggled together in the early days. Where the one was there the other could be found. They worked in the mill together, they farmed together, they went west together, they bought the mill together and both of them still work at the mill. Mr. Haag presiding in the engine room and Mr. Weber sewing up sacks of flour and bran. Today at the age of 74 and 76, respectively, they are closer than ever. Mr. Haag, who has not married, lives with Mr. Weber in the latter's pleasant home in Florence. Both of them pronounce Florence an ideal town in which to live and Nebraska unsurpassed among the countries of the world. To see the two men walking on the street, at work or about the house, one would say they were twenty years short of their real ages. And their laughs are hearty and deep. With their steins and their pipes they are quite happy.

Mr. Weber regards with distrust the advance of invention. Of course the steam engine is all right, for that serves to drive his mill, but the camera, the motor car, the telephone and kindred modern ideas are likely to lead to no good. In October, 1902, Mr. Weber was in Omaha to view the Ak-Sar-Ben parade. Since that time he has not been in Omaha nor has he been anywhere else outside of Florence. He has never talked over a telephone and has had only one photograph taken in his life. He has been a moderate smoker and drinker all his life, but has always been in good health. Two years ago he was very sick and nearly died. In fact, he expected to die, for a fortune teller had stated that he would live to be 72 years old, and that was his exact age during that illness.

The religion of this man is that summed up by the late James B. Kitchen in the funeral sermon written by himself, namely that man knows not whence he came nor whither he goes; knows not whether or not there is a God or a future life.

Mr. Weber was mayor of Florence one term, school director three years, treasurer of the school board nine years and delegate to the county convention several times. Other political honors he could have had, but declined them.

Three of his sons, Emil, William and Walter, operate the roller mills at Wayne, Neb. The fourth, Jacob, is associated with him in the little mill at Florence. One daughter, Mrs. P. D. Smith, lives three miles north of Florence. The other, Mrs. Mary Griffin, lives with her parents.

## Nails for the Millions Made Annually in America

WHAT becomes of all the nails? Well," said the hardware man, "that wouldn't be so difficult a question to answer as you might think, though we certainly do use a lot of nails; a lot of nails."

"I haven't the figures for 1906 at hand, but there were produced in this country in 1905 of cut nails 1,357,549 kegs, and of wire nails 10,854,892 kegs, making a total production for that year of 12,212,441 kegs, or, the kegs each containing 100 pounds, 1,221,244,100 pounds of nails."

"As to the number of individual nails, why, I don't believe we'd have time to count 'em, or not today; but, getting back to pounds, 1,221,244,100, and for the sake of easy figuring, counting the population of the country at \$0,000,000, we would find our home production of nails for the year 1905 to have been at the rate of about fifteen pounds for every man, woman and child in the country. And you will bear in mind that we keep on turning out nails like that year after year, and that the consumption keeps pace with the production."

"But now suppose we should get down from those million and billion figures a little into figures a little more condensed, and on such a basis you would find that our nail production in 1905 amounted to \$10,622 tons. We export some nails, our present exportation amounting to about 45,000 tons a year. If our production now were the same as in 1905, that would leave about 570,000 tons as our annual home consumption; but while I haven't the figures for 1906 by me, I don't doubt that our production and consumption have both kept pace with our increasing population, and fig-

uring on that basis and omitting fractions, I should say that our present production of nails is at the rate of about 640,000 tons annually, and so, deducting the 40,000 tons exported, our annual consumption would now be about 600,000 tons, which figures, I imagine, would be found to be substantially correct."

"And, taking 600,000 tons as the country's present consumption, let us come down a little closer still and do a little figuring on the consumption of nails right here in our home town. To get things into round numbers let us put New York's population at say 4,000,000, which would be one-twentieth of the country's 80,000,000, and putting it so and assuming that we consume one-twentieth of the country's nail consumption, we find that we use right here in this city alone 30,000 tons of nails annually, or 600,000 kegs."

"Nails are commonly shipped 300 kegs to the car, some cars hold more, but 300 kegs is the usual carload. So of such carloads we take, here in New York, 2,000 carloads a year, or an average of more than five cars of nails coming along daily and day after day through the year. And, coming back to round numbers again, for the correspondingly easy figuring, and so counting 300 working days in the year, we find that we eat up here on our working days somewhere about 2,000 kegs, or 100 tons of nails a day; and, yes, even figured in that close manner, down to daily consumption, it makes quite some nails, quite some nails."

"And you wonder what becomes of them all? You haven't bought a pound of nails yourself, you say, in twenty years? I know, but if you were

going to build a \$5,000 house you'd buy three or four kegs of nails or more right in a lump to put into that house; and if you were building twenty such houses you'd buy twenty times as many, and as many more still if you were putting up buildings at half a million or a million dollars apiece."

"There are great builders who would think nothing of ordering a couple of thousand kegs of nails just for current use, and orders for 25,000 or 50,000 kegs of nails from great dealers or distributors would be nothing remarkable. And, though you may never buy a pound of nails yourself, yet you get your share of the nails made in some way just the same; they are in the house you live in or in your furniture or other belongings, put there by the people who made them. You get your fifteen pounds a year all right, or more, for we can hardly use or own anything without having the use of or owning some nails."

"For while building construction is what we might naturally think of first, anyway, when we thought of the uses of nails, yet the moment we come to dwell upon it we realize that nails are put to well nigh innumerable uses. Nails are made in almost endless variety and there are few things of more common use. We can scarcely look in any direction anywhere in any civilized country, indoors or out, without the eyes resting on something in whose construction nails are used; and when we come to realize that fact the nail figures may seem a little less stupendous."

"Still, we might think, here the nails keep coming by the millions of kegs yearly and every year, and don't enormous quantities of them go into more or less permanent construction where they don't have to be replaced every year? They

do, they do; but with the growth of the country there is constantly going forward an enormous amount of new construction calling for more nails; and enormous quantities of nails are annually required for temporary constructions of various kinds and for the millions and millions of boxes and barrels, for instance, used for shipping purposes, and they sooner or later are destroyed. Of course the minute you come to think of it you realize that many thousands of tons of nails have but this one brief use, to be then bent or broken, scattered and lost. In some places where many nails are used the bent and broken nails may be swept up for iron scrap, but the bulk of such nails simply goes to waste."

"And enormous quantities of nails are required in the replacing of innumerable other things of a more or less destructive character, from which, when they are worn out or broken, the nails are never recovered."

"Why, it would require a lot of nails just to take the place of the new nails that are dropped and never used at all. Nails are cheap now and time is valuable. In old times, when nails cost three or four times what they do now, people were careful of their nails and they used to save their bent nails and straighten them out and lay them away for future use."

"Nowadays the farmer who dropped a nail in the dirt would be likely to let it lie there rather than look for it, and take another out of his pocket to drive. The carpenter who dropped half a dozen or a dozen nails from a scaffolding wouldn't go down the ladder to look for them. In various similar ways many new nails are lost without ever having been driven."