

Well, we are in Omaha. Though some three or more railways now span the northern half of this continent, yet the city of Omaha must for ever be associated with overland travel. Take away Omaha and the Union Pacific from the stories of western travel and you take away all that is romantic, poetic and interesting from the great plains and the magnificent mountains. With this route is associated the exodus of the Latter-day Saints from the Egypt of Illinois, the terrible rush of the California gold hunters, the expedition of Fremont, and also that of Lewis and Clark.

The history of Omaha as a town or city is said to begin in 1853. A party of explorers located at Kanesville across the river conceived the idea of investigating the country on the Nebraska side for a town site. They did, and Omaha was laid out. To one Jesse Lowe is attributed the privilege of naming the town. The first grave dug in Omaha is said to have been for an old squaw. Whether the enterprising founders really killed her to start a graveyard, or whether they bought her for the purpose history sayeth not. At all events the guide-books quote a stanza from one of Whittier's peg-legged poems in commemoration of the occurrence:

Behind the squaw's light birch canoe,
The steamer smokes and raves;
And city lots are staked for sale
Above old Indian graves.

Yes, and if the modern land hunter was not held in check he would stake lots over the graves of Washington and Patrick Henry, and would turn Benjamin Franklin's tomb into a cowshed.

In Omaha in 1856 there was what we would today call a real estate boom. Owners of corner lots were afraid they could not ask enough for their property, and to give without hesitation the price asked for a lot was almost to break a real estate agent's heart. It is supposed that in those days real estate agents did have something which approximated to hearts. But booms like many other sublimary things pass away, and in 1857 the Omaha land owner who the year preceding was accounted a millionaire could not in 1857 buy himself a plate of soup.

The Pike's Peak gold excitement in 1859 once more resuscitated Omaha. Up to 1867 the stage coach and the river steamer were the only connection with the outside world. The C. & N. W. was the first to reach the Missouri River. Its first train arrived January 17, 1867. The great overland road was completed May 10, 1869, and the bridge at Omaha had its last piece of iron fastened in its place February 20, 1872.

We are on the Union Pacific at last. We are whirling away from Omaha and out into the great west. No more Indians, no more buffalos, no more prairie fires to alarm timid passengers. Here and there we meet thrifty looking towns, and again we light on slovenly looking villages, with knots of persons unkempt, unwashed and uncombed. However, one cannot help thinking over the names of those persons con-

nected with the original projection of the road. There are Carver, Wilkes, Benton, Whitney, Burton, Plumbe and others. Though a highway of this kind was talked of as far back as 1836, yet it was not until after President Young and his people demonstrated that not alone a route over the plains but a residence on them was practicable, that the United States government took any active measures to explore the country. Fremont and others held that nothing civilized could exist beyond the valleys of the Missouri River.

The truth is that to the "Mormons" may justly be attributed the construction of the road. On their journey through the plains they made close topographical observations, and never for a moment entertained the idea of the impracticability of a Pacific railroad. In the "memorials" of the Legislative Assembly of both the State of Deseret and of the Territory of Utah will be found many pertaining to the Pacific road, and demonstrating to Congress the possibility of accomplishing such a work. Even in the proceedings of the first Assembly meeting of the State of Deseret in 1849 one such will be found. And again we find a memorial praying for a mail route from the Missouri River to Salt Lake City approved March 3, 1852, by the Governor and Legislative Assembly of Utah. We find again a "Memorial to Congress for the construction of a military road from the mouth of the Platte or Nebraska River to Sacramento, California," approved January 21, 1853. We find again a "Memorial to Congress in relation to the Pacific Railway," approved January 14, 1854. In this memorial Congress is twitted on its dilatoriness in acting on a project which at this time admitted of no doubt. This memorial recommends the initial point at Council Bluffs City, thence to the main Platte, thence to Box Elder, Medicine Bow Butte, and Bridger's Pass. The memorial shows that close study was given to this matter by the people of Utah, and that they desired a road. So, after all, it is to the much-reviled "Mormon" we owe the Pacific railroad, to him we owe the gold of California, and to him we owe the reclamation of the sagebrush territory to fields of waving corn and golden wheat. No doubt but it was owing to the repeated importunings of citizens and representatives from Utah, that Congress made its appropriation for the exploration of the Far West in 1853, in order to ascertain if it were really practicable to build a road to the Pacific. In 1854, \$190,000 additional was appropriated for the same purpose. It was not until Nov. 5th, 1865, that ground was broken for the Union Pacific road. There was grading already done, but the official act occurred on this date. But strangest of all things in this strange age, one never hears the name of George Francis Train mentioned in connection with neither the road nor Omaha.

Whether any of the persons employed in the construction of this

road ever published a diary or not, I cannot say. If such were kept and published it would doubtless make sensational reading. Though, perhaps, it were better if be left in obscurity. An unbroken record of five years of sin and crime would not figure very morally as the bases of one of the greatest triumphs of modern engineering.

At length we glide into the Platte Valley, and can indulge in reminiscences of olden times. We can sigh over the decadence of the bull-whacker and his loud-resounding whip and double-barreled oaths. We can mourn the decense of the Red man and his co-existent creature, the buffalo. In fact, if one is so inclined he has a wide realm for sentiment, fancy and imagination, and if he takes the trouble to acquaint himself with the history of his route, he will store an inexhaustible fund of future anecdote and adventure. We glide into North Platte, an apparently flourishing town, constructed without attempt at art, design or taste. Saloons and boarding houses seem the main industry. No less than half-a-dozen persons in white aprons and in short sleeves are ringing monotonous bells, making a hideous clatter and most infernal discord. I am reminded of Lord Dunsen's trip over the plains. His Lordship saw the country as ordinary travelers do, and as he relates his experience in graphic words, I will quote:

"Very curious are these small settlements, some of them consisting of only two or three adobe houses, or of a few wooden shanties and a pumping engine to supply water; others being large villages or small towns. They look as if Providence had been carrying a box of toy houses, and had dropped the lid and spilt out the contents on the earth. The houses have all come down right end uppermost, it is true, but otherwise they show no evidence of design; they are scattered about in every conceivable direction, dumped down anywhere, apparently without any particular motive or reason for being so situated. The chief peculiarity noticeable about these little settlements and their inhabitants is that on the approach of a train everybody rushes to the front of his house and rings an enormous bell. The Chinese do the same on the occasion of eclipses and other natural phenomena in order to frighten away malignant spirits who cause them. But these dwellers of the plain ring their bells to induce travelers to come and look at the inside of a cup of what is called coffee for 10 cents."

If you are in a mood for moralizing drop off at North Platte and remain a few days in the town and vicinity. Buffalo Bill's is not far from here. And perhaps you may meet "Cold Turkey Bill" and the "Pike" and several others distinguished characters of the plains. You may meet some surviving hero of the period when the road was being built. He can enliven you with many stories of white desperadoes and Indian scalpers. You will find an occasional trapper of the olden time, who will regale you