

# THE TIMES

## NEW BLOOMFIELD, PA., TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1881.

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**THE TIMES.**  
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### INTERESTING SKETCHES.

Recollections of Prominent Men of the Past.

ALMOST any day, sunny or wintry, there can be seen on the streets of Atlanta a short, thickset, sturdy old gentleman, bearing erectly on unusually broad shoulders an immense head, surmounted with a crown of white hair. A trifle reserved, holding himself like a gentleman and man of affairs, with ruddy face and quick, penetrating eye, holding a stout cane in his hand, less for support than in deference to an old habit of the Southwest, the stranger who sees him usually inquires of some one for his name. Any by-stander will inform the inquirer that it is Colonel W. H. Sparks, an old veteran, who has known more distinguished people than any man living. I do not think there is so remarkable a link between the past and present to be found anywhere. Colonel Sparks is not a centenarian, being only about eighty-three, and he has none of the querulous weakness or vagueness of old age. He is still good for a ten mile tramp; is a decisive brilliant talker and altogether a compact, vigorous old gentleman. He has been prominent in politics and society all his life, and as legislator, writer and wit has been famous for more than half a century throughout the West and Southwest. He has known personally every President since Washington and has the most entertaining gossip about each of them. He was the intimate of Henry Clay, Prentiss, Crawford and the most of their contemporaries; sat opposite Aaron Burr at table for three months; heard the story of the execution of Andre from the lips of the man who superintended it; heard all the small talk of the meeting of the signers of the Declaration of Independence from the mouth of John Adams, and is, in short, a perfect treasury of gossip and personal history.

Your correspondent asked him one morning if it were true that he had been personally acquainted with every President of the United States, except Washington.

"Yes, sir," he replied: "I have had the acquaintance of every man who occupied the Presidential chair since George Washington left it; the friendship and confidence of most of them—certainly of the greatest of them."

"Where did you meet John Adams? He must have died when you was very young."

"There is a story connected with that. I was at Cambridge with three young Southern chums. We were discussing the best way to spend the Fourth of July and determined to spend it with Ex-President Adams. I wrote a letter soliciting the privilege of calling on him and destroyed a quire or two of paper in forming the request. Mr. Adams replied that he would be happy to see us and instructed us to stop at a certain hotel in Boston. As soon as we were registered the landlord informed us that Mr. Adams' carriage was awaiting us. At the door we found his coach, drawn by four horses and equipped with great pomp. We were rapidly driven to his home, where he welcomed us cordially, being touched, I think, at the respect shown him by Southerners. He gave us a most graphic account of the signing of the declaration and the election of Washington as commander-in-chief. While we were with him he received the first of those letters from Jefferson that led to the correspondence between them. He read it to us and said: 'This is the finest letter ever written by an octogenarian.'"

"Did you know Jefferson intimately?"

"I knew him well. I was once trav-

eling through Virginia with a young friend and stopped at a small tavern. As we were sitting in the tap-room four distinguished-looking men passed up stairs and entered a small room. I inquired as to whom they were and was informed that they were Ex-President Jefferson, Ex-President Madison, Chief Justice Marshall and—. I at once determined to see them and knocked at the door of their room. Mr. Jefferson came to the door, and I stated that we were Georgians who desired to pay our respects to himself and his friends. He took us cordially by the hand, and introduced us to the company. Mr. Madison was sitting in a corner, with his head tied up in a handkerchief, and merely grunted when we were presented. We soon secured attention, as we had just left Washington and bore these distinguished men the first news they had of the Missouri Compromise. When we left, after an hour's stay, Mr. Jefferson followed us to the door. He took our hands in his and bending his head forward—it was as flat as a board on top—said: "Go home, young gentlemen, and prepare to devote your talents and your lives to the service of your country. This Compromise has only scotched the snake, not killed it, and it will yet tear this country assunder. The South will need your services." How prophetic were these words. I have since given the lives of my sons to the service he then dedicated me."

"Was there much open talk of secession then?"

"Let me tell you of a scene in Mr. Crawford's room just prior to the passage of that compromise. William H. Crawford, of Georgia, was then the most powerful man in Washington. His room was the rendezvous of a band of lofty and ardent spirits, such as Loundes, Calhoun, Clay, Troup, Randolph, Forsyth. He would have been the candidate of his party to succeed Madison had he not declined to oppose Mr. Monroe. He was sent to France as Minister to succeed Mr. Livingston, who was hard of hearing. Crawford could not speak French, and Napoleon said after his reception: 'America has sent me two Senators, one of whom was deaf and the other dumb.' On the night I speak of there was a meeting at Crawford's rooms to discuss the Missouri question. Mr. Holmes, of Maine, was present. Mr. Crawford was lying, as was his wont, on a sofa. Addressing the Southern men present he told them that if they held slavery of more importance than the Union the time had come for them to secede, but if they thought the Union of more importance than slavery they must go home and begin gradual emancipation. He added that the slave States were strong enough then to go in peace and preserve their institutions, but that they could never hope to maintain slavery in the Union." At this Mr. Randolph jumped up and said:

"Then let us go, and at once. Mr. Clay will be here to-morrow. I have not spoken to the fellow for years, but I will go to him to-morrow and beg him to go to his people and urge them to quit the Union. I will go and urge mine to do the same and I will follow his leadership to the last."

"Can Mr. Randolph be in earnest?" asked Mr. Holmes, of Maine.

"Intensely so," replied Mr. Crawford; "and the course of your people, Mr. Holmes, are forcing Mr. Randolph's views upon the people of the whole South."

The next day Mr. Clay arrived from the West. The greatest anxiety was felt as to his course. His influence was tremendous, and the West especially was training under his lead. I shall never forget the scene when Mr. Clay entered the House the next morning. He was dressed in a spotless black and pale and majestic he walked down the aisle with the slouching stride of the race horse. By an involuntary movement every member rose to his feet, in courtesy to the great man. Mr. Randolph stepped into the aisle to meet him. When Clay saw him he seemed to grow a foot in height, but his face never lost its tranquillity. Mr. Randolph was very much excited and said: "Good morning, Mr. Clay."

Mr. Clay bowed politely. Randolph then went on excitedly:

"I have a duty to perform—so have you, sir. Leave your seat here as I will

leave mine. Tell your people as I will tell mine that the time has come when, if they would save themselves from ruin and preserve the liberties for which their fathers bled, they must leave these people of the North. Do this; although I never did before I will follow your lead in the effort to save our people."

Mr. Clay listened quietly and without apparent surprise. When Randolph had concluded he said without raising his voice:

"What you propose, Mr. Randolph, requires more than momentary consideration," and passed on. In a few days his famous speech on the compromise was made and the trouble passed over for a time.

"President Jackson was a remarkable man. Did you know him well?"

"I did. I married the daughter of Abner Green, at whose house Jackson's wife lived, while she was awaiting her divorce. I and she and our child spent the night with Jackson at the White House. I remember there was in the corner of the fireplace a box full of corn-cob-pipes, out of which the stems protruded. I asked the President why he was so fond of cob-pipes. He replied: 'For the simple reason that they burn out before they begin to stink.'"

Colonel Sparks was eloquent in his praise of "Old Hickory," and developed two points that are interesting and new. Said he: "It is not at all certain that Jackson was born in South Carolina; indeed, the special proof seems to go to show that he was born in Ireland. Judge Alexander Porter, of Louisiana, was an Irishman, and his parents lived in the neighborhood of where Jackson's parents lived. He visited Europe shortly before his death, and made diligent inquiry into the history of the Jacksons, and learned enough to satisfy him that Andrew was born in Ireland and brought to America when two years old. Judge McNary, who had investigated, held the same opinion, and always contended that Jackson was four years older than he said he was."

He says further: "Jackson once told one of the advices his mother—a little dumpy redheaded Irish woman—gave him when he left her for the last time. 'Andy,' she says 'you are going into a wild and strange country and among rough people. Never tell a lie, nor take what ain't your own, nor sue anybody for slander or assault and battery. Always settle their case yourself.'"

"Jackson was a negro trader, despite the proof to the contrary made by his friends. He had a small store at Brainsburg, in Claiborne county. At this trading point he received the negroes sent to him by his partner and sold them to the neighborhood and into Louisiana. I have now several bills of sale of negroes signed by Jackson, in which his signature runs clear across the page. He quit negro trading because he sold an unsound negro into Louisiana and had to stand a loss on him. He and his partner quarreled in adjusting this loss and he quit the business."

"Were you acquainted with any intimate friend of Washington?"

"I knew intimately the man who knew him perhaps better than any other man ever did—Colonel Ben Talmage, who was Washington's favorite aide. The circumstances under which I knew him were interesting. I passed the old gentleman one day as he was mending his gate. I was then a student. I raised my hat and bowed profoundly. He was struck with my evident respect and asked Judge Reeves who I was and why I had been so respectful. I replied 'Say to him that I could never walk into the presence of a man who has had the confidence of the great Washington with my hat on my head.' This reply pleased him so much that it gained me a place at his fireside."

"He was full of reminiscences of Washington?"

"Oh, yes; and very entertaining it was to hear him talk familiarly of the Father of his country. He said that no character in history had been so consistent as Washington's. He was stern, slow, reserved and cold. Even Hamilton, whom he loved and trusted above all men, never ventured upon the slightest intimacy. I never saw General Washington laugh, and only once or twice did I ever see him smile. I never saw him exhibit the slightest surprise

or impatience. I was with him when he received information of Arnold's treachery, and he received it as impassively as if it were an orderly's report. Of all the officers of the army, Greene was his favorite, and he was right—for Greene was a superior military man to Washington. I heard Washington say that Greene was the only man who could retrieve the mistakes of Gates and save the Southern country. Mrs. Washington was less amiable than her husband. She always remembered that she was wealthy when she married Washington, and she never let him forget it. One of Washington's strongest points was the quickness with which he read men. He mistrusted Burr from the very first, and was rarely deceived in men." In this strain have I heard Colonel Talmage talk of Washington by the hour. And let me remark here that I have known many women who knew Washington. I never yet saw one that liked him. Governor Wolcott told me that he heard Mrs. Adams say she never believed that Washington had been "more than polite to Mrs. Washington."

"Was this Talmage the same who superintended the execution of Andre?"

"Yes, sir; and I have heard him tell of that sad affair a score of times, and always with tears. It was he who begged Washington to at least allow Andre to die a soldier's death." Said he: "The saddest duty I have ever had to perform was communicating his refusal to Andre. He saw my embarrassment and feeling as I approached, and rising said, 'I thank you, Colonel, for the interest you have taken in my case, but I see that it has proved of no avail; yet I am none the less grateful.' He paused a moment and said, 'It is hard to die—and to die thus. I have only a short time, which I must employ in writing to my family. Shall I see you to-morrow, or is this our last parting?' I told him it had been made my duty to superintend the execution. 'We will part then at the grave,' he said, and covering his face with his hands, sank sobbing into his chair. When we met at the scene of execution next morning, he asked me to secure his watch, which had been taken from him at headquarters, and send it to his family. I made the promise, but never secured the watch. As he saw his grave a shudder ran through his frame, and he said: 'I am to be buried there. One more word, Colonel; mark it, so that my friends may find it when this cruel conflict shall have ended.' These were the last words he ever spoke to me. He pressed my hand, turned and ascended the scaffold with unflinching steps. In a few moments all was over. Many a time have I heard Colonel Talmage tell this story, and a precious privilege I esteemed it to hear from the lips of the man who had superintended it, the story of the execution of Andre."

### A Spectre Light.

ONE of the most singular events that ever arose in the experience of railroad men came across the engineer, fireman and brakeman on the C. R. I. & P. express, which left Davenport for Council Bluffs the evening of Thursday, the 30th ult. The train pulled out of this city, James Raynor, conductor, at 7:10 o'clock. The weather was bitter cold that night, it will be remembered, the mercury falling to fifteen degrees below zero. Nothing unusual happened until after the train had gone from Marengo, at 11 o'clock, and about three miles west of that town the engineer, J. R. Wilkinson, saw in the distance ahead a locomotive headlight, and he says to his fireman, David Myers, "Dave, what on earth is that train on the track on our time for?" Dave looked ahead, and there was the headlight sure enough, and Wilkinson immediately closed his throttle, applied the air brakes and stopped. The brakeman jumped off to ascertain the cause of the halt, and he, too, saw the headlight coming. The engineer and the fireman watched the distant glare a moment, and it quivered exactly as a headlight does when viewed at a distance from a fast approaching train, and the track for a long distance in front of it glistened like silver in its light. The conductor did not get off to see the light, and so missed the sight. But as there was a train ahead, with an apparent right to the track, the express train backed to Marengo in short order. There a telegram was sent to the train

dispatcher at Des Moines, informing him of the unexpected train, and asked for instructions. His answer was, "No train between Marengo and Brooklyn—go ahead." "But the engineer reports seeing a train." "Impossible—there is no wild train on that section, and regulars are all right—go ahead, I tell you." And again the train pulled out of Marengo, but the strange headlight was seen no more. To those who beheld it when the train stopped it was as real as any light they ever saw, and all were as certain that there was a locomotive with a train coming toward them as they lived. It is now believed that a sort of mirage or reflection of Wilkinson's headlight was produced at the place by some freak of the elements in that clear, cold frosty air, and that this was what Mr. Wilkinson, Dave Meyers and the brakemen saw. It was real enough to send the train speeding back to Marengo for instruction. Mayhap it was a spectre train, of which there are several in railroad lore.—Davenport Gazette.

### Tower Clocks.

MR. SPERRY, the man who has charge of the clock in Trinity Church, New York, gives the following interesting facts about the clock and its winding:

"The Trinity clock was placed in the steeple in 1846 by James Rogers. It took two men to wind it. Now I do it alone. It's not because I can do more than two men can. The machinery has been changed. Formerly it was wound by a single back gear, but not very long ago it was fitted with a double back gear. Of course it takes longer to wind it now than it used to. I have to lift each one of the three weights of 1,500 pounds each to a height of over fifty feet. One weight is for the chimes and the other two for the clock. The crank, which answers to the key to your watch, is about twenty inches long, and when I turn it around I make a sweep of thirty inches. It's a good deal harder than turning a grindstone, but the machine has a ratchet, so that I can stop and rest when I want to. The crank has to be turned 750 times to turn the barrel twenty-two times. Around the barrel is wound a wire rope that holds the 1,500 pound weight. The weight is simply a box with pieces of iron in it. That is very old-fashioned. Now, we have iron weights so moulded that they can be added to or subtracted from, and the weight can be graded to a nicety. A new wire rope was put to the chimes' weight the other day. The rope is what is called the tiller rope, and is made of finer and more pliable wire than that which supports these store elevators. This rope is 280 feet long and three-quarters of an inch thick. It takes me an hour and a half to wind up the clock."

"The oldest clock in the city," continued the clock man, "is in St. Paul's steeple. John Thwait, of London, made it in 1778. A cog in the escape wheel by constant use was worn thin and turned over backwards by the ratchet. Of course the clock stopped. I patched it up and it runs as well as ever. This clock has a single back gear, and I wind it in three-quarters of an hour. It has two weights of 1,000 pounds each."

"St. John's clock was put in the tower in 1812. I wind it in less than an hour. St. George's clock is modern. I wind it in fifteen minutes. Once a week I examine each clock, and use a whole bottle of porpoise oil in keeping the wheels and pinions oiled. This porpoise oil is extracted from the jaw of the porpoise, and is expensive."

### The Exact Irishman.

A two-foot rule was given to a laborer in a Clyde boat-yard to measure an iron plate. The laborer not being well up to the use of the rule, after spending a considerable time, returned. "Noo, Mick," asked the plater, "what size is the plate?" "Well," replied Mick, with a grin of satisfaction, "it's the length of your rule and two thumbs over, with this piece of brick and the breadth o' my hand and my arm from here to there, bar a finger."

In the commission of evil fear no man so much as thyself; another is but one witness against thee; thou art a thousand; another thou mayst avoid—thyself thou canst not. Wickedness is its own punishment.