

ARKANSAS

BY CLAY FULKS

Woods and Templed Hills

WHAT the third President really wanted when he acquired for his country the vast Louisiana Territory, if he knew his business as well as I think he did, was Arkansas. With one stroke of the pen he and the Little Corporal made mere microbes of all succeeding realtors, for Arkansas alone was worth many times the money paid for the whole domain. Her 53,000 square miles embrace a greater extent of navigable rivers and a greater variety of natural resources than perhaps any other State in the Union can boast. Her fifty-odd varieties of oak, her many other hardwoods, and her yellow pines, to say nothing of the incalculable wealth lying in her lush alluvial soil, were worth enough to pay the price of the whole Territory over and over again. Arkansas could have paid the price in marble, in coal, in petroleum, in aluminum ore, or in diamonds and pearls. Her wasted water-power could buy it today, with interest to date. She could even pay it in the proverbial chips and whetstones, for the products of her novaculite quarries are known wherever edged-tools are used. Thus every good Arkansan knows that, when he bought the Louisiana Territory, Jefferson had his eye on Arkansas.

She has the highest mountains between the Rockies and the Appalachians—mountains having all the beauty without either the grandeur or the waste places of the mountains of Colorado. The steepest slopes of Arkansas might be terraced, and festooned with fruitful orchards and vineyards. She has rich river plains without

the torrid, muggy climate and the miasmatic ooze and slime of alligator land. In her wildwoods her scenery, at times, is magnificent in its loveliness. Many a time in youth and since have I strolled along the mossy banks of her crystal streams, beneath towering cliffs of gray granite, by golden sand bars fringed with weeping willows, and by meadows carpeted with flowers, listening to the murmur of the sparkling water and the music of the humming birds hidden among the sweet-scented honeysuckles. Along the Cadron and Cove creeks and the upper waters of the Washita, White, Caddo, and Little Red rivers are scenes that are certainly as beautiful as any this earth affords. Arkansas still has a wealth of such scenes. Their attraction for me is constant and strong.

But now, slowly, one by one, they are being rudely violated as the State struggles to put on the rattling harness of "progress."

II

The Arkansaw Traveler

Tradition, legend, tune, and song preserve the ridiculous caricature of the early native encountered by the Arkansaw Traveler. Their famous dialogue is recorded anew in Cox's recently published "Folk Songs of the South."

The care-free barbarian sat, grasshopper-like, in the open doorway of his half-roofed cabin chirping on his old fiddle when the Traveler hallooed.

"Hello yerself! If you wanta go to hell, go by yerself," returned the native as he continued sawing on the battered violin.

"Is the river fordable?" inquired the Traveler.

"I guess so," replied the native, "my ducks been a-fordin' it ever' day."

"Old man, what makes your corn so yellow?" asked the Traveler with thinly-veiled scorn.

"You fool, you, I *planted* yaller corn," retorted the native.

"Where does this road go?" queried the Traveler.

"Taint never gone nowhar yit—it stays right thar all the time," chuckled the Arkansawyer, still playing his fiddle.

"Old man, why don't you cover the other side of your house?" the Traveler wanted to know.

"Why, when it's rainin' I caint," explained the native, "an' when it aint a-rainin' it's as dry as yourn or anybody else's."

The native kept sawing the same measure over and over.

"Why don't you play the other part of that tune?" inquired the Traveler.

"Didn't know it had another part," the native admitted. Then, when the Traveler took the fiddle and played the other part, the impudence of the Arkansawyer was instantly changed to garrulous hospitality and the Traveler was offered the best of the old man's bed and board.

The part of the tune played by the native and the "other part" played by the Traveler make up the favorite in every old fiddlers' contest. If the unknown Traveler could come back today, and had the fare, he could crisscross the State on fast trains, or in swift, luxurious motor-busses named "The Arkansaw Traveler" and manned by silent, humorless chauffeurs as dignified as headwaiters. He could travel over thousands of miles of asphalt and gravel highway, crossing the river fordable by the ducks on massive bridges of solid masonry and steel. He could pass broad fields of waving corn, not yellow from lack of cultivation, and modern dwellings roofed on all sides. He could spend the night in marble-lined hostelrys, going to sleep to

music made by exotic virtuosi able to play both parts of the tune.

For, despite the persistence of the assumption in the minds of the uninformed of other States that the Arkansas found by the legendary Traveler is the Arkansas of today, the Commonwealth has undergone, and is still undergoing, great changes. It is true that these changes relate in large part to the physical aspects of its civilization—to the development of its natural resources, and the establishment of sustaining industries, transportation systems, and comfortable habitations. They relate more to the visible environment, to styles in cookery and dress, to tools and methods of travel, than to habits of thought. The changes have occurred in kitchens, barns, and forests rather than in libraries: in material possessions rather than in heads.

But this, it seems, could not have been otherwise. Permanent civilizations must be rooted in the soil and built from the ground up. Pioneers of the forests do not readily resolve themselves into artistic or scientific societies. The generation that found Arkansas a howling wilderness has hardly yet passed out. Only the ruder sort of folk, as a rule, are willing to forego the society of their fellows, the advantages of established institutions, and the comparative ease of settled communities to face the dangers, the terrible loneliness and emptiness, and the innumerable hardships of the frontier. It is no wonder, then, that Arkansas' attempts at civilization, as yet, are crude, ferent from each other, in all essentials, as Mississippi and Western Missouri.

III

Contrasts

The Missouri Pacific, the principal railroad of the State, crossing it diagonally from the northeastern corner to the southwestern, roughly divides Arkansas into two nearly equal areas. They are almost as different from each other, in all essentials, as Mississippi and Western Missouri.

The southeastern lowland section, in the realm of King Cotton, is farmed almost exclusively under a modified feudal arrangement familiarly known as the plantation system. In this, the wealthier portion of the State, prosperity is based largely on the labor of the ignorant blacks and the State's 110,000 tenant families. Here a namesake of Robert E. Lee is monarch of forty thousand black acres, and president of a railroad; he owns a town of two thousand population so absolutely that it doesn't even have a municipal government. In this section are hundreds of lesser lords who loom large in Arkansas' Who's Who. They dominate the local flora and fauna absolutely, and there is not the remotest prospect that this age will see their sovereignty challenged. Their reign is thought to be as inevitable as the weather, even almost as necessary. Here the ghosts of the Confederacy still stalk abroad; here the memories and traditions of the Old South are embalmed and cherished with many sacred rites; here remain the necessary conditions, the psychological raw materials, for a feudal society. Here, too, the political heretic is a criminal, and the scratching of the Democratic ticket a form of blasphemy. And the gods of Christendom are politely worshiped in fashionable churches by men and women who regard themselves and one another as little lower than the seraphim.

The northwestern highland portion of the State is owned by the small but independent farmers who cultivate it. In that section fruits, grain, poultry, livestock, and Republicans are produced. There live the men who supported Arkansas' carpet-bag administration after the Civil War—the régime that established the University of Arkansas, locating it 1700 feet above sea level and 170 miles above the down-South section. It is due to this fact, perhaps, that so few of the delta magnates send their sons and daughters to the university. In the highland part class distinctions are not important, and radicalism is furtively countenanced. While the wealthy

planter believes that his is the best of all possible civilizations, the best-known citizen of the highland region proposes to build a pyramid to preserve for a distant posterity certain sibylline books, some of which he has written himself, explaining why this civilization must fall.

But the two sections have this in common: both are bristling bulwarks of Fundamentalism.

IV

Homogeneity

Arkansas has few foreigners, but plenty of prejudice against them. The latter fact is doubtless due in part to simple ignorance, but provincialism, the war propaganda, and the Noble Knights of the Nightgown have fostered and fomented the congenital suspicions of the yokelry. The population is overwhelmingly of native American stock and rural habit. But town folk and country folk are lately becoming less sharply differentiated, due chiefly to the automobile. The country cousin used to curry the cockle-burrs out of his whiskers, mount his mule, descend upon his town kin, and incur their open contempt. Now he shaves, invades Main Street in his Ford, and gets his meals at a catfish restaurant. He does this very often and has thus achieved a self-assurance he never felt in town before. It is true that he still shies at a book or a bathtub—but so does the villager. Only in the few cities and large towns are class distinctions noticeable and even there they are based almost wholly on differences in wealth. Distinctions based on intellect or culture are necessarily rare.

Arkansas has a few Jukeses, many Kallikaks, and melancholy expanses of dull mediocrity relieved here and there by strange individuals who sometimes give great offense to the general by thinking for themselves. The dullest group the State has, considering its opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, is that composed of the school-teachers—the dullest and the most cowardly. The intellectual condition

of these public servants is pathetic indeed. With about one-sixtieth of the population of the country, Arkansas contributes only about one two-hundred-and-twenty-sixth of the names in the current volume of "Who's Who in America." Allowance must be made, of course, for her lingering pioneer condition. But her prospects for a renaissance are far from reassuring.

Of the 111 names furnished by Arkansas to "Who's Who," about three-fourths fall within the arbitrary classifications: officials of State and church who would be included though their intelligence were even lower than it is. The names included by reason of real achievements are painfully few: Charles J. Finger, a native of England and perhaps the only Arkansas writer known in Europe; Mrs. Bernie Babcock, author of some half a dozen books; Inez N. McFee, author of professional books for teachers and booklets for school children; Tom P. Morgan, humorist; "Coin" Harvey, eccentric commentator on our national monetary system; and Fay Hempstead, poet. That is about all. Save for a few doctors of medicine, not a scientific name is contributed by Arkansas to the fat volume; and with the exceptions noted, not a name representative of the fine arts. The State's public and professional men, with exceptions equally rare, try with amazing success to keep themselves on the intellectual level of the peasantry. This is obviously due to the assumption, all too true, that the disclosure of exceptional intelligence would throw so much of their trade to mountebanks as to imperil their professional lives.

The herd instinct, expressed officially in the motto on the great seal of the State and practically in the stolid tyranny of the majority, predominates with a vengeance. To achieve popularity an Arkansan must conform—that is to say, he must use barbarous English, swallow about all the superstitions known to the white race, maintain a strict intellectual idleness, and agree with every imbecile on every corner about everything. To be different is still danger-

ous, and those who have sense enough to be different understand the virtues of discretion. No issues of pith and moment ever divide the State into hostile camps. Its people frequently get het up, but it is invariably over something evanescent and inconsequential. Their interest in politics is never more than a sporting interest. They have an unerring faculty for fixing their minds on non-essentials. No scientist impresses them like the quack; no artist like the faker. Their ideas of human liberty are naïve and somewhat strange. The government may encroach on their fundamental liberties all it pleases, but it had better not kick their dogs around. Their strongest candidates for public preferment are those who can raise the most trivial issues and are the most adept in slinging bunk. Their interest in religion is terrible, and woe unto him who has the wrong kind or none at all. Their capacity for reaching, and their courage in maintaining, independent conclusions are alike negligible. When they move, they move in herds. They are truly a homogeneous people.

V

Regnant Populi

The great seal of the State bears the democratic motto, *Regnant Populi*, and the indigenous democrats, unused to drawing fine distinctions, construe this slogan of popular sovereignty very broadly. The majority in Arkansas would have its hands full in trying to cope only with what is concededly within its province. But not content with making a mess of such matters, it insists on a mass of fool laws concerning things it knows nothing about, and things which by no stretch of an intelligent imagination are any of its business. The Methodists and Baptists of the State are now girding their loins with the intent of having enacted an anti-evolution law at the next session of the General Assembly. It will be astonishing if the bill does not pass; astonishing, too, if a

single professor cheeps a word of protest against it.

Mayor Charles E. Moyer, of Little Rock, estimates the intelligence of the majority pretty accurately. Recently, aided and abetted by a former imperial cyclops of the women's Ku Klux Klan, he drew up an ordinance to protect Holy Things from the profane wit of the iconoclast and infidel. The local stage was to be prohibited from poking fun at religion, Prohibition, patriotism, marriage, and the government. Nor were the gals' legs overlooked. Moreover, newspapers and other periodicals carrying jokes or criticisms which, in the opinion of the board of censors, tended to bring the aforesaid Holy Things into contempt, were to be banned and barred from sale in the city. Unfortunately, the idiotic measure has been adopted by the city council, though in a modified form.

Happily, the official law-makers of Arkansas get their heads together infrequently, their powers are limited by constitutional checks, and they must work under the eyes of the whole State. But the unofficial law-makers are in session perpetually, their assumed jurisdiction is comprehensive in the extreme, and much of their work is done in comparative secrecy. From the konklaves of the Klan, the congregations of the godly, and the cracker-boxes of the village store, come forth the decrees of the democracy, with fumes of brimstone. Here, as elsewhere in the Bible Belt, the hairs on the heads of heretics are numbered, and the intelligent minority has no rights which the majority is bound to respect.

VI

A Stone-Age Survival

Notwithstanding that the Fundamentalist is not peculiar to Arkansas, the most cursory survey of the present state of her civilization should include a note upon that primitive survival. Scientifically considered, I suppose, the true Fundamentalist is a person whose mental development has

been arrested. His average mental age is perhaps as high as thirteen years. He can weigh a sack of cotton, count money, and read the clock. Generally speaking, he is a farmer, workingman, or tradesman, who renders some more or less useful service to society and, to that extent, is a help rather than a handicap to civilization. But his contribution to *Kultur* is utterly and uncontestably nothing. On the contrary he adds immeasurable difficulties to the work of enlightenment and lowers the general average of intelligence appallingly. To the social scientist he is a baffling problem.

But the lay Fundamentalist would remain a quiet, harmless nitwit, a producer of raw material or a useful artisan, were it not for the pragmatist parsons infesting the Arkansas region. These busybodies, nocturnal in their habits and preying preferably on chickens and women, incite him continuously against intelligence wherever it shows its head. Let a man in any way dependent on the favor of the public express a rational opinion regarding Fundamentalism and its hideous consequences, and promptly these parsons and their accomplices begin to plot his ruin. In view of this practice, the timid intelligentsia of the State is so effectually intimidated that a *post-mortem* is necessary to determine whether Professor Pinhead, for example, was a cheerful idiot or merely an arrant coward. These parsons and their devotees suppress all sprouting ideas so successfully that we Arkansans, I fear, appear to be quite unanimous in our imbecility.

Under the leadership of such men, every community in the State, annually or oftener, reverts to the rites of *Pithecanthropus erectus*, and holds a revival. Then the Fundamentalist preacher is in his heyday. Then every civilizing process, if any, going on in the community is blocked. In rural districts brush arbors built in the edge of a forest are the favorite places of meeting. Sessions are held twice daily, the second frequently lasting till midnight. When the incantations get well under way, lugubrious howls and moans assault the air. A

climax is always reached at night when the lights are dim and red, fantastic shadows lurk about, and the last feeble restraints of civilization can be thrown aside. The revival often continues for weeks and many precious souls are saved, but the community is left in a state of nervous exhaustion. Not every one, to be sure, who attends these meetings participates in the orgy. Many attend for private, ulterior reasons connected with business. Of these, I hope, some are amused.

For it is true that Arkansas has a civilized minority. But it is a disheartened minority. It is scattered, isolated, inarticulate, and leaderless. No man with anything worthwhile to say ever comes among us. We have to listen to scheming politicians and pulpit morons or stay at home. No great writer has arisen among us to

voice our hopes and fears, our mirths and indignations. But almost every community has its lone wit, made cynical and bitter by the welter of arrant nonsense surrounding him.

I know the people of Arkansas and I do not libel them. I know they have many noble qualities. There is not a spot in the State where any respectable-looking stranger cannot find shelter and friendship free. Taken in the mass, they are humorous, sympathetic, honest, generous, and patient, and their hands are quick to relieve distress. They are shrewd and industrious, and have the native capacity for far more learning than they have ever aspired to. But they won't think. They just feel. The loud cackle of merriment is heard on every hand, but an idea tossed among them scatters them like a bomb.

AMERICANA

ALABAMA

MELLOW words of the able editor of the Baldwin *Times*:

A SOURCE OF GREAT COMFORT

We've had in mind writing a little word of commendation of the Hedge and Fleming undertaking company for quite a while. First one thing and then another has delayed it.

It should be a source of considerable comfort to the people of this county to know that they have available such a fine organization as this one is, to handle the sad and oftentimes sorely trying duty of properly laying away our departed ones. No town anywhere, regardless of size, has any better qualified or more sympathetic morticians than are the persons making up this organization. They are well informed on their business, as their advertisements, which appear weekly in the *Times*, disclose.

Another point which we would touch in passing is the need of properly cleaning up and disinfecting the quarters in which some contagious disease was treated, as often arises in their business. Hedge and Fleming understand fully all the laws of sanitation and their record is a most enviable one. The care which they bestow on those who pass away, and the thoughtfulness they show the survivors, are matters of great importance to the bereaved and are ones in which they excel.

ARIZONA

THE lighter moments of a sage of the desert, as reported by the high-tone New York *Evening Post*:

Dr. C. H. Marvin, president of the University of Arizona at Tucson, camouflaged as a be-whiskered white wing, will help State American Legion Commander Dougherty sweep a Phoenix thoroughfare because Phoenix defeated Tucson in a Legion membership campaign.

ARKANSAS

PROGRESS of the New Jurisprudence in Little Rock, as brought to light by a United Press dispatch:

Proposals to change the city's censorship ordinances which have been submitted to the city council by Mayor C. E. Moyer, include:

No ridicule of the Volstead Act.

No display of unadorned feminine beauty over five inches above the knee.

No suggestive matter in sight or song.
No remarks about unfaithfulness to marriage vows.

No ridicule of any religion.

No bedroom scenes.

No talk of white slavery.

No long, passionate love scenes.

No ridicule of American traditions.

CALIFORNIA

CONTRIBUTION to the same science from California:

Children attending schools in California cannot be asked to write essays on the subject of communism, Attorney General U. S. Webb has ruled. Webb holds that the writing of such essays would necessitate a study of a subject which is taboo in this country.

COMPLAINT filed with Chief of Police R. Lee Heath, of Los Angeles, by Mrs. Angeleno Inforacto, of 435 East Forty-sixth street:

I wish to report that Officer Rader some time ago choked my dog so bad that he scared my child so bad that he immediately infantiled paralysised and was quarantined for two weeks. If this officer had not scared my child he would never had the infantile paralysis. This child saw the officer choke the dog and it scared him so badly that he immediately became sick. The expense for this child being sick were 50 cents for the doctor, \$30 for Mr. Inforacto being quarantined away from house and having to pay board. I would also like to get \$1,000 damages on account of having my family disturbed when the dog was choked.

I would like to have him put under \$1,000 peace bond to see that he does not choke my dog again. This makes a total of \$2,030.50 which I would like to have the officer pay for choking my valuable collie dog. This dog's name is Roddy and I value the dog at \$100, and in case this officer should sneak up on this dog and choke him after dark, I would like to get a judgment of \$100 against him as I am afraid that my boy would die with infantile paralysis if this officer ever chokes the dog again.

I would like to get another \$1,000 judgment against this officer in case my son dies from this fright caused by the officer choking my dog. This makes a total of \$3,030.50, which I believe is all the damages I should receive for the present.