PART III.
HALF-TONE SECTION
PAGES 1 TO 6

THE OMAHA SUNDAY BEE

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THE OMAHA BEE
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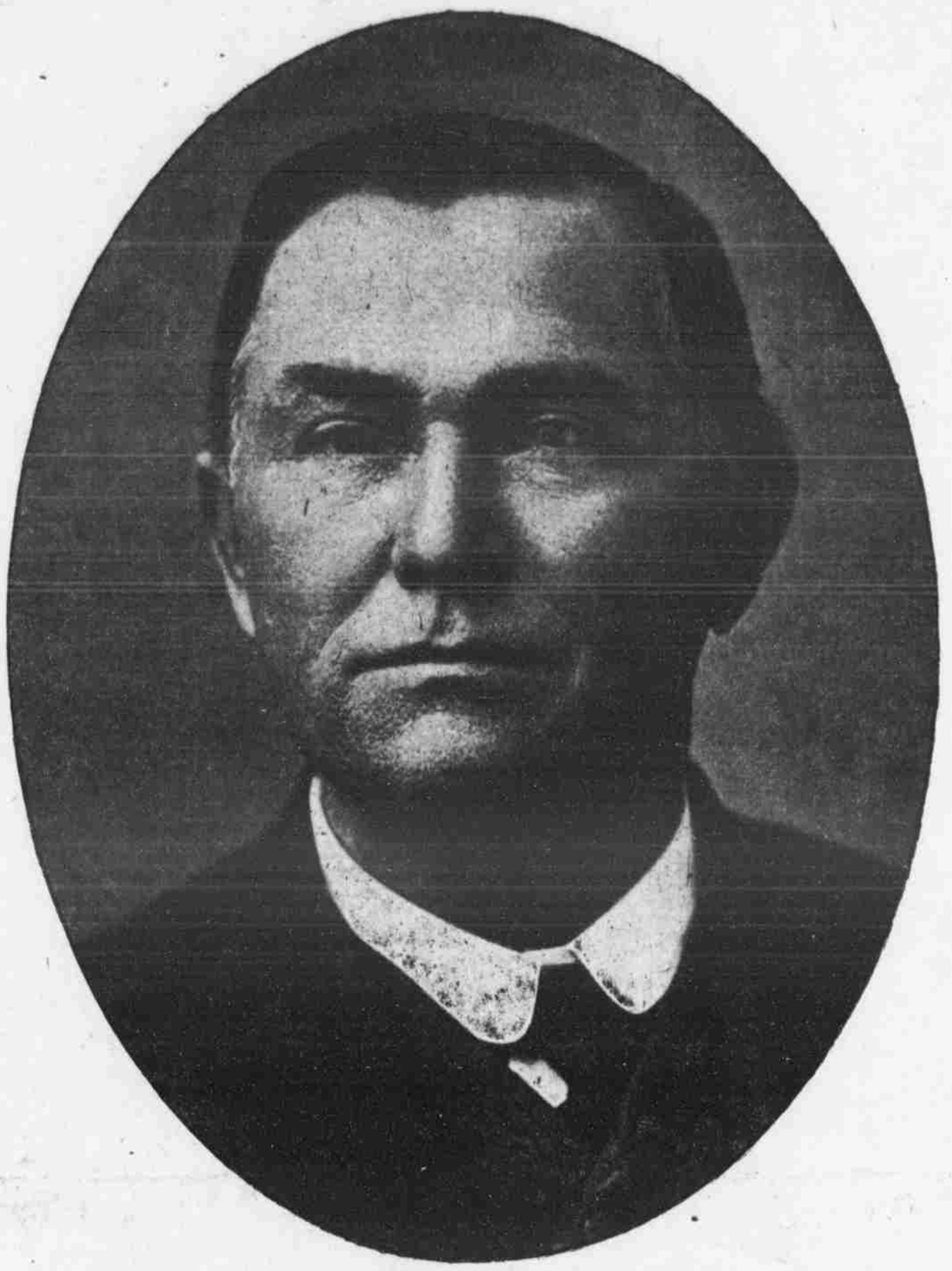
JOHN FRED BEHM SOLDIER CONTRACTOR AND OPTIMIST

Youngest Member of the Famous Old Fighting First Nebraska Has Had a Strenuous Life Amid the Stirring Scenes of Western Development, but Feels Strong and Good-Natured Yet.

A MAN of original and pronounced ideas, of philosophical temperament and of contented spirit is John Fred Behm, pioneer of Omaha, civil war veteran, Indian fighter, house mover, contractor and musician. His has been a life of variety both in occupation and in fortune. It has always been a life of energy and effort. He was born in the little village of Moechel, near the city of Stutgart, Kingdom of Wurtemberg, Germany. His father was a cabinet maker of industrious and frugal habits—habits which enabled him to acquire the old stone house where they lived and the fertile vineyard which occupied the steep hill rising from the back of the house. But his father had also pronounced ideas regarding the right of every man to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Therefore when the Fatherland was wrenched by civil strife in the troublous years of '48 and '49 he took a leading part. He was one of a company of rebels who surrounded 800 Prussian troops and killed them. This was too much for the powers at Berlin. A price was set on his head and one night, after bidding a tearful farewell to his wife and children, he crept out of the house and hurried away toward Antwerp. He arrived there, took ship and came to America. Two years later the father, having secured a foothold in the new world, sent for his wife, his three sons and daughter. They sailed also from Antwerp. The ship was tossed by storms and so buffeted about that it did not arrive at New Orleans until three months later. The water supply ran out and for days the passengers and crew stared into the gaunt face of Death. But they did arrive safely at last and were united to the exiled husband and father in New Orleans. The family remained there two years and then moved to Indianapolis where the father secured work as a carpenter.

In the spring of 1856 they decided to come to Omaha, which had just been settled. The family with about twenty-five other Germans from Indianapolis arrived in Omaha April 28, 1856, on the steamer "Emigrant," having come most of the distance by the river route via St. Louis and St. Joseph. Here the father again secured work as a carpenter and the family lived first in a house on Cass street between Nineteenth and Twentieth streets. This house had two rooms downstairs and a loft above. In these quarters the twenty-five Germans lived witht the Behm family, boarding there and sleeping in the loft for several months. The house was sold eventually to George Barker and the Behms moved to a place on Chicago street between Eleventh and Twelfth streets where they conducted the "Deutsches Gasthaus" for a time.



J. FRED BEHM.

Printing in Early Days

John Fred, or "Fred," as he has always been known, was only 12 years old when he secured his first employment, which was as "devil" in the office of the Omaha Nebraskan, then published by M. H. Clark. He helped print and distribute the first telegraphic newspaper ever published in Omaha. This was in Clark's printing office on the second floor of a building at Thirteenth and Douglas streets. A. N. Ferguson, afterwards a judge, did the typesetting and presswork. The paper was printed on a hand press. While Mr. Ferguson worked the lever and laid the sheets of paper in place, it was the duty of young Behm to ink the type, which had to be done with a hand roller.

"I went to work at 6 o'clock in the evening and was generally through at 6 in the morning," says Mr. Behm. "It took us about five hours to print 200 papers. Then I used to take a bundle to the old stage station on Eleventh street between Howard and Harney streets. These went to the south. I also took a bundle to a stage station on Twenty-third street between Cuming and Izard streets for the north and northwest. There were no electric lights, sidewalks or anything of that sort and I did all that tramping through the dark and cold and snow. For this I got $12 a month."

Mr. Behm was the youngest enlisted soldier in the First Nebraska, being only 13 years old when he enlisted, May 20, 1861. He was made a drummer boy and all through the war was known by the sobriquet, "Taps."

"I think there was never so fine a regiment of soldiers as that one," he says. "We used to be drawn up down there near the Union Pacific headquarters. There we were mustered in and there the beautiful flag made by the women of Omaha was presented to us. Elizabeth Davis, afterward Mrs. Herman Kountze, and Gussie Estabrook were leaders in making the flag. It was a beauty and I remember Gussie Estabrook making the presentation speech. She was surely a fine speaker. We carried that flag through the war and we brought back what was left of it. The staff is down at Lincoln now in the museum."

Tough Times in Arkansas

"Taps" went through the first part of the war as a drummer boy. Then he re-enlisted as a soldier with a rifle and went through fifteen engagements, including Shiloh and Fort Donaldson. He was taken prisoner by a large band of rebels in August, 1864. A force consisting of seventy-five cavalry from the First Nebraska had been detailed to protect a large number of men making hay for the government on Grand Prairie, Ark., between Duval's Bluff and Little Rock. The rebel general, Shelby, surrounded them with overwhelming force. The besieged threw up fortifications of hay bales, but the rebels, who had four cannon, kept up a fire which set the hay afire and the Union men were compelled to surrender. Just after the surrender a regiment of Union cavalry came over the hill and there occurred what Mr. Behm calls "the prettiest fight" he ever saw. But the rebels were strongest in numbers and got away with their prisoners.

"They stripped us of all but our underclothes immediately," says Mr. Behm, "and in that condition in our bare feet we had to walk across about three miles of hay stubble. I remember Sergeant Major Slocum, who was very weak, leaned on my arm. The soles of my feet were all raw and bleeding when we finally reached the woods. When we arrived there they wanted to go faster and they took Slocum away from me, set him up against a tree and shot him.

"We had had about thirty negroes with us as wagon drivers and helpers. After we had reached the woods the rebels decided to shoot these and they also decided to have some fun out of it. So they said they would give every nigger a chance for his life. About fifteen men with rifles were stationed along in a line and then one negro at a time was let go and they shot at him as he ran screaming and begging for mercy. It was a horrible sight. They were all shot down, though one fellow I thought was going to get away. He had got beyond the line and was still running. But suddenly he wobbled and then fell like the rest of them. After this slaughter the rebels proceeded with us. We marched all night and in the morning arrived at the rebel prison between Batesville and Jacksonford, Ark. It was a stockade about ten feet high. During the two weeks we were kept there we were fed on about a pint of bran a day. We had no way to cook it. But by putting it in our hats, mixing a little water with it and holding it on a stick near the fire we were able to make it a little warm before eating it.

Oak Leaves as Food

"At the end of two weeks we were paroled and turned loose in that hostile country. We had nothing on but our underclothes and there was nothing to eat in the country. For days we lived on oak and sassafras leaves. Yes, oak leaves are pretty good eating when a man's hungry. As we got nearer the north we reached orchards and cornfields and then we feasted. At Patterson, Mo., the first Union station on our route, we found there were no clothes for us. We walked forty miles farther to Pilot [illegible] a freight train and went to St. Louis. [illegible] at 2 o'clock on a Sunday morning [illegible] and slept till daylight. Then [illegible] day for racks. But a crowd gathered around me and a policeman stopped me and said I'd have to get more duds on before I could appear on the streets."

Young Behm was taken to Benton barracks and there recruited his strength. Then he was sent to Omaha, whither his regiment had come several months before. The regiment had already been sent to Fort Kearney to quell the Indian uprising and thither "Taps" went and served until 1866. The duty of the regiment, among other things, was to accompany the overland stages from one station to another, twelve soldiers going with each stage. Mr. Behm remembers the attack of a large band of Sioux on Alkali station, where they killed all the garrison. He also recalls what he declares was the most pitiful sight he ever witnessed. This was 1,200 hamstrung cattle. The Indians had killed the men who were bringing them from Denver and then from pure delight in cruelty had severed the tendons of the hind feet of the animals. When Mr. Behm saw them they were crawling around the prairie painfully on their front feet, the rear ones being entirely useless.

He was a member of a band of 200 soldiers who pursued 1,000 Sioux a distance of eighty miles through a country where there was no water. The Indians stampeded their horses one night and they were compelled to walk back to the fort. A very narrow escape for him was one occasion when he and two companions were riding down from a remote post they called "Camp Banishment" to James E. Boyd's brewery, on the Wood river, with the mail. A band of Indians surprised them and Behm's two companions were shot. An arrow intended for himself struck his horse just behind the saddle. The animal was not disabled, however, and bore him safely out of the reach of danger.

All Sorts of Activity

He returned in 1866 to Omaha, noting on the way with much surprise the cuts and embankments marking the line of the new Union Pacific railroad. "I never thought they would have any use for a railroad out there," he says. For twenty years then he engaged in the business of house moving and the art of music. He possessed naturally that Utopian ideal of citizenship which considers one occupation as honorable as another, and he saw no incongruity in toiling all day at the most laborious kind of work and then spending the evening in the pursuit of his beloved music. He became one of the leading musicians in the city on the bass viol and the trombone, playing in the orchestras at the several theaters with Prof. Hoffman and Prof. Steinhauser. While he was thus busied he yielded to the persuasion of friends and entered the city council, where he served two terms. He was also a member of the state legislature one year.

He took an active part in the volunteer fire department of Omaha. He was the first paid fireman in the city department and he fired the first steam engine owned by the city. He "held the nozzle" on probably the most sensational fire that ever occurred in Omaha, that which consumed the King grocery establishment at Twelfth and Farnam streets. A young clerk by the name of Baker had stolen some money, killed another clerk named Higgins and then set the place on fire to conceal his crime. Mr. Behm found the body lying in the smoky room when he pushed in the burning building with the hose. A few months later he was one of the guard which walked beside the carriage that took Baker from the jail to the scaffold at Twenty-fourth and Douglas streets, where he was executed.

Discovers a Murder

Circumstances caused Mr. Behm to play a part in the sensational case of Judge Cyrus Tater. Tater had come across the plains from the west with Isaac H. Neff. Arriving at Omaha they camped on a bluff near where Locust street now is. Tater murdered Neff during the night, wrapped a heavy log chain around his body and threw it into the river. The following morning Mr. Behm happened to be walking along the river bank at that point and saw the body. He drew it out and notified the authorities. Tater had fled with the wagons. He was pursued and caught this side of Columbus. His trial took place in Omaha and he was condemned to death.

"The scaffold on which he was hanged was erected right on the spot where the murder took place," says Mr. Behm. "An immense crowd was there at the execution and I never saw so many fainting women any other time in my life. He made quite a long speech just before he stepped on the trap. He was a very eloquent orator and his words moved many to tears. He protested his innocence to the last."

During the '90s Mr. Behm went west and engaged in contracting on a large scale. Among other things he built the water works at Astoria, Ore., and did much paving in Portland and other cities. He was president of the Pacific Paving company. But he met reverses and returned to Omaha, where he has resided since that time, always busy and always contented. He is now in charge of all the real estate owned by the First National bank, keeping weeds cut, sidewalks repaired and looking after all the multitudinous details of properties.

Mark Topley Personified

"I was worth $75,000 in 1890 and now I am 'broke,'" he says. "But that makes no difference to me. I came into the world without anything and I will go out of it the same way. I couldn't take any money along, and so what should I want it for? I do my work and I do it well, and that is a great satisfaction. And I've got good friends. John Creighton, Herman Kountze, W. A. Paxton and Edward Rosewater were all my friends, and they did everything for me. When I came back from the west Edward Rosewater made a special trip to Washington to try to get me a contract. Would you find many men that would do that for you?"

Mr. Behm in 1878 married Miss Carrie L. Preston in Omaha. They have three sons, Frank Lee Behm, until recently a bailiff in the district court here, now lives in Seattle. Floyd L. Behm and Forrest E. Behm both live in Omaha. Another son, Fred Behm, jr., was killed in an accident a few years ago. Mr. Behm is a member of the Veteran Masonic association, the Grand Army of the Republic, the Union Veterans' union and the Eagles. He is proud of the fact that he voted for Abraham Lincoln and for every republican president since then. He also enjoys the distinction of being probably the youngest pioneer of Omaha, only 59 years old. He has had a remarkable business career. Though he did business in contracting amounting to more than $1,000,000, he never drew up or had drawn up for him a written contract and he never lost more than $30 on his collections. Contented, he lives in the city with which he has grown up and he has a philosophy all his own:

"I used to be a great church member, but I got to going fishing and I found it did me more good than going to church. I go out to Cut-Off lake every week now, generally Saturday afternoon and Sunday. I have a place out there and tackle and everything and I just fish. I love to do it and I don't believe the Lord is going to punish me for doing that."

Some Triumphs Wrought by Modern Surgery

IN the department of surgery, as opposed to that of pure medicine, advances have been made of a nature which today may well cause those who are acquainted with the state of medicine in the '60s and the '70s to rejoice in the improvement of surgical methods, and likewise to indulge in legitimate surprise at the rapidity with which improvements in treatment have been made. No doubt the surgeon has a great advantage over the physician in the sense that he comes more directly into contact with the disease states which it is the object of his science and art to cure or relieve. From the nature of his particular inquiries the physician literally has often to work in the dark. The surgeon, on the other hand, lays bare the seat of disease, and the great advance of the surgical art in modern times may be summed up in the statement that the modern surgeon has learned that practically no organ or tissue of the body is to be regarded as lying outside possible interference.

No better or more instructive example of this latter fact can be found than in the case of the brain. It certainly had long been known that persons who were suffering from head injuries, and who had lost a relatively considerable amount of brain substance in consequence, frequently recovered, and in many cases did not exhibit such marked failure of the mental powers as might have been expected when regard was had to the severity of the accidents. As a matter of fact, the brain itself is not an extremely sensitive organ, and head injuries mostly concern the surgeon from the point of view of the brain case itself, and not so much of the organ which that case is intended to contain and protect. Many instances are on record in which extremely severe brain injuries have been recovered from with a [illegible] faculty [illegible] even medical men. [illegible] hen [illegible] ith [illegible] ce [illegible] ic- [illegible] nt

Charles C[illegible] and broke his [illegible] was killed. This Jo[illegible] swered well to the descripti[illegible] man. As far as known he had n[illegible] or connections in Omaha.

aspect. In the first place, it was necessary to note the duties or functions performed by different parts of the brain. This knowledge came to us from the researches of various observers, and today, as a result of such investigations, we find the whole surface of the brain mapped out with accuracy in respect of the duties discharged by each part or area. I need hardly remark in passing that these areas do not correspond in any sense with the divisions one sees in a phrenological cast of the head. A new phrenology, if I may still use that term—that of science—has ousted the old.

The functions of the brain being known, it became an easy matter to diagnose or identify particular symptoms exhibited in brain diseases with affection of particular areas of the brain. Twitchings of certain groups of muscles, for example, are related to the part of the brain which covers these muscles, so that if the surgeon and physician together have reason to suspect that a special area of the brain is involved, say through the existence of pressure of a tumor, the surgeon can today safely cut down upon the spot, remove the tumor and not merely in many cases prolong life, but effect an absolute cure of the case. Such brain operations, in fact, represent one of the triumphs of modern surgery, rendered possible not merely, as in the case of the thyroid gland, by the definite and efficient research of science into the natural functions and duties of the brain, but also aided by the experience of the modern surgeon, and, I need hardly add, by the fact that through the action of chloroform and other anaesthetics the abolition of consciousness on the part of the patient is perfectly effected.

I can well remember when the membrane which lines the abdomen, and is reflected over its various organs—a membrane known as the peritoneum—was regarded by surgeons as a singularly dangerous structure in respect of its assumed liability when touched or irritated to pass into a state of inflammation. This view, through improved surgical practice, has been entirely exploded. The peritoneum today, in various serious operations, is practically as freely handled as is the skin, and very many serious internal diseases, especially of the nature of tumors, are removed with perfect safety to the patient. Indeed, the death rate from such operations presents today, in respect of its lowness, one of the most satisfactory testimonials of the perfection to which the practice of surgery has attained. This special aspect of the matter relates itself in a very marked manner to an ailment which of late days has become unfortunately only too well known by name to the public. I refer to appendicitis. The affection in question implies inflammation of a small rudimentary or vestigial organ attached to the first part of the large intestine. It undoubtedly represents in man the remains of a structure which in certain phases of lower life continues to be large. Subjected as it apparently is in modern civilized life to irritation of various kinds, arising from various sources, the appendix exhibits inflammatory action which, if not promptly treated, leads to serious results. The modern physician, as the result of his experience in other directions, fearlessly tackles the appendix and removes it. In this way thousands of lives are saved year by year which in former days were sacrificed to the natural fear of the surgeon to meddle with parts or to interfere in conditions supposed to be beyond the reach of human aid.

Even an organ like the heart, which might certainly be supposed to lie outside the sphere of the surgeon, has now come to be included within his province. Not so very long ago a case occurred in London where a man stabbed in the heart was taken to the hospital. The wound in the heart was duly sutured or stitched, and the patient made a perfect recovery. Surgery in this case undoubtedly saved the assailant from being indicted on the capital charge. The heart is, of course, a hollow muscle, and in the case of a wound of this organ everything must depend upon the particular part which has been injured. If a vital part, and one closely connected with what we may call the internal mechanism of the organ, has been touched, recovery, of course, is impossible; but where the substance of the heart itself alone has been affected surgery is enabled to place the patient in a condition favoring recovery; and this notwithstanding the apparently constant work of the organ. For example, last March a negro, 30 years of age, was treated for a wound of the heart in New York. To show how an otherwise severe injury may not necessarily be a fatal one, the patient in this case walked a certain distance to the hospital after being injured, and within forty-five minutes was operated upon. The wound was on the left side of the ventricle. After due treatment the patient recovered. In another case, reported at a German surgical congress, a wound of the heart was successfully treated, the injury being on the right upper cavity or portion of the heart. It is related that this wound in the heart was closed by three silk sutures; and, although the patient suffered from a complication of troubles thereafter, his recovery was perfect, and he was able to follow his trade, which was that of a butcher.

Surgeons know that in a certain number of cases where the heart has been injured patients may recover without any operation at all, this being, of course, due to the fact that the wound in the heart closes of itself, a result which, again, depends very materially upon the part of the organ affected. More extraordinary still are those accidents in which injuries to the heart have been inflicted by bullets. Here it might be assumed greater laceration or destruction of the heart-substance takes place. Yet many cases are known to military surgeons and others in which perfect recoveries have taken place as the result of efficient surgical treatment. Indeed, individuals are alive today who carry about embedded in their hearts bullets which have, so to speak, made

(Continued on Page Six.)