

9-1-1921

Comment

John C. Parish

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)



This work has been identified with a [Creative Commons Public Domain Mark 1.0](#).

Recommended Citation

Parish, John C. "Comment." *The Palimpsest* 2 (1921), 298-300.
Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol2/iss9/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

Comment by the Editor

TEETH AND CIVILIZATION

A few days ago we were looking over some Indian skulls which had been dug up from the mounds in the neighborhood of Lake Okoboji, and we were greatly impressed with the condition of the teeth. They were sound and white and regular. No dentist would have been needed, for there were no holes to fill. True, the teeth were not all there, and it may be that there were holes in the ones which had dropped out in the course of a few hundred years; but we are inclined to think that in general the primitive Indian had much better teeth than has the modern white man, and that the difference is due to a civilization that has had for its aim the making of life — and eating — an easy and pleasant affair.

The dog who forages for his own food seems to have good teeth, and we believe the cat who is a mouser is likely to have better teeth than the lap-cat of an effete household. We hear often nowadays of the tigers and crocodiles which have become domesticated and pampered in the big zoos, needing to have their teeth attended to by dentists, but we have heard of no dentist going to Africa to fill cavities for tigers and crocodiles in the wild state. Without doubt this is because animals who forage for their

own food and do not have it prepared for them, need no dentists.

We believe that the pioneers who had less finely-ground flour than we have to-day, and more foods that required dental exercise, had also better teeth. Theodore S. Parvin tells us that during the session of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa in 1840, a traveling dentist from one of the New England States first crossed the river and interviewed members of the legislature. He found so little need for his services that he gave up the profession and settled down to the occupation of a fruit-grower. This is only circumstantial argument for the presence of good teeth in 1840, but we give it for what it is worth.

In like manner we call attention to the fact that the United States Census for 1860 credits Iowa with a population of nearly 675,000, but there were only 76 dentists to serve this multitude. Incidentally there were over 1400 physicians, all of whom probably took undue pride in the fact that the Census showed only four undertakers in the State.

TWO MILES A DAY

We have found out how to annihilate time and space, and offset the law of gravity when we travel; we have learned to eat without an effort and have evolved a thousand contrivances to minister to our bodily comfort. But we are losing our teeth and our hair and our contentment at one end and our powers

of locomotion at the other, while we develop too largely in between. The early fur trader and the explorer could go into the wilds with a gun and ax and a few pounds of provisions and face primitive conditions with equanimity. How many could do it to-day? The pioneer settler, with few implements, broke the wilderness and established a home. He made little ado about a walk of ten or fifteen miles; but to-day a Kansas City man strives to better mankind by organizing a walking club of men who will exert themselves to the extent of walking two miles daily.

We sometimes wonder if civilization does not bring physical degeneration, and if man's historic struggle to make life easy has not simply made him less of a man.

J. C. P.