

THE
ATLANTIC MONTHLY.

*A Magazine of Literature, Science, Art,
and Politics.*

VOL. XIX. — APRIL, 1867. — NO. CXIV.

for fear. I cried out, and asked if they would take me in. 'Yes,' they said; 'but they could not open the door; no one could tell how near the red men were. I must crawl up over the logs.' In those days, we used to barricade doors and windows, and set our guns in the crevices of the logs, but leave an open hole in the roof, near the chimney. So I climbed the low roof, let my baby down through the hole, handed Will to my neighbor, and dropped in myself."

"We only stayed a few years at the Sangamon," resumed William Herndon; "and I well remember how we moved up to the ridge where Springfield now is. I have told you about the 'gopher.' The little animal always has the sense to make his hummocks higher than the winter rains will rise. The whole way was clear bog; father made a small board cart, into which he threw the chickens, the little pigs, and the young children. He and I and mother walked beside the cart, which had two wheels. We skipped from hill to hill; and when the wheels of the cart stuck or floundered, we lifted them out of the mud and balanced them somehow on one of the hummocks."

The "gopher," which ought to be borne on the shield of Illinois, is really a marmot, — a little squirrel with long hind legs, sitting like a watch-dog at the door of its lodge, and skipping over the ground like a tiny kangaroo. The name is given in Canada, not only to the prairie-dog, but to a long-legged rat, which naturalists decline to class with the marmots.

"We reached Springfield at last," said Mr. Herndon; "and a most unlikely place it was. We had to build our log cabin on the edge of a ridge, while we labored to subdue the muck. The marks of bears' claws were deep in the trees right round us. Ten years later I have killed a hundred snakes in the three quarters of a mile between my own house and my father's, so you may guess what it was then. There they all were, — rattlesnakes, vipers, adders, and copperheads."

"And what sort of a snake is the copperhead?" I asked.

"A mean thing. A rattlesnake rattles, a viper hisses, an adder spits, a black snake whistles, a water-snake blows, but a copperhead just sneaks! At nightfall we laid green logs in parallel rows, set them on fire, and drove the cattle between. Then whichever way the wind blew, we could keep off the mosquitoes and relieve the creatures. The dumb beasts knew what it meant, and we never had to drive them again. They went in of themselves. Words cannot make you understand this life. The prairies of Illinois are watered with the tears, and enriched by the graves, of her women. The first generation — have you any dim, glimmering sense of what men they must have been who turned this sea into dry land? — the first generation lived on mush and pork. Fencing was too costly to be obtained. No gardens could stand the herds of cattle, a thousand strong, which might come swooping over at any minute. Just as our corn was ripe, the bears would strip the ears; just as the pumpkins grew golden, herds of deer would hollow out the gourds. As we got more land, there was no transportation to carry away the crops. Butter was five cents a pound, eggs were three cents a dozen; corn was six cents a bushel, wheat twenty-five cents. A cow was worth five dollars, and a man's labor fifty cents a day. Do you wonder we clamored for railroads, lied for them, went in debt for them, — did anything till we got them?"

I remembered the thronging lines of railroad that I had often seen steering to some tiny depot in the vast prairie, and saw afresh that these lines were built for freight, not travel. The latter was an *accident*, happy or unhappy, as the case might be.

"And now we come to the saddest point," I said. "I want to understand the people born of this contest with the soil, the first white race born on it. Standing in a log cabin on the edge of a prairie, the other day, and looking over the half-drained surface, I said,