

"ALICE OF OLD VINCENNES"

Four years ago I happened to spend a week near Vincennes, Indiana, and took the occasion to read Maurice Thompson's famous book, *Alice of Old Vincennes*. Last night when I came to Vincennes in a snow-storm, I was hoping for a clear day of this date; for I was anxious to see where it all happened. This morning it was still snowing, and tonight it is raining; the weather of the day was a sort of guess between snow, rain, sunshine, and shadow; but I went out anyhow and located the site of Fort Sackville, the old church of Father Beret, and perhaps the very spot where the wonderful cherry tree grew in the days of Alice and hunchback Jean.

Enroute I stopped at the beautiful city library of Vincennes to be certain that it was Thompson who wrote this book, and that it was Winston Churchill, a native of St. Louis, who wrote *The Crossing*, another great novel that has much of its setting in and around this same old French town. In the library, very appropriately, I found something about both Churchill and Thompson, and also, just as fittingly, a good deal about the city of Vincennes itself. One book of 220 pages, by H. S. Cauthorn, presents an interesting order of topics and events dating from 1702 to 1901; another, of 290 pages, by Dr. Hubbard M. Smith, is perhaps less scholarly, but is no less readable.

The most attractive thing I found was an artistic "Tourist's Guide to Historic Vincennes," compiled and published by the Vincennes Fortnightly Club, and now in the second edition. In this I learned that Vincennes was the first capital of Indiana Territory; that it is the oldest town (of white men) in the Northwest Territory, with the possible exception of Detroit, Michigan, and Kaskaskia, Illinois; the home of the first newspaper in Indiana; and the home of the first college as well as the first public school in Indiana.

Of course, I knew that Vincennes was the strategic British post of all this region during the Revolutionary War; that it had been taken by a handful of Virginians under George Rogers Clark and Joseph Bowman; that thereby it became a part of the United States by the treaty of peace, instead of a part of Canada; and that out of this vast territory, once a possession of Virginia, five or six great states had been made; but the thing that pleased me most was to observe that Vincennes historians know these things too, and have written them in their books. In the words of one of these writers: "Vincennes is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the United States. She has lived under three flags, the flags of what are now the greatest powers on earth. Born under France, matured under England, she became the parent of the Northwest Territory and the mother of the great states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana. She was the cradle of American world power. Because of the revolutionary battle fought on her soil, the Mississippi, instead of the Alleghanies, became our first western boundary."

The fact that all the rich territory northwest of the Ohio River was a Virginia possession from 1779 to 1784 is unequivocally stated by these Vincennes historians, as well as the fact that Virginia gave all this vast empire to the general government in 1784. This endowed the federal government and did perhaps more than anything else to make the Union possible and permanent. Herein, therefore, is one of the patent reasons why Virginia has so often been most properly termed the "Mother of States." When she surrendered this territory in 1784 she stipulated, among other things, that slavery should be barred and that states should be erected therefrom.

Whoever wrote the inscription for the stone that marks the site of old Fort Sackville, known after 1779 as Fort Patrick Henry, perhaps went a little too far by including all of Minnesota within the Clark

conquest; but here is what he wrote—I saw it today:

SITE
OF
FORT SACKVILLE
CAPTURED BY
COL. GEO. ROGERS CLARK
FROM THE BRITISH
FEB. 25, 1779;
RESULTING IN THE U. S.
ACQUIRING THE GREAT
NORTHWEST TERRITORY
EMBRACING THE STATES OF
INDIANA, OHIO, ILLINOIS,
MICHIGAN, WISCONSIN,
AND MINNESOTA

I came to Vincennes to study American history where a lot of it was made. I was not disappointed. Years of reading from books and maps were vitalized by the snow-covered plain, the encircling arcs of low hills, by the broken tombstones of the old graveyard, and by the rushing flood of the broad muddy river. Very much like they are today were most of the great natural factors of the situation in February, 1779, when Clark and his little band, wet, frozen, and starved, came toiling across the flooded country from Kaskaskia.

The Wabash River, on whose bank Fort Sackville stood, is 240 yards wide. Today it was muddy and turbulent, filled with cakes of snow and ice, carried rapidly down. I could almost imagine a forlorn band of young Virginians, shivering and faint, but with the light of empire in their eyes, on the farther bank.

And yet, the first school histories of the United States that I read and studied did not even mention Clark's name, so far as I can recall.

Here in Vincennes, Francis Vigo, who with Father Gibault, gave Clark's enterprise invaluable support, died in poverty. Forty years after he was dead the Congress of the United States paid him notable though tardy honor.

Clark is now being recognized as one of the great builders of the United States.

Joseph Bowman, his right-hand man, also under 30, who died here in the captured fort and lies somewhere hereabout in an unmarked grave, will also in time be recognized nationally, as he well deserves. The purchase of Louisiana by President Jefferson in 1803 was perhaps the greatest achievement of its kind in American history; the conquest of the Northwest Territory by Clark, Bowman, Gibault, Vigo, and men from the Shenandoah Valley, from Fauquier, and neighboring regions, will easily rank next.

I wish that every teacher in our schools would read Churchill's *The Crossing* and Thompson's *Alice of Old Vincennes*, two of the very best American historical novels. They clothe a wonderful period of our history in flesh and blood.

By the merest accident, while tarrying in the Vincennes library this morning, I learned that the man who inspired Thompson's great story is still living here in the city. I was given his name and address. From two o'clock till three this afternoon I watched his face and listened to the story from his own lips. He is an Alsatian, aged 75, but still well preserved, perfect in sight and hearing. He is a man of education and a writer of no mean ability. He left Alsace-Lorraine 54 years ago to avoid service in the Prussian army; he came to Vincennes because so many French people were already here. He learned the traditions of old Vincennes; and he still speaks the French language today, after nearly all the families who have been here since colonial days have forgotten it. He lives on the border of the old French quarter of Vincennes, not far from the site of the old fort, the abandoned cemetery, and the church of Father Beret.

Thompson came to Vincennes from New Orleans—discouraged and at a loss what next to do. For several years he had been working on a story of Louisiana, only to have it brought out ahead of him by Rosstand and Sarah Bernhardt. He came to Dr.

Valcour, for so he calls him in dedicating *Alice of Old Vincennes* to him, asking him to translate certain French manuscripts. From these manuscripts, and from certain productive suggestions of Valcour, the masterpiece was produced.

This man's real name, of course, is not Alcide Valcour. It is Benjamin Fritsch. This name sounds German, and so perhaps it is; but Fritsch classes himself as French, and speaks French as his mother tongue. As may be imagined, he takes a keen pride in *Alice of Old Vincennes*. In my opinion, he has ample justification therefor.

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ENGLISH NOTES

NORTH CAROLINA ACTIVE

The annual meeting of the North Carolina Council of English Teachers is to be held on April 16 and 17 in Charlotte. Miss Marguerite Herr, President of the Council, is arranging for an exhibit of English textbooks by various publishers and also an exhibit of newspapers and magazines. Some of the topics which will receive discussion are the following: The Conference Period; Précis Writing; Oral Instruction That Meets Life Needs; Creative Writing; Preparing the Teacher; Teaching a Superior Group; How Much Grammar?; How to Make Grammar Effective; Measurements; A Dramatic Director or Not in the High School.

DISTRICT ORGANIZATIONS

The organization of teachers of English at the various district meetings of the Virginia Education Association, according to the plan instituted by H. Augustus Miller, Jr., of Petersburg, during his two years as president of the English section of the association, is still progressing. Professor Conrad T. Logan, of the Harrisonburg Teachers College, new president of the English section, has requested Mr. Miller to con-

tinue his efforts to organize English teachers in each of the ten districts.

Garland Quarles, of the Handley High School, Winchester, was selected as chairman of the group in District G, and at the District H meeting in Manassas it is expected that a chairman for that region may be chosen. In Southwest Virginia both Districts I and K will be organized by Professor J. R. L. Johnson of the Radford Teachers College.

Thus only Districts E and J have not taken the initial step in bringing together their English teachers. Much of course remains to be done in all districts, but first there must be responsible chairmen in the ten districts if a state organization is to be effected that will be permanent.

ENGLISH WORK AT LINCOLN SCHOOL

Believing that subject matter is not an end in itself but a means of growth for each individual child, and that ample provision must be made for individual instruction, Miss Caroline B. Zachry has offered interesting evidence of the value of the project in English teaching. It is all to be found in a recent publication of the Lincoln School of Teachers College, entitled "Illustrations of English Work in the Junior High School."

In the foreword Professor William H. Kilpatrick, of Columbia University, questions our satisfaction with such procedure as to make first the curriculum, then teach it. He points out that this may be just as wrong as it would be to say that a tennis player must fix in advance the order of his strokes. Perhaps, he says—for no one can yet speak with certainty in this field—a curriculum can no more be contrived in advance than can the succession of strokes in a tennis match. Still, "thinking should look as far into the future as it can, and prepare as adequately as feasible for what is foreseen; but the teacher's thinking can never