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A Reminiscence

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A Reminiscence

The *Blizzard* and the *Early Cabins*, in the PALIMPSEST of January, convey to the reader of this generation a vivid impression of the courage, initiative, and self-dependence of the Iowa pioneers.

My father built 82 years ago the log house in which one of my brothers, my sister, and I were born and reared. It was a two story structure, the bed rooms above were reached by a common rung ladder. The roof was of clapboards, kept in place by poles secured at the ends by wooden pins. This roof shed the summer rains but the winter snow was sifted in by the keen winds, and many a morning I stepped out of bed into several inches of snow on the floor. Later on my father had the cabin weather-boarded and lathed and plastered inside. But the original logs are there yet, sound as ivory. Mr. Boarts, the present owner, a few years ago had occasion to cut an opening through the side and gave the pieces of the logs to my brother. They were white oak and hickory, and he sent me canes made of each kind. The cooking was done by the fireplace by my mother until finally a stove was found in Muscatine, and when it was put in operation the neighbors came to see it as a curiosity and a reminder of their old Eastern homes.

In those frontier days all were of equal fortune, all worked and saved. The clothing fabrics were

substantial. My father wore a suit of Indian tanned buckskin, and later on we had the homemade blue jeans made into garments by my mother. I would like a suit of it now.

There was a story told of one of those pioneer women and her granddaughter, who asked, "Grandma, you were here in the early days?" "Yes, I was a pioneer." "Well, were you poor?" "Yes, we were all poor." "Couldn't you have what you wanted?" "No, I could not." "Did you have no meat?" "No, nothing but venison, wild turkeys, prairie chickens and quails." "Did you have no sugar?" "Nothing but maple sugar." "What did you want that you couldn't get?" "It was New Orleans molasses and salt mackerel."

The blizzard of 1856 swept over Johnson County and one settler in Pleasant Valley froze to death and one in Liberty township had both hands frozen off. Those were years of adventure, stress, strain, and trial, yet the pioneers were happy and I do not recall a single expression of discontent, envy, or repining. It is a pity that the frontiers are all gone.

JOHN P. IRISH