

# PARADISE, O PARADISE.

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There has been lying dormant in my system for a period a story—a fairly good one, I think. It has come to me that with proper local tinting it may be so colored as, though not exactly “History herself as seen in her own workshop,” yet sufficiently clothed to pass the censorship and be received by the Historical Society under the title of near-history. It concerns early happenings in our district and by this sign may prove acceptable.

By the way, why, except as in logical consonance with our title, should we be strictly held in our papers, to historic composition? The highbrows do not seem to set much store by Clio. Hear them:

“With history I have no patience at all, because it always contradicts the very things I have seen and known.”—Blackmore.

“History is a pageant and not a philosophy.”—Birrell.

“In history.....we lost sight of truth in the desire to make it truer than itself.”—Froude.

“As for history, it is after all but a gazette; the truest is full of falsehood; and it can have not merit but that of style.”—Voltaire.

“With the most positive testimony, history can claim only more or less probability.”—Volney.

“Books of history that do not lie are stupid.”

“History is not a science, it is an art; in it one succeeds through imagination.”—Anatole France.

A little rough on history; but here is our salvation:

"It is as useless to quarrel with history as with the weather."—Whitman.

So, pinning my faith to Walt, I submit my blend of story and history to your decision—thus:

Late in the twenties and early in the thirties a company of young, practical scientists engaged in the then novel enterprise of surveying, locating and constructing a railroad across country for a distance of some eighty miles. Railroads of less importance were already in operation in different localities of the country, but this was the first work of like extent undertaken in the State of Pennsylvania. Of the men who essayed this task and in its performance worked out on the ground the then unfamiliar problems of railroad engineering, a number came to be the eminent civil engineers who afterwards grid-ironed the State with the great through routes of rail and waterway which developed the agricultural, mineral and manufacturing resources of the commonwealth.

Among these young engineers was Samuel W. Mifflin, a native Columbian, whose after-professional career was distinguished, embracing service with the major railroads of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and New England, as well as under the United States Government in harbor work on the Great Lakes. He located a considerable mileage of the difficult mountain division of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and was regarded as one of the greatest locating civil engineers of the country. His minor work covered a large area of our own county.

Another noted local man of this company was Joshua Scott, afterward the eminent surveyor of Lancaster county, whose map of his territory is justly esteemed for its wonderful topographical exactness. (May I be permitted a little personal testimony to the merit of this work, in the year 1854, I, a cub civil engineer, was turned loose with this Scott's map as a guide—no previous pioneer examination of the proposed route—to find a practicable line for an intended coal-carrying cross-country railroad from Columbia, on the Susquehanna, to tidewater on the Delaware; and by grace of Joshua Scott, his map, I succeeded in locating my division, extending through Manor, Conestoga, Pequea, Providence, Drumore and Colerain townships, to the border of Chester county, to the satisfaction of my chief, Mr. Mifflin. That the road was never built, more is the pity, had cause in financial stress.)

To get back to my main theme: The proposed route through the garden of the State—the counties of Philadelphia, Montgomery, Delaware, Chester and Lancaster—thickly settled, was furnished with many public stopping places; yet for convenience and possibly for economic reasons, the accommodation of the farmhouses was sought, and, as a rule, cheerfully granted. The good-will of the farmers was essential to the comfort of the engineers, and, in a measure, to the success of the undertaking. With the general believers in and supporters of the enterprise, were, of course, the doubters and skeptics; but the uncontrovertible believer was the exception. Among the fertile fields of Lancaster county was found one

of the few "intransigents," whose reply to a polite request for the loan of a bucket was: "You may all go to h—l!" The ready-witted axeman, or chainman, or whatever—the emissary—answered: "Thank you (the flip-pant "Thanks!" was not then the formula), we expect to sleep in Paradise to-night." The party had arranged for quarters in the little village of that name.

In due course of time—no "making the dirt fly" with steam shovels in those days—the road was completed, connecting Philadelphia on the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers with Columbia on the Susquehanna, and was known as the Columbia and Philadelphia Railroad. It was built and owned by the great State of Pennsylvania, which, satisfied to test by half the problem of State ownership, wisely decided not to "work" its new acquisition, but to supply the motive power and leave the accommodation of the expected traffic and travel to private enterprise.

The early operation of the road—the "railroading" technically—would supply an interesting theme; the initial horse-motive-power; the primitive railway carriages (fair imitations of the stage coach of the period—"Billy Hull's Chicken Coops," so disrespectfully known); the stone block sleepers in place of cross-ties; the strap rails spiked to longitudinal timber stringers; with many other peculiarities of line and equipment. But that is another and larger affair. This operation of the road was almost a go-as-you-please. Any man or company able and willing to provide the cars and pay the tolls was free to "run the road."

With varying fortunes these indi-

vidual or corporate enterprises were conducted, and the survival of the fittest amply served the needs of trade and travel over the route. The passenger carriage eventually narrowed to the "Red" or the "Eagle" and the "Blue" or "Pioneer" lines, respectively Democrat and Whig—for in those good, old strenuous times politics meant "principles" (otherwise, birthright prejudice), not necessarily public plunder—and the man who did not ride as he voted was anathema. One of the trials of my early faith was the free ride of my chum on the "Red," while I had to pay my fare on "Devil Dave" Miller's "Blue." The State exacted a capitation tax on passengers carried over its road, and its politics being then Democratic, the Whig conductor was restricted in granting passes, while the liberality of its rival was indulgently winked at. That this percentage might be duly assessed, each train carried beside the competing "Agents"—that was the name then—a neutral "State Agent," whose eye was supposed to check the number of passengers; a forerunner of the street-car "spotter" of later date. Why kept tab on the syndicate of three, unless it was the recording angel, tradition does not tell.

The opening of this route stirred to enterprise the hitherto sleepy community, and the village on its course which didn't have a "line," or, at least, individual freight cars, was exceptional. The inscriptions: "Leech's Line," "Union Line," "Pioneer Line," and the like, indicating the various ownership of the passing cars, became as familiar to the dwellers along the railroad as the natural features of the landscape, or as their houses and barns.

In the final location and construction of the road our hospitable Paradise had been left some half-mile to the south, and a spur track had been built by the private enterprise of a "live" citizen, connecting his warehouse with the main line. Up and down the railway, with hundreds of others, ran his freight cars, on which was blazoned: "Witmer—Paradise."

Naturally, the western terminus of the road, Columbia, at that time a town of some thousands of inhabitants, prospered. Here was the depot for "up-river" products—grain, spirits, and especially lumber in its several rough-manufactured forms. This traffic was by raft and "ark" on the spring and fall freshets of the Susquehanna river in assemblage, and by Conestoga wagons in distribution, mainly via the Lancaster and Susquehanna turnpike. The town, admirably situated for internal trade, had the great advantage of a bridge over the wide river, thus commanding the wagon-route between east and west. The citizens were enterprising, as shown by the influence which fixed the western terminus of the railroad at this point; and the coming of the iron way greatly enhanced the business and swelled the population of the town.

The lumber interest, already important, at once largely increased, and the terminal mile of rails was laid between ranks of piled lumber—millions of feet of "sawed stuff"—boards, joists, rafters, lath, etc., etc., of pine and hemlock. The main depot for "timber" was Marietta, though some "spar" and hewn-timber rafts tied up at the Columbia shore—there were then few improved wharves. With the opening of the

Pennsylvania canal, another State work, supplemental to the railroad already in operation, terminating at Columbia, the navigation of the Susquehanna by "arks" practically ceased, and the river floods brough only rafts. These found market with the many large dealers of the town, and the handling of this immense supply of rough lumber was the chief labor problem of the place, supplying abundant work for the numerous colored citizens of the "Hill."

The washing, "drawing," inspection and piling of lumber went on for weeks, giving life to the usually quiet river banks. The inspection consisted of the separation of the lumber into grades and the marking of its superficial feet, board measure, and was the work of experts. The labor of washing and drawing was exhausting, but was carried on at high pressure, generally under contract by a boss of the same complexion as was the colored working force, whose word was law. One exceptionally compelling taskmaster boasted: "Some niggers wucks dar men from sun to sun; I wucks mine from stah to stah!" And they were a happy, contented lot, willing to work. They refrained from dissipation during the season; but, work-time over!!! They tramped homeward at evening through the alleys, at speed, singing in concert—the mellow song of the negro—suggesting their former plantation custom.

This great lumber trade brought into the town on the spring floods always, and on the fall rise whenever favoring Providence sent the latter rains, a motley and picturesque horde of raftsmen—pilots, steersmen, hands—locally known as "Yankees." They

came from the upper tier of Pennsylvania and the lower tier of New York counties, bordering the headwaters. Their dialect was the stage New England vernacular, a trifle exaggerated, if possible. The unwieldy craft were steered from the front end—one can scarcely call it bow—and the managing of the long front and rear oars, or sweeps, was important and arduous in the many “breaks,” falls and currents of the rock-studded river in flood. The crews came from the affluents where the lumber was sawed and the rafts confectioned; and at Columbia the pilots for the lower river took charge with their own relief of hands. From here the run was to “Port” (Port Deposit), and was generally made in part of a day. At that time there was no “port” railroad or Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal for return travel, so the crews “footed” in back to Columbia, ready for the next day’s trip. In the year 1854, the writer on a projected railway survey along the face of the river hills westward from Safe Harbor, found what was known as the “Yankee path,” a firm trodden path on the face of turkey hill, sometimes climbing to the summit to avoid such impassable cliffs as “the Buz-zard.” This path may still exist.

To accommodate this transient influx, in addition to the large and excellent stores of merchandise for their generous trading, were many inns, especially in Front street, where the prevailing drought found irriguous relief in a fairly sound article of “rye.” Away up at the west end lay the Canal Basin, a section apart, where the great transportation companies had their warehouses for the trans-shipment of freight. Here, too, tav-



erns were plentiful, for accommodation of the canal boatmen, another and different tough crowd, which passed back and forth during the entire season of canal navigation. These men, earning a smaller wage than the liberally-paid rivermen, were served with a proportionately cheaper and more potent drink.

Among the old inhabitants of the place was a good citizen with a family of sons and daughters of varying degrees of respectability. Of distinguishing idiosyncrasy was one boy—the black sheep of the flock. He was utterly worthless; had lovable qualities withall to which some of his kin were absolute strangers; and he was without an enemy in the town. He was well-grown in his upper teens when I, a slip of a boy, saw, like Joshua, of old, the sun stand still, and felt “the polar axis grind” and the jar as the earth paused in its roll and my heart in its beat, when he skated into the Susquehanna, well out towards the middle of its mile-wide stream. The Good Genius which watches over children falling from upper windows, and over the drunkard in his devious and wayward career, was on his job, and buoyed up the vaurien as he broke his way to solid ice and safety. A really good boy would have drowned. The fellow did not even take cold—possibly preserved by the inner warmth which had led him into his foolhardy risk.

Of course, his was a hopeless case; the more so that when he “broke out” he abandoned the comparatively innocuous exhilarant of his own neighborhood and sought the “fire-water” of the canal basin. On one of these outbreaks, on a balmy night of summer, he headed homeward very

late, and, having enough remaining sense to realize that it was an undue hour to attempt the shelter of home, wandered to the "board yards," climbed one of the highest piles—some twenty feet—stretched himself on the springy boards, rolled off to a lower pile and slept the sleep of innocence.....

The morning broke with an angry east. A fiery beam burst through the crimson curtain and shone full upon the face of the sleeper. As he struggled to consciousness, the Basin whisky was rightly punishing the sins of overnight. Hades was not in that day the discredited slum it has since come to be. In the fiery glow of sunrise the sinner recognized the undying flames promised as his portion, and realized that he was then receiving all that was coming to him. He gathered strength to turn from the curdling terror. He rolled over, and there, a few feet from his eyes, he read the legend: Witmer—Paradise; the agonized face relaxed; a grateful smile broke over it, and, with a fervently breathed, "Paradise! Thank the Lord!" again he slept as a little child.

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