Story of Prosperity of a Sturdy Welsh Colony in Richardson County

NO colony in southeastern Nebraska ever played a more important part in the development of the new country than the Welsh who came to Richardson county, Nebraska, from Pomeroy, O., in the first three or four years following the civil war, settling in a community known as Prairie Union, northeast of where is now located Stella, and about ten miles west of the Missouri river. Preceding the Ohio Welsh there came here from Wisconsin three Welsh families, David Thomas and Thomas Higgins, who came together in 1859, and Daniel Davis who came in 1863. The Wisconsin Welsh made the entire journey by ox team. They at once began to prosper and were most enthusiastic over the new country. Reports by Mr. Higgins or Mr. Davis were sent to a Welsh paper (Drych) printed in New York, and it was the reading of these reports by the miners at Pomeroy that led to the coming here of the Ohio Welsh. A colony of thirteen families settled within a radius of five miles in the territory east of Prairie Union, a number of others at Salem and some at Brownville.

When Daniel Davis started from Wisconsin he represented his entire amount of cash; he had provisions for the journey, a yoke of oxen and a pair of cows. He died the morning of July 4, 1909, and left an estate worth $75,000. For forty-six years Mr. Davis lived continuously on the same farm. Of all the early Welsh settlers he had the reputation of being the most liberal giver, giving help wherever needed.

There was a big colony at Pomeroy of Welsh who had come over from the old country to work in the coal mines. As they had been here but a comparatively short time they did not enlist in the civil war, as did their American neighbors, so many of whom were away from home that the miners were paid higher wages than usual. During any time of idleness they discussed opportunities for investment in land and the best place to go. Alex McGechie, a Scotchman, and some of his Welsh friends from returning soldiers heard wonderful stories of the country about Chattanooga and Lookout Mountain in Tennessee and made a journey of investigation, but decided that section was better adapted to mining.

Rev. John T. James was an important personage in bringing the settlers to Nebraska from Pomeroy. He and Caleb Reese came to investigate in September, 1865, and contracted to buy 600 acres of land at $5 an acre. Reese and his family moved to Nebraska that same fall, taking up their residence at the old river town of Aspinwall, where soon after he was shot and killed at dusk one evening by a couple of drunken soldiers on the way to Fort Leavenworth. They stated they had mistaken him for a wolf. Mrs. Reese gave up her contract for the large tract, but bought and resided on a quarter section in the Welsh settlement. She died not long ago in Guthrie, Okl.

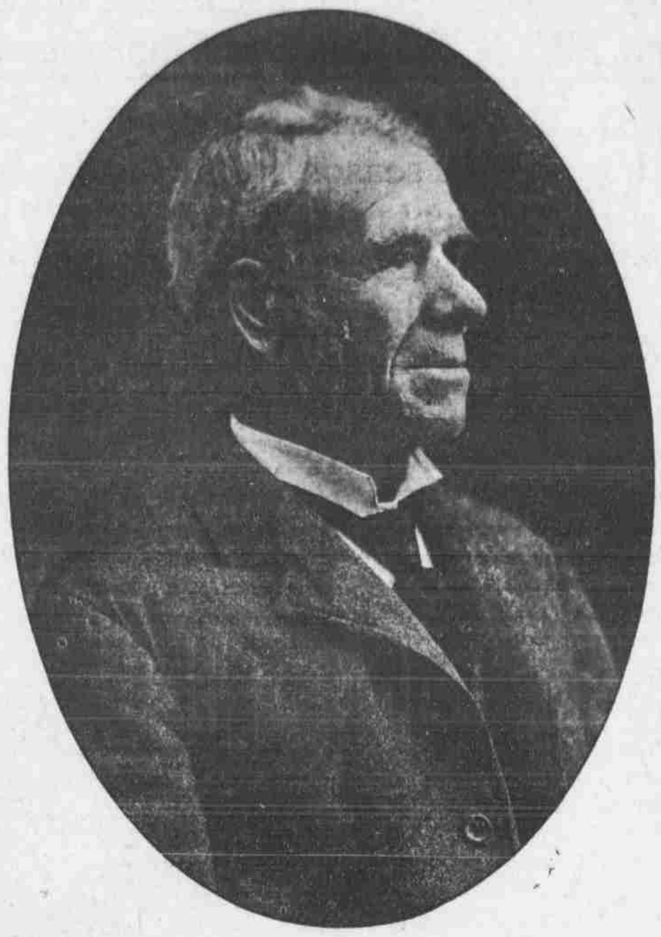
The wife of Rev. James was largely responsible for his western movement, as she had lived on a farm in the old country. She died in December, after his purchase here, but following her wishes to bring the sons up on the farm, he moved here the next summer.

Within the very next few years there came from Pomeroy the following twelve families, making thirteen in the settlement from the same place: David N. Jones, Alex McGechie, John M. Lewis, Richard Morris, Jonah Jones, Edmund Williams, David N. Jones, David R. Jones, Samuel Brimble, James Evans, Robert Roberts, David Phelps and John Owens. All were Welsh except Mr. McGechie. The trip was made by water, as Pomeroy was on the Ohio, and Aspinwall was made the landing point. At the time Mr. McGechie and others came, six weeks were spent on the boat. Two weeks of this time the boat was laid up on a sandbar, and three times on the journey the cargo was unloaded.

Of the fourteen men named there are but one survivor today, Alexander McGechie of Broken Arrow, Okl, who was 82 years old last April, and is still strong and well and keen of mind. Mrs. John M. Lewis of Shubert, who was 79 years old in August, is the only surviving wife who moved here with the homeseekers. David N. Jones, the last surviving head of a Welsh family among the settlers, died this week of dropsy at his home seven miles northeast of Stella. He was born in Wales in 1832, came to America in 1857, and had lived continuously on the same farm since the spring of 1866. His first marriage took place in Pomeroy, O., in 1860, and the wife died here in 1867 and was buried in Prairie Union cemetery, where more than forty-two years later, this week her husband was laid to rest beside her. He was married the second time in 1869 to Dorothy Bebbe of the Wisconsin Welsh. Of the pallbearers four were sons of the early Welsh settlers, who were his associates: Daniel Higgins, David Lewis, W. W. James and Morgan Williams; also Evan W. Evans and Thomas Edwards, two young Welshmen, who came into the community in an early day and became his friends. The death of his first wife was the first in the Ohio colony after Reese's. While Reese's death was tragic in the Ohio colony, among the Wisconsin Welsh there were also two tragic deaths. David Thomas had a friend here from Wisconsin and he was drowned while attempting to cross the Nemaha in a flat boat at Bennett's mill. He is buried at Prairie Union. Later Joseph Jones was drowned in a well at Liberty while drawing water.

Of the heads of the above families, Mr. McGechie is the only one who ever went from here to live elsewhere. It is rather a singular coincidence that as he and Mrs. Lewis are the only surviving heads of families that his only surviving son should be married to a daughter of Mrs. Lewis, and for the last four or five years he has resided with this couple on a farm near Broken Arrow in the old Indian territory, where he has large land holdings.

These pioneers prospered and their families were an honor to the community. Most of them, perhaps all, were of a devout religious nature; anyway, two Welsh churches were founded in the community. Prairie Union and Pennell, the latter during its existence being about two miles northeast of the former. The homeseekers were peaceable, quiet loving men. They stuck together like a band of brothers, helping one another until new machinery made the necessity less. Alex McGechie, to the southeast of the settlement, and Sam Brimble, to the northeast, have walked many and many a time through the tall, wet grass in the morning to do a day's binding of grain, and the same may be said of the other settlers.

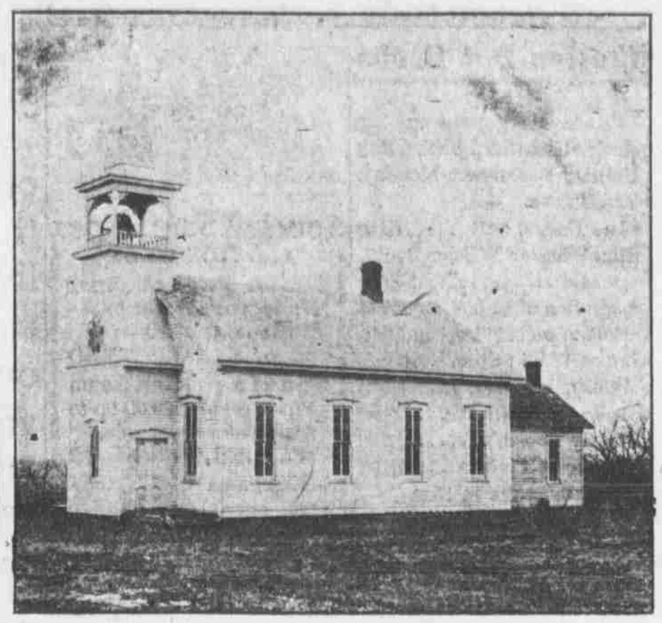


REV. J. F. JAMES.
From a photo taken when he was about 50, the only one now existing.

These early pioneers kept attracting other Welsh people from Ohio, and it is less than five years ago the last, A. E. Evans, now postmaster at Shubert, moved west to be near a son, John M. Evans, cashier of the Farmers' State bank of Shubert. Another son, at Auburn, W. L. Evans, is county superintendent of public instruction of Nemaha county. A big colony also came from Pomeroy and neighboring towns to Salem in an early day, among whom is Miles Jones, at one time superintendent of public instruction in this county. Another is Al Nace, a venerable river man at Brownville.

Thomas Higgins was a devout and pious man. It was his dream that there should be a Welsh settlement in the community, and a Welsh church be founded. The coming of the Ohioans made his dream come true. At first Sunday school was held in his residence, and so soon as Higgins' school house was built it was the place of holding Sunday school and preaching services; and next was Prairie Union church, built in the early '70's. Of the list of members appearing on the orginal church book, Mrs. Elizabeth Higgins of Stella, a daughter of Rev. James, is the only one who remains. Prairie Union was organized as a Welsh Baptist church, but as the younger people grew up it became English, and, although a county church, is today one of the strong Baptist churches of the state.

Prairie Union in itself is quite a little settlement. Four years ago the old church was struck by lightning and burned and a year later a modern church was dedicated in its place. The church has stained glass windows, is furnace heated and has its own lighting plant. Several of the farmers who are members attend church in automobiles and touring cars. There is a nice parsonage with an acre or two of land, a school and a cemetery, all within a short distance of the church; also the sexton's house. The cemetery is beautifully located and splendidly kept. The parsonage is always occupied by a minister. The community is bright intellectually and the young people have always had the privilege of the best schools in the country. At the present time Bert Evans is professor of electricity in the Colorado university at Boulder. A number of these pioneers, or their sons, helped to build a farmers' elevator at McCandless Siding so as to have a point nearer Shubert or Nemaha to market their grain.



ORIGINAL PRAIRIE UNION BAPTIST CHURCH.

PRAIRIE UNION CHURCH, STELLA, NEB.

Rev. James was instrumental in organizing the Welsh Baptist church of Pennell, the organization being later than Prairie Union. But with the passing of the activity of the elder Welsh this church became no more. Rev. James was a minister in Ohio, and also in the old country, yet he worked in the coal mines. A son, W. W. James, now mayor of Shubert, gave one acre of his farm for the location of Pennell church and cemetery. The church is no longer standing, but the cemetery is maintained, and when Rev. James died three years ago there he was laid to rest.

W. H. McGECHIE,
Prominent among the sons of the Welsh settlers and now a resident of Tulsa, Okl.

It was to the home of Thomas Higgins most of the pioneers went when first coming here. It is related of him that as he prayed in public he would often start in English, but as his zeal increased he would revert to his native tongue. In public, such as at farm sales, the Welsh made it a habit to converse with each other in English. Upon being asked the reason the reply was given that "No gentleman in company speaks in a language that others cannot understand."

These pioneers grew up as miners and none knew anything about farming as carried on in this country at that time. Many had never hitched a horse or knew how to turn a furrow. Consequently they learned by experience, and many are most amusing.

Of the sons who came here with their fathers, H. E. Williams, a merchant at Shubert, and W. W. James, are the oldest. Mr. James recalls a time when he crawled quite a distance through the grass, thinking to find a wolf, only to learn the noise he was following was made by a prairie chicken. He was nineteen when he came here. A few days ago in talking over their boyhood days, it was mentioned once when at Shook's mill at Hillsdale, Mr. Williams did not know how to back his team so as to get the wagon in the desired position.

The first public school was in the kitchen of John Henderson, who came from Wisconsin in 1859. One of his sons, Jack Henderson, resides in Stella, and a daughter, Mrs. Susie King at Shubert. Charles Peabody, a young man from the east was the teacher, and he was paid perhaps $30 a month. The school house at Prairie Union is known as Pioneer. The original school house is now used for a feed store in Shubert.

In the early days every one walked to church on Sundays. The pioneers believed after their horses had worked six days, they should then be given a day of rest. The roads at first were scarce more than a trail or path; often the grass was tall and wet or the path filled with dust, yet Mrs. Elizabeth Higgins recalls that it was the early autumn of the young ladies to go barefoot a part of the way, carrying shoes and stockings so as to protect them from dust or dew. Once she had a silk jacket of which she was very proud, but it was ruined one day on the way to church by a big grasshopper alighting on her back and eating a large round hole through the silk. She also recalls her first Fourth of July here. The day was spent at a big celebration at Hillsdale on the Missouri river. There was a barbecue, beef being roasted over the fire and distributed free among the merrymakers, and she laughingly tells of the young beaus walking about with a big chunk of roast beef in their hand, taking a bite every now and than. Mrs. Higgins was sixteen, when she came here and with her chum, Miss Maggie Jones, now Mrs. William Wilkingson of Lincoln, were the oldest girls in the settlement, and accordingly were very popular, in fact, they were the belles in a large territory. Mrs. Higgins, until her marriage three years later, was her father's housekeeper. Corn bread and sorghum were staple table food. Once she needed soda, and had to go about a mile to borrow at the home of David R. Jones. On the way, she saw two Indians coming on ponies. She was badly frightened and tried to hide in the tall grass. They saw her, but only grunted as they passed. Strapped to the saddle of each was half a hog with the hair still on. They had just raided some farm, and were making way with their stolen property. Singing school at the Higgins' school house was a great diversion of the pioneer young pedple, and many of the families intermarried, the courship being helped along by going to singing school.

There was a big grove, known as Hargler's, on the farm of Rev. James. The Indians had oeen in the habit of holding councils and camping in this grove, and it is said took precautions to protect it from fires. Along most of the streams, now covered with a good growth of timber, in those early days of the Welsh there was not a tree, owing to the frequent prairie fires. In this community some of the settlers, bought a small piece of timber land along the Missouri, there was, and still is, what is known as the "half breed line." This was a line at one time, marking the boundary of alotted lands set off by the treaty of Prairie du Ellucn, for half breeds and their decendents, including from the Otoes, Sioux, Poncas and Omahas. The line was between the two Nemahas, ten miles from their mouth at the Missouri. At first measurement was made by the actual course of the rivers, but this was not satisfactory to the "half breeds," as they believed it did not give them enough territory, and the survey was again made, the second time ten miles from the mouth of either Nemaha, to points on the rivers in a direct line straight as the crow flies.

When these pioners first came, the nearest railroad was St. Joe. Brownville was an important river point in those days and the settlers did much in their trading there, and also at Aspinwall.

Mrs. John M. Lewis of Shubert, her daughter, Mrs. W. G. McGechie; W. G. McGechie, jr., and William Olion McGechie.
FOUR GENERATIONS OF THE SETTLERS.

Andrew Johnson the Poorest of Presidents Yet Not a Taker of Gifts

THIS country has had five accidental presidents—John Tyler of Virginia, who succeeded to the office at the death of President William Henry Harrison; Millard Fillmore, who owed his elevation to the death of President Zachary Taylor; Andrew Johnson, who succeeded Lincoln; Chester A. Arthur, the successor of President Garfield, and Theodore Roosevelt, who was President McKinley's successor.

To Andrew Johnson belongs the distinction of having been the poorest of the presidents. Other presidents have been poor men, but he was unlike all others in that he went to the White House almost as poor as when he entered the legislature of Tennessee, while yet a jailor.

The earlier presidents were men of means, excepting the second and sixth, who were John Adams and his son John Quincy Adams, and who may be described as comfortably off. Tyler was a poor man with a large family, but his degree of poverty was so far removed from Johnson's that it appeared to be wealth by comparison. Tyler had a Virginia plantation and slaves to plant and harvest crops. Johnson owned his little tailor shop and his home at Greenville, Tenn., and the latter was scarcely more than a ruin. It had been used as a hospital by the confederates and was spared from complete destruction only because it served the purpose.

Come Up from People.

Many public men in this country have risen from humble surroundings, Jackson and Lincoln among the presidents being notable examples; but no man of national repute has sounded to the same degree the depths of poverty and obscurity that encompassed the early life of Andrew Johnson, yet no man has left a record of greater integrity. He was the personification of honest industry, and as boy and man he had a passionate hatred of debt. His enemies, and he had his full share, paid tribute to his honesty, and his bitterest foes, such as Isham G. Harris and Parson Brownlow of Tennessee, admitted that he had an invincible shield in his probity.

His attitude of dignified, cheerful acceptance of his fate from his boyhood made him strong friends. He never alluded to his poverty and never shirked the consequences of being poor. When he was a lad in Raleigh, N. C., his birthplace, he worked at any task assigned to him, and he uncomplainingly accepted his fate when his mother had him bound out as an apprentice to a tailor. The following is a copy of the document which indentured him:

State of North Carolina,
Wake County.

At a Court of Please & Quarter Sessions begun and held for the County of Wake at the Court house in Raleigh, on the third Monday of February, A. D., 1822, being the 46 year of American Independence, & the 18th day of February.

Present
The Worshipful
CHARLES L. HINTON,
NATHANIEL G. RAND,
MERRITT DILLARD.

It is "Ordered that Andrew Johnson, an orphan boy, the son of Jacob Johnson dec'd. 14 years of age, be bound to James I. Selby until he arrive to lawful age, to learn the trade of a Tailor."

Was Not An Orphan.

Why he should have been referred to as an orphan is inexplicable, because his mother and his stepfather were both living in Raleigh at the time. The popular idea that Johnson was the only son of a widowed mother is incorrect. He was her youngest son and she was not a widow dependent upon him until after the death of her second husband, which occurred near Greenville after Johnson had been elected to the legislature.

In the autumn of 1826, Johnson and his mother and stepfather went from Raleigh to Greenville. They traveled in a cart in which was carried all their household goods and they camped the first night in a lot which is now a part of his old home. As if led by some unseen hand Johnson selected the spot and then explored the village. It pleased him, and its nearness to the college made him desire to remain.

His mother was of Irish parentage. Her first husband, Jacob Johnson, was the janitor of the court house in Raleigh at the time Andrew Johnson was born. He died when the boy was very young and Andrew Johnson never knew a father's care or had a real home.

He was not yet 20 when he arrived in Greenville. The family had started to go to west Tennessee, where his oldest brother was living, but the young man saw in Greenville the place of opportunity for him and he refused to go further. In Greenville in May, 1827, he was married.

Romance in His Meeting.

Johnson's bride, Eliza McCardle, was the daughter of a widow, who sewed for a living. She lived on the pike leading from Jonesboro through Greenville, and the day that Johnson passed the house on his entrance into the village her daughter stood at a window of her home and, seeing Johnson, said to her mother: "There goes my sweetheart; that's the man I'm going to marry." Mrs. Patterson, the eldest child of the marriage and the idol of her father throughout his life, is the authority for this account of the meeting of her parents and also for the facts given in connection with her father's life in Greenville.

From 1827 to 1830 Johnson worked and studied, living in a log house of two rooms, one of which was his shop. At first his young wife helped him, doing the lighter work, such as sewing on collars and the like, but it was not long before the young tailor could hire help. He had all the best custom of the place and when he abandoned the business he had seven men in his employ.

He was twice elected alderman and then was sent to the legislature. While away his shop was run by his foreman, overlooked by Mrs. Johnson. When he was elected to congress he sold his trade, but not his shop, and no one ever occupied it after he left it.

He taught his young daughter to sew, and when she had learned to do good sewing he let her sew on the sleeves of coats. For this he paid her, carefully measuring her work and estimating its worth. She was put at school at the age of 6 years and knew how to read before that age. Her father had taught her, and as soon as she was started at school he studied with her.

Worked With His Daughter.

In after years she said of those days: "My father would sew all day until about dark, and then he would go out to meet me as I came home from school. We would walk together slowly to the house. At that time our home was separate from the shop. His invariable greeting was, 'Well, daughter, what have you learned today?' and I would tell him, and then repeat all that I could of the different lessons.

"After supper we would read over the lessons for the next day, and thus he studied my lessons, and learned them sometimes better than I did. If I knew my lessons better than the other girls sometimes I would be taunted with the remark, 'Oh, your father helps you.'"

All the way along his journey from obscurity to the White House, Johnson lived in an unpretentious and economical manner, studying every day and trying always to get knowledge from every one he met. The course he pursued of avoiding debt and cultivating a contented mind enabled him to live a comparatively care free life. When called to fill the highest office in the land he entered upon its duties poor but not oppressed with any sense of poverty.

His family remained in Tennessee for a long time after he and his oldest daughter took possession of the president's house, and when they were finally established there Mrs. Patterson had it under the same careful control that had characterized the governor's house at Nashville. She best knew the slimness of his purse, and she had all the ambitions for him that he had felt for himself.

Life in the White House.

It was with no little anxiety that they considered the management of the salary of the presidential office and the demands of a public nature that would be upon it. The one simple rule of his life he insisted should be carried out there, and a man never had a more loyal and faithful colaborer than this daughter.

Johnson had not the money-making spirit. He was too ambitious to let a love of money dominate him, and he treasured his personal independence as above all wealth. As president much was required of him and he was eager to meet all the requirements of his position. His family knew his wishes, and plain and unassuming though they were, they sustained the dignity of their positions, while his eldest daughter became a popular hostess.

The White House in the time of President Johnson's administration was a simply furnished and unpretentious place as compared with its present condition. All its appointments were plain, while its equipages consisted of a plain old coach and a general utility carryall. The president's family rode about Washington in a carriage that had done duty there since Buchanan's day, and it was driven by a colored coachman, whose only sign of livery was a high hat. Spartan simplicity characterized the stables, the kitchens and the drawing rooms. It never entered the thoughts of any one to wish that a new carriage was needed.

Declines a Present.

In the early days of his administration, before the shadow of the impeachment trial had fallen upon the president and while yet he had the good will of both political parties, some of his admirers in New York conceived the idea of making him a present. It was finally decided that a suitable carriage was most needed at the White House, and it was ordered to be made. A pair of horses was purchased to accompany the carriage to Washington.

To notify Johnson of the gift a large piece of parchment was selected and a suitable envelope was made to hold it. The letter, which is now published for the first time, was engrossed on the parchment and the names of the donors appear on it in three rows. The list, as will be seen, represents many of the leading bankers and merchants of that day. The letter was sent to Washington by a personal friend of President Johnson, a Tennessee union man, who, knowing him well, went with many misgiving as to the reception of the gift. The letter is as follows:

The undersigned citizens of New York take great pleasure in sending to Washington, by the Camden and Amboy R. R. cars, a coach, span of horses, harness, blankets, et cetera., respectfully asking Andrew Johnson, President of the United States, to accept the same as a token of their high appreciation of his fidelity to the country as a statesman, well approved by word and deed in all the various offices to which he has been called.

Hoyt Brothers.
Phelps, Dodge & Co.
J. S. Schultz.
Hoyt Brothers.
Hull, Southwick & Co.
John R. Lawrence & Co.
Wicksmith Co.
S. B. Chittenden.
Sprague C. Holbern.
Winslow Lanier & Co.
Chas. A. Meigs & Son.
Eugene Kelly.
A. A. Low.
Arthur Leary.
M. Armstrong & Son.
Hoover Calhoun & Co.
Horace B. Claflin.
Henry A. Smythe.
Lathrop, Ludington & Co.
Daniel S. Ross.
Daniel Drew.
Henry Clews & Co.
Wm. W. De Forest & Co.
E. A. Quintard.
Wilson G. Hunt.
Chas. H. Marshall.
Chas. B. Bosdick.
Arnold Constable Co.
William H. Fogg.
Edwin Hoyt.
Shepard Knapp.
Vermilye & Co.
Peter Hayden.
R. J. Baker.
William T. Blodgett.
Peter Cooper.
Hunt, Tillinghast & Co.
L. F. Morton & Co.
Ketchum, Son & Co.
Reeve, Case & Banks.
George H. Potts.

New York, May 17, 1865.

Johnson's Answer.

The answer that was returned was this:

WASHINGTON CITY, May 22, 1865.

Messrs. A. A. Low, Phelps Dodge & Co., Hoyt Bros., J. S. Schultz and others.

GENTLEMEN: I am in receipt of your very complimentary note dated New York, May 18, 1865, wherein you request my acceptance of a coach, span of horses, harness, etc., as a token of your high appreciation of my public course.

While I fully appreciate the purity of your motives in thus generously tendering me such substantial evidence of your regard, I am compelled solely from the convictions of duty I have ever held in reference to the acceptance of presents by those occupying high official positions to decline the offerings of kind and loyal friends.

The reisention of the parchment conveying your sentiments and the autographs of those who were pleased to unite in this manifestation of regard is a favor I would ask, and I assure you, gentlemen, I shall regard it as the highest mark of respect from any portion of my fellow citizens.

Trusting that I shall continue to merit your confidence and esteem in the discharge of the high and important duties upon which I have but just entered, and with best wishes for your health, etc., individually, I am, gentlemen, yours truly,

(Signed) ANDREW JOHNSON.

It is a fact that after the death of Andrew Johnson, but one present was in his family's possession. This was a silver service, consisting of a pitcher, a dozen goblets and a salver, given him by the union men of Nashville. These men were not a numerous body, and they had been closely associated with Governor Johnson in his reconstruction work in Tennessee. They asked permission to give him a token of their appreciation of his efforts before he left Tennessee, and he agreed to receive the offering in the spirit of comradeship in which it was offered. This gift was taken with him to Washington and was one of the features of the private dining room's decorations while he lived in the White House. It occupied a place of honor in his home in Greenville and remained in the possession of a grandson. The union men of Nashville were his personal friends and, as he was leaving then for an indefinite stay, he made their wishes his own, and this was the sole exception to his lifelong rule of independence in the matter of gifts.

It was said of him by his neighbors who had known him longest and best that he never borrowed a dollar in his life and never spent one that he had not first earned.

Mistletoe an Ancestral Link of Our Festival

THE use of mistletoe at Christmas time is one of the links connecting the Christian festival to one that was celebrated by our pagan ancestors. The earliest religion that can be attributed to the Aryans was simple nature worship, with the sun as chief deity. Among the Greeks and Romans, this worship has in historic times evolved into the pantheon of Jupiter and his fellow divinities, but traces of the original system can be distinguished.

In Gaul and adjacent lands inhabited by the Celts, the old religion retained its pristine characteristics, and under the name of Druidism received the study of Tacitus, Pliny, and other classical writers. Enough has been recorded by them to enable us, with the aid of the customs of the modern European peasantry, to reconstruct the ancient system.

The two principal festivals of the Druids were in June and December. The first occurred some days after the longest day of the year, when it could be noticed that the sun had ceased its upward climb in the heavens; the second followed the shortest day, when the people saw that the divine luminary had once more started its march to the zenith to bring back the spring. The first festival was a period of fear, the second of rejoicing. And they have both survived; one in St. John's day (midsummer), the other in Christmas.

In both these festivals a principal rite was the cutting of the mistletoe. Among the Aryans, the oak was always an object of worship, either because they came originally from a locality where the oak was the principal tree, or because, as records prove, the oak was at one time far more plentiful in Europe than it is today.

Now among these primitive Aryans the only way to obtain fire was by rubbing two sticks together. As this practice was started where only oak trees grew, it came to be thought than only such wood was suitable for the act. Even to this day in the various nooks and corners of Europe, where annual fires are lighted, such as on Hallowe'en, the fire is usually brought out by rubbing oak wood. Our primitive ancestors, therefore, conceived the fire as being inherent in the oak, like a miraculous kind of sap, and consequently, they found a mystical connection between oak and sun, the divine fire.

Therefore, when they noted this strange plant growing out of the oak, belonging neither to earth nor sky and derived its sustenance from no visible source, they concluded that here was the essence of the oak. Hence, it was regarded as sacred and gifted with strange powers. When cut, it was not allowed to touch the desecrating earth, but white cloths were spread beneath it.

Cutting of the mistletoe was also probably the signal for festivities that culminated in an unlicensed saturnalia, as is suggested by a custom that formerly prevailed in New York on Christmas Eve, when the high altar was laden with mistletoe.—New York Post.