

## Eliphalet Price

Samuel Murdock

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## ELIPHALET PRICE.\*

BY THE LATE HON. SAMUEL MURDOCK.

We met in early life upon the border, where the civilized and savage commingled to pursue a common road, and for more than a third of a century he was my neighbor and my friend, and what I have here to say over his past life is but a tribute I owe to his distinguished worth.

Neither in the history of our own country, nor in that of any other civilized nation of the globe, has there ever been another half century of human affairs in which there has been so much progress and development, in all the avocations of human life, as the one that now closes the career of our lamented friend.

He saw the country from the great lakes to the Pacific ocean a wilderness and peopled alone by the hunter, and the savage, and he saw the same territory rapidly converted into states and peopled by a race of men who have converted it into blooming farms and fertile gardens; and established over all a government and a civilization based upon the principles of exact justice and self-government, the greatest and perhaps the grandest the world ever saw.

In nearly all of this development of empire, of human progress, settlement, and western civilization, with all their attendant excitements, turmoils and passions, our old friend was an ever constant, prominent and untiring worker, and to write the history of such a man, to do justice to his name and memory, and to carry him through all the varied scenes and

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\*Up to the time of his removal to Colorado there was no more commanding personality in the northeast quarter of this State than Hon. Eliphalet Price. Upon the occasion of his death Judge Murdock, of Elkader, wrote this interesting sketch of his life, which was published in a local newspaper. It is deemed most fitting to reproduce the sketch in these pages as a part of the history of that section of the State.—EDITOR OF THE ANNALS.

struggles of the last half century of western life, in which he was connected, would require volumes, instead of a newspaper article.

The history of Iowa and the development of civilization in this great valley can never be correctly written without his name being in the front rank of those who contributed the service of a long life to the establishment of everything that has proved beneficial to existing races and their posterity; and I must leave it to the pen of him who may come after me, and who in future years may seek to write of the rise, progress and development of American civilization to do more, and content myself and your readers with a few of the leading, prominent features and acts of his eventful life.

He was born in Jersey City, in the State of New Jersey, on the 31st day of January, 1811, and as he grew up he received from his father the rudiments of a common education, and when about 18 years of age his father took him to New York City and bound him as an apprentice to learn the trade of a painter.

This old relic of feudal times, called master and servant, still forms one of the chapters of the law of "domestic relations," and although it has nearly vanished from western civilization, it still clings with force to the institutions of the older states, and at the time we speak of it was in its full force and vigor in the State and city of New York, and was often made the pretense for the very worst acts of tyranny and oppression by the master over the apprentice.

Here, however, was a field for the genius of our friend and he soon accomplished a thorough organization of all the apprentices of the city into a strong society, with a constitution and by-laws that taught the most tyrannical master that they had rights which he was bound to respect.

This society soon raised a sum of money with which they purchased a fine library of all the leading works of that day and it was here that our old friend laid the foundation of that classical and historical knowledge which made him famous in after years as a writer and a scholar of no ordinary capacity.

Vicissitude and misfortune, however, overtook his old master, and he absolved young Price from his indenture and this threw him upon the world to make his own way through life.

About the beginning of the year 1831 he arrived in the city of Philadelphia and became the local editor of a paper called *The Market Exchange*, and in this capacity he soon brought himself into notice by his witty and spicy articles, many of which are more witty and mirthful than those of Ward or Nasby. But he soon tired of this work, and looking about for wider fields for his talent, in the fall of that year he repaired to Washington City.

General Jackson was at that time President of the United States, and the Senate and House were then represented by such men as Clay, Webster, Calhoun, Adams and others, who have now, like himself, passed away, but whose deeds will live forever. He remained here through two sessions of Congress, heard all these great and distinguished men from time to time discuss great national questions, and formed an intimate acquaintance with many of them that ended only with their lives.

He left Washington some time in 1832, with the design of seeing the far west and exploring the valley of the Mississippi; traveled on foot to Pittsburg, and after recruiting his wearied limbs, embarked on a steamer for Cincinnati. After remaining in this city for a short time he took passage on a steamer for New Orleans, and when he arrived in the latter city he found a large number of its inhabitants stricken down with the cholera.

Here for the first time since he left New York he found himself among strangers and without a cent in his pocket, with a dangerous and fatal disease raging around him. He repaired to the wharf in hopes to find some craft that would take him beyond the limits of that fatal scourge. At the wharf he found a steamer with her clerk on shore checking goods that were being shipped upon her, and upon inquiry the clerk informed him that they were loading for the lead mines of Galena, and requested him to take his place at the

plank and check for him a few minutes while he procured a little medicine from a neighboring drug store.

This he gladly did, and very soon the captain of the boat came along and discovered that his clerk was absent and a new man in his place, when he immediately followed his clerk to the drug store, only to find that he too had just died of the fearful disease.

Returning in a few moments to his boat he immediately engaged the services of our lamented friend as his clerk for the trip. Never was a service more gladly accepted or more faithfully performed, and in due time we find our young friend in Galena, looking about for some vocation that would give him a living.

But to him in his youthful days "fields always looked greener when they were far away," and he turned his steps towards Iowa, arriving in Dubuque some time in the fall of 1832.

It will be remembered that on the 21st of September, 1832, the Sac and Fox Indians had ceded to the United States a strip of land about fifty miles wide, extending from Missouri to the mouth of the Little Iowa. This treaty was to take effect on the first day of June, 1833, but as soon as the terms of it were known hundreds of men rushed across the great river, took up claims and began prospecting in the lead mines of Dubuque.

The Indians protested against this inroad, and Gen. Zack. Taylor, who was then commanding at Fort Crawford, and who was afterwards elected President of the United States, was ordered to proceed to the purchase and drive out the settlers. This order he executed to the letter and our old friend with others was compelled to leave the Territory.

Like all the others, he hung upon the border, and on the expiration of the time he returned to Dubuque and was among the first white men who made a legal settlement within the limits of what is now the great State of Iowa.

In the fall of 1834 he, in company with a party of hunters, explored the valley of the Turkey, and being enraptured with its romantic scenery, its rich and fertile prairies and its

rippling stream, he determined to make the valley his future and permanent home.

Returning to Dubuque to fulfill a contract he had entered into with Father Mazzuchelli to build for him a Catholic church, he again, in the fall of 1835, returned to the valley of the Turkey, and in company with C. S. Edson, a person well-known to the old settlers of Clayton, spent the first winter near the town now called Osterdock.

In the winter of 1836 a Mr. Finly erected a sawmill on the Little Turkey, near the present town of Millville. He shortly afterwards sold out his mill and his claim to Robert Hetfield and Mr. Price. In the erection of this pioneer sawmill, Joseph Quigley, still living in Highland, was the millwright, and Luther Patch, still living and now residing in Elkader, was the sawyer.

After a time Price sold out his interest in the mill, selected for himself a beautiful and fertile tract of land on the north side of the Turkey, about five miles from Millville, and on this he built his cabin. In a few years he converted this wild land into one of the finest farms of the county.

It was in this cabin that he became known to every settler and wayfarer in the land. Whether his stock of provisions was great or small, good or bad, he would divide his last loaf and meat with the stranger. It was this unbounded liberality on his part that gave him in after years such a hold upon the hearts of all the old settlers of his county. Many a time has the author of this article, with wearied thoughts and tired limbs, struck his clearing and his cabin only to find that generous welcome which ripened into a lifelong friendship, terminated only by his death. In 1839 he married Miss Mary D. Cottle, a lady of culture, education and refinement, and his equal in liberality and hospitality.

Here upon his farm they raised a family of eight children, five of whom are still living. Two of these, R. E. and T. G. Price, now reside in Elkader, another son is now the postmaster at Colorado Springs, Colo., and still another resides in San Jose, California. One of his sons fell at the battle of Tupello, and another son, a Major of the Eighth

Iowa Cavalry, was wounded at the battle of Fort Donelson and afterwards died of his wounds.

His amiable wife died in 1865 and he never married again, but with his youngest daughter, who still lives in Colorado, he kept the younger portion of his household together to the last.

During his long residence of thirty-eight years in our county he always took an active and prominent part in State and county politics, and in the management and organization of parties he had no peer in the State of Iowa.

In early times he was an ardent Whig, but upon the repeal of the Missouri compromise he threw his whole soul and action into the Republican party, and was among the very first, with voice and pen, to arouse the people against the strides and encroachments of the slaveholder. When the Rebellion broke out he took an active part in the organization of military companies, encouraged his sons to draw the sword, and from the beginning to the end of the great war his voice and pen were never idle in the cause of the Union.

No one in the State in a civil capacity did more, no one could do more than he did in the cause of the Union, and his speeches and writings at the time were models of learning, ability and oratory.

When he was well and himself he was a natural born orator, and this gift, added to his tall and graceful form, gave him at all times the full command of his audience. At one moment he could convulse that audience into boisterous laughter, and in the next arouse them into expressions of the most frenzied passion, and in a moment more they were again in the region of the clouds, where fancy was unrestrained, and where they had the option of basking in the sunshine unharmed by the whirlwind's roar, or with the thunderbolt leaping down to earth again, laughing at one of his sallies of wit, or lighting perhaps, in the mire and filth of accumulated dirt, only to curse themselves for having spent an hour listening to such a consummate juggler.

A lifelong complaint caused him to renounce public speaking, and he resorted to his pen, and if we only take into consideration his subjects, his themes, his racy, chaste and mu-

sical style, together with his remarkable ingenuity of spinning all his facts and fancies into a common thread, he had no equal in the civilized world.

In literature he was a prince in the art of humbugging, and was more a master of this art than any juggler or showman who has appeared before the public for the last three hundred years.

He could stand upon the Rocky mountains, fifteen thousand feet above the level of the sea, and with his pencil and paper humbug a world; and, when he saw his infernal rat story published for truth in all the leading journals of America, illustrated in *Police Gazettes*, translated into foreign languages, and hawked about by the newsboys on the streets of London, Paris, St. Petersburg and Berlin, he sat down and laughed himself sick over the ease with which he could gull and tempt the cupidity of mankind.

It will be remembered that the story related how the rats had attacked, killed and eaten up the infant child of Sergeant O'Keef, belonging to the signal station on the summit of Pike's Peak, and when it was published and illustrated in pictures many a tender mother, and many an innocent child throughout the reading world shed sympathetic tears over the horrible miseries of that little child as the infernal rats were tearing the quivering flesh from its bones. Scientists, too, in every part of the world, took up the subject and discussed the question whether rodents in such numbers could possibly exist in such an altitude above the sea, and the question has not yet been settled, for but few persons know to this day that the whole story is without the first shadow of truth.

He next tried himself on the subject of the "Connecting Link," and knowing the interest I had taken on the subject of "Prehistoric Man," he held out to me the most tempting bait, intimating to a mutual friend that I would be the first man in America to bite; but as that friend knows full well, I smelt the rat before I had finished the story.

He began his *Sketches of Northern Iowa* in an early day and continued them down to his departure to Colorado in 1872. These sketches were published by the Historical Society of Iowa in a periodical called *The Annals of Iowa*, and will be



read and reread by the lovers of history and romance while the English language is spoken upon this continent.

He was for many years the vice-president of this society, and through his knowledge of this great valley, his general acquaintance with the early settlers, his intimacy with all the Indian tribes of the northwest, together with his experience in public life, he was enabled to collect and preserve for that society a vast fund of information and historical facts that without him would have been lost forever. He was also the author of the thrilling and interesting story called *The Indian Runner*, a story that twenty-five years ago went the rounds of the American press and was translated into foreign languages and published in all the leading journals of Europe.

In 1845 he wrote and published the thrilling and melancholy story of *The Mysterious Grave*, founded upon no fact whatever, and because the statement that these words: "Erin, an exile, bequeathes thee his blessing," were found in the grave, the story was copied into Irish papers and many a poor Irish mother wept over it as perhaps the grave of a lost and wandering son.

But perhaps his most successful story, one that called forth the greatest and most numerous encomiums, and one that was read at every camp-fire in the army, and in every cottage wherever the English language was spoken, is *The Drummer Boy*. It was first published in *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, and for tenderness of expression, for ingenuity of theme, for elegance of style and diction, for converting the ideal into reality, for chaining the reader's attention and calling from him emotions of sympathy and patriotism, for the ease of deception and for its perfect and consummate delusion, it is his masterpiece. No one doubted but that the story was true and the poor little "Drummer Boy," like Charlie Ross, was found in every village and hamlet in the land.

No story of modern times ever had a wider circulation, or was ever read with deeper or more sympathetic interest, and like *Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *The Deserted Village*, it will be read around the hearthstone of domestic tranquility, when its anonymous author is forgotten.

Saxe, the poet, traced out the author, complimented him highly and converted the story into one of his finest poems.

During his long and active life in our midst he was a constant contributor to the columns of the *Miners' Express*, *Dubuque Tribune*, *Dubuque Herald*, *Lansing Mirror*, and other papers of Iowa, and in all of these articles can be seen the same racy, chaste and elegant style of composition and thought that place him above any other writer of his day.

He took an active part in the organization of Clayton county, and held the first justice court within its limits. He was the first clerk of the Board of Clayton County Commissioners, was elected the first School Fund Commissioner and served one term as a Judge of Probate.

In 1850 he took the United States census of the counties of Clayton, Fayette, Winneshiek and Allamakee.

In 1850 he was elected from the counties of Clayton, Fayette, Winneshiek and Allamakee to the State legislature, and it was at this session that he brought himself into notice as one of the most skillful and sagacious politicians of the State. He took an active part in this Legislature, in the organization of the school system of the State, and to his actions and suggestions are we to-day indebted for some of our best laws relating to schools.

For many successive terms he was elected Governor of the Lobby, and that body received from him an annual message, that for keen wit and withering sarcasm has never been excelled.

In 1852 he was appointed by President Fillmore as Receiver of the Land Office at Des Moines, and held the office during that administration.

In 1855 he was elected Judge of the County Court of Clayton county, and held the office for two years. During his term in this office he resurveyed the roads of the county, established guide-posts and mile-posts along them; remodeled the county records and gave names to the streams and townships.

When his term expired he had the satisfaction of seeing his county's records and her finances established on a safe and permanent basis, to become a foundation for those who followed him for all time. He left every official position that

he ever occupied with clean hands and with a reputation for honesty, capability and fairness.

In the fall of 1864 he followed the brave General Hatch through all his military raids in Mississippi, and was an eye-witness of all the battles and skirmishes this general had with the rebel general, Forrest.

He was for many years the President of the Old Settlers and Pioneers' Association of the county, organized the first meeting and delivered before it one of the finest and most eloquent speeches of his lifetime.

Long before any railroad had reached any part of the great west; he called the people of the county together at a mass meeting in Guttenberg to discuss the propriety of giving aid to a railroad from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and in his opening speech before that meeting he declared with the most prophetic vision that he would live to see Clayton county checkered with railroads and this he accomplished with some years to spare.

Shortly after this meeting he made another speech to a few of the old settlers at Littleport, in which he said, "There are men in this audience, as well as myself, who will live to see a railroad passing up the Volga," and after the road up this stream was completed he wrote to the author of this article from Colorado, saying in reference to it, "My dream is fulfilled, my prophecy has come to pass, and my mission will soon be ended, but Clayton county, hail!"

One can hardly realize that that giant form that towered among us so long, that mingled in all our conventions, railroad meetings, county seat courts, balls, parties and routs, is gone forever, and that his voice and pen, which once stirred the thoughts and hearts of thousands, are now silent forever.

For fine, interesting conversational powers he had no equal in the State of Iowa, and it was at all times a rich treat to spend a few hours in his company. Never vulgar, always temperate, his language flowed with the same easy, elegant and poetical style of his compositions.

He could tell and embellish a good anecdote, sing a good song, convulse a crowd with merriment and laughter over any subject, and when one had left his company and pondered a

moment over the interview, the wonder was why his absurdities were not discovered while you were still in his presence.

Kind, courteous and social to all, whether rich or poor, his sympathies were aroused to the highest pitch at distress and sorrow, and he was at your service, while his money flowed like water. The priest and the layman, the tramp and the trader, the lawyer and the farmer, the rich and the poor, all found a home and a resting-place at his house and a seat at his table.

Ill health at last forced him to take refuge in the Rocky mountains, and in the year 1872 he sold his homestead, took the younger members of the family and departed for Colorado, leaving behind him the scenes of his early triumphs, exploits, association and hardships, upon which his eyes were never to rest again.

In Colorado he began the same career which characterized him in his early days in Clayton county, and with the vigor of his youth he visited the camps of her miners, ascended her highest mountains, looked down upon her wide-spread plains and with his voice and pen contributed to her greatness and her resources.

But old age and disease were fast destroying his stalwart frame, and when the fatal hour had come his death was like the blowing out of a candle.

Such are some of the leading acts and events of his long and useful life, and if I have not done him justice let an indulgent public attribute the fault to a want of ability on my part to do more, and may the ashes of my old and valued friend rest in peace.

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WOLVES.—Prairie wolves are very plenty this winter, and seem to be in first rate condition. Mr. Wells, of this town, trapped a big one a short time ago, which measured five feet three inches from the tip of his tail to the end of his nose. They may occasionally exceed that size, but we believe this one is voted a "right smart" wolf.—*Hamilton Freeman*.—*St. Charles City Intelligencer*, February 28, 1861.

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