

The Evening Mail

AND PACKET.

FRIDAY, MARCH 29, 1867.

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.

Burlington, Iowa, Feb. 24, 1867.

I left Chicago by an early morning train on the Burlington Railway, which passes diagonally through the State of Illinois in a south-westerly direction, and as we rolled along the shore the blue waters of Lake Michigan were sparkling in the morning sun, while the harbour, lighthouse, and apparently boundless waters all combined to help the illusion that we were travelling by the sea-shore. We seemed to be a long time getting clear of the city, passing street after street, each getting less important than the preceding one, till at last we were fairly out on the broad prairies of Illinois. There was little variety all the way to Burlington; sometimes the prairie was flat and treeless for miles, then tracts of gently undulating country, with occasional clumps and groves of small trees, and sometimes we crossed what appeared to be the beds of ancient rivers, now nearly dry and thickly wooded. There was very little snow on the ground, and everywhere, without exception, the soil appeared most fertile—a regular farmers' paradise.

Corn stubble (corn in this country generally means Indian corn) was everywhere, and now and then, as the train shot by, a few prairie chickens rose and flew wildly about.

These birds are like grouse and are esteemed a delicacy. Comfortable homesteads, farmhouses, and cottages dotted the country in all directions, the fields were often well fenced with straight wooden palings, sometimes a tall hedgerow appeared, and things wore a neater and cosier aspect than I have seen elsewhere in the Western States. Some of the farmhouses would have done credit to any country.

The towns we passed were thriving, busy-looking places, and at two points right alongside of the line they had begun to work coal. English and Indian names followed each other in a strange way, Oswego and Bristol, Monmouth and Oquawka; but very few places, indeed, bear Irish names. English and Scotch are common enough, but Bally this, or Tuber that, never seems to turn up. What is the reason or this? Do our countrymen never get a chance to name a settlement?

Illinois is a regular farmers' State. Last year its corn crop reached 177,000,000 bushels. There are 14,000,000 acres of "improved" land, and about 2,300 miles of railway in the State, which, with the Mississippi on the west, and Lake Michigan on the east, supply at least ready, if not ample, means of transporting her products to the Eastern and Southern States.

There is a large trade in cattle also, and to-day we passed many long trains freighted with horned beasts and swine.

It is strange to stand on the platform at the rear of the last carriage, as the train rolls over the prairies, and watch the rails straight for miles and miles; and, as it grows dusk, the undulations in the prairie vanish, and the whole appears one great level plain.

After dark we reached the Mississippi, whose frozen waters we had to cross in sleighs to Burlington. It had been thawing fast all day, and the ice was reported to be

not quite as sound as it might be, there being an inch or two of water on its surface. Three large sleighs were waiting for us, and some of the passengers vainly tried to find out which one would cross first, in order that they might avoid that particular sleigh; but we all crossed safely enough. The river here is nearly half-a-mile wide, and is generally frozen over for about two months each year—the traffic during that time being carried on by sleighs; but they are now building a railroad bridge, which will lessen the inconvenience.

The aspect of the Mississippi is peculiar, flowing as it does in a flat groove of great width cut through the higher level of the prairies, and technically known as the river "bottom."

Burlington is a well-to-do city of 10,000 or more inhabitants, but at this season has not so lively an appearance as American cities generally have.

Part of it lies down in the hollow by the water, but the town extends up on to the bluffs, which command a fine view over the river and the opposite country.

It was settled in 1832, and the first brick house was built in 1836; it now has 14 churches and a university, the latter in the hands of the Baptists, who seem to muster strong in this State, while the Episcopalians are very thin indeed.

When taking a walk the other day I counted from one spot eight different towers and spires belonging to as many different churches, probably no two of them being of the same denomination. The summer climate is warm enough to ripen grapes, and the culture of the vine and the manufacture of wine are regularly pursued. The latter is something like poor Rhine wine, and, at this season at least, whiskey and lager beer, are more usually drunk.

Civilization has not reached a very high pitch here. There is no good hotel, food is poorly cooked, and prices of all manufactured articles are extravagant, even for this country; but the shops are large and good. Idlers are scarce, and beggars there are none.

The Germans, as usual, muster strong, and have a newspaper published here in their own language. There are also two daily papers in English. Here, as elsewhere, the Germans, and Irish too, show great readiness to adopt American phraseology, "guessing," &c., and it often sounds ludicrous to hear a German, whose English is very imperfect, "guessing," "calculating," and using all those expressions which we regard as characteristic of an American.

This is a sort of place where boots get cleaned about once a week; any approach to dress is unknown; and the pursuit of the "almighty dollar" is the one universal and all-absorbing pursuit.

Here, as at Chicago, if you listen to any conversation, dollar, cent—cent, dollar, is pretty sure to be the burthen of the story.

On Sundays the country farmers drive or ride into town to church, and during service leave their horses tied to trees in the streets, which at this season are alternately seas of mud and rough with frozen ruts. The side walks are chiefly made of planks, and cows and pigs roam everywhere about.

Talking of cows reminds me of a good American story often retailed with great gusto.

An American was trying to play Yankee Doodle on the flute, but only succeeded in murdering the tune. An Englishman who was standing near him asked if that was "the tune the old cow died of." "No, stranger," replied the player; "I guess that is the tune the old bull died of."

Such stories are common enough here, and of course always turn the joke against John Bull. However, the Germans are generally chosen as fair game for ridicule, and the Irish come in for their share of the same.

Land about the town sells at very high prices. A gentleman told me he had purchased a farm within two or three miles for three hundred dollars an acre. Ten years ago the same land was selling at six dollars an acre, and all that has been done on it since has been the erection of a few fences. Land speculation is a regular fever in the West.

MARCH 29, 1867. LETTER 8

Little wood of any value grows in the neighbourhood, and, consequently, the houses are chiefly built of brick or stone, giving somewhat of an Old World aspect to the town, which can show some fine blocks of buildings and many nice villas.

The Mississippi is still frozen, but on one or two days it was almost impassable, rotten ice in the centre and lanes of open water at the sides. Since then it has frozen hard again, and traffic been resumed, but the ice is lasting longer than usual this year.

The sudden changes at this season are most disagreeable and trying. I often hear the wish expressed by residents that they lived either three hundred miles to the north or south of this—as, in the first case, they would have the comfort of settled cold all the winter; and, in the other, escape the cold almost entirely. Ague is the great curse of all these Western States, and few residents seem to escape it. Illinois enjoys an unenviable reputation in this respect, and the more fertile the land the more ague seems to prevail.

FEB. 28.—To-day the ice in the river has begun to move, and it was a curious sight to watch the huge cakes of thick but rotten ice slowly grinding against each other, and piling up in overlapping heaps on the shore. Sometimes the ice would "jam," but soon began to move again; and it was pleasant to see the open water once more appearing.

F.E.P.