

LETTERS FROM ARKANSAS

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Albert Pike (1809-1891), born in Massachusetts, started west in 1831, reached Santa Fe, New Mexico and then after many hardships and exciting experiences made his way back east to Fort Smith, Arkansas. In 1833 he was teaching school in Arkansas and trying his hand at literary writing. His Prose Sketches were published in Boston in 1834. 1

NO. I

My knowledge of Arkansas, and of the people of the West, has been derived from personal observation and actual residence among them. I know their peculiarities well. I am like one of them—an adopted son of the West; and I love my brethren and their character. To New-England, however, mine ancient home—to Boston, my mother city, I look back with love and affection; and could I be the means of making more fully known to your readers the character and virtues of the inhabitants of the West, I should hold myself a fortunate man.

It will be my object, in the few letters which I shall indite at odd seasons and scattered moments, to give you, in the first place, a general sketch of Arkansas. What order I may afterwards pursue, is entirely uncertain. I think, however, that I shall not weary of my task until I have given you a description of some of the principal curiosities, including courts of justice and distinguished men in Arkansas.

The Territory of Arkansas, as every one knows, is bounded on the east by the river Mississippi, on the west by the Indian Territory, on the north by the State of Missouri, and on the south by Red River and a part of Louisiana. It is with the portion

Albert Pike, "Letters from Arkansas, No. I," *New England Magazine* 9 (October 1835): 263-70; No. II, *American Monthly Magazine* 7 (January 1836): 25-32.

I. *Dictionary of American Biography*, 12 vols. (New York, 1957-1958), vol. 7, Pt. 2, pp. 593-95.

of the Territory lying on the river Arkansas, that I am most conversant; and it is therefore natural that this river should first engage our attention. It rises in the Rocky Mountains, about three hundred miles north of Santa Fe. I have crossed it and been on it in many places, but never within five hundred miles of its head. In the mountains, however, it is, like all other mountain streams, a clear, rapid river, and so continues until its color is changed in its passage through the prairie. I crossed it, in October, 1831, at a considerable distance above the mouth of the Semaron, 2 where it was a shallow and clear stream, with low prairie on one side and sand hills on the other—about an eighth of a mile wide. Farther down it receives the red and salt waters of the Semaron, and above Fort Gibson the waters of the Canadian, which come from under the Rocky Mountains. In the Cherokee territory, it receives the waters of the Grand River, or *Neosho*, *Illinois*, and *Salisau*, and at Fort Smith, of the *Poteau*. Above Fort Smith, the river is generally about a quarter of a mile wide; and in fact, its width is not much increased from that point to its mouth. Above that place the river is shallow, and not often navigable by steamboats. Below Fort Smith, the river continues of about the same size and depth—passing, in succession, through the counties of Crawford, Johnson and Pope, to Pulaski. Within the boundary of the Territory, that is to say, below Fort Smith, the Arkansas is a muddy, red and brackish stream—though much more so at 2. Cimarron.

one time than another, according to the stages of water, or the places where the *rises* come from. At low water it is the worst river of the West, except Red River, for snags and difficult navigation. To a person passing down the river, the country presents generally a uniform appearance, owing to the low *bottoms* which extend in a continuous belt on each side of the river from Fort Smith to the mouth, except in places where a point or bluff juts out upon the river, immediately succeeded by the monotonous *bottom*.

The bottoms, as they are called, being entirely alluvial, are generally from one to three miles in width on each side of the river-of a fine black and rich soil, producing excellent corn, and the best cotton in North America. The stranger who enters one of these bottoms for the first time, in spring or summer, is astonished and delighted. Imagine a New-Englander, familiar with the clear, silver-sanded, pebbly brooks and rivers of that country-the level, verdant, and heavy-swarded meadows through which they run, and the forests of pine, oak, maple and birch-imagine him entering a solid mass of greenness, a heavy and unstirred body of verdure. He enters, by some narrow path, into the depth of the bottom. The first idea that strikes him is, that he could have had no conception of such a depth and solidity of greenness. There is not a hand-breadth of barrenness about him. The immense trees, standing close together, are completely covered and laden with leaves to their very tops-and their trunks, twined round and garlanded with vines, appear like pillars of embodied greenness. The undergrowth of small trees and bushes is matted with vines and green briars; and the ground is covered with grass and weeds, or perhaps with the never-failing greenness of the cane. Such is the character of a great proportion of the Arkansas bottom. The cottonwood-a tree similar to the poplar, but of gigantic size and immense height-is the most common tree in these

bottoms. There is, besides, an abundance of ash, black, Spanish and yellow oak- all growing luxuriantly-the branching mulberry, the tall and graceful persimmon, and the humble but beautiful passaw,³ with multitudes of others unknown in your country. The dogwood, with its fine, close grain, and its multitudinous red blossoms; the hackberry, similar to the beech, the honey and black locust, and that splendid evergreen, the *holly*, appearing like a huge boxwood tree; blossoms of many kinds shine among the greenness like gems; while on the river-bank, the tall sycamore stands, hoary with age, and its silver trunk outlasting many men's lives. In some places, are impervious forests of cane, twenty feet high, as thick as they can be stuck. In others, are low swampy places, where the water stagnates, and where there is little or no vegetation. Out of these bogs, or "swamps," rise the protuberances, or knots, called knees, from which the straight trunk of the cypress (a tree similar to the hemlock) shoots up.

This is a picture of the Arkansas bottom in summer. In the winter everything is reversed. The vegetation has passed away; the leaves are massed and rotting below; and the tall cottonwood sighs mournfully in the wind; while the dark and sullen river rolls on under them. Everything seems dark, filthy, and desolate, and high on the trees are the red marks of the great inundation.

The soil of the Arkansas bottoms is inferior to none in the world; and the facilities offered a man for making a living and a fortune there, are nowhere equalled. A poor man comes here, whose necessities have driven him from the States. He has not a cent in the world-nothing but his axe and his rifle. He goes into the Arkansas bottom, cuts a few logs, and his neighbors help him raise a hut, with a wooden chimney, daubed with mud. If it is summer, he leaves the crannies open; if it is

3. Probably the pawpaw tree.

winter, he *chunks* them with bits of wood, and daubs them with mud. He chops out a hole for a door, and another for a window; splits, and hews out some thick slabs, or, as we call them here, *puncheons*, for a floor; hires himself out for a month or two, till he earns some corn and two or three hogs, and then “turns in to work” on his own farm. He cuts his hogs’ ears in some mark or other, turns them out to *root* for themselves, and goes resolutely to work, chopping timber, grubbing up cane, and performing the various operations necessary to clearing up land. Then you may hear a mile off, the continual musketry which the cane keeps up in burning, as the air contained in the joints expands and explodes. Having burned up the underbrush and the smaller trees, he girdles the larger ones—that is, cuts off a girdle of bark around them, for the purpose of deadening them; breaks up his ground a little, and throws in his corn. In four or five years that man will raise twenty bales of cotton and a thousand bushels of corn, and be steadily enlarging his crop and increasing his income.

The Arkansas is a singularly winding river, during the whole of its course. The distance from the mouth to Dutch Rock⁴—which is by land only one hundred and twenty-five miles—is by water about three hundred miles. On one side, the river is continually forming new land, while on the other it is continually encroaching upon Father Tellus;⁵ and frequently when a high overflow comes, the river breaks over the neck of a promontory, around which it has made a bend, and forms a new channel—while the old one becomes a lake. Thus, in 1833, it broke across a point of bottom, about one hundred yards wide at the place, through which new channel, steamboats now pass. The old chan-

4. In his second letter (included here) Pike corrected this mistaken reference to Little Rock as Dutch Rock.

5. Tellus was a Roman goddess, the personification of the earth. *Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia*, 9: 984.

nel, fifteen miles around the point, is filling up. And thus also, on the south side of the Arkansas, above the fort, are a long chain of lakes, in the former bed of the river.

Below Fort Smith, the Arkansas receives the waters of *Mulberry*, *Frog Bayou*, *Horse Head*, *Spadra*, *Petit Jean*, *Point Remove*, *Cadrow*, and *Palarme* creeks. The three latter are deep, filthy and disgusting bodies of water, sluggish, and resembling the river Styx or the Dead Sea. The former are very pretty, clear running bodies of water. Below Dutch Rock, the river becomes more sinuous. It receives various creeks on its way down—among others, *Fourche* and *Bayou Metre*. Within twelve miles of the Mississippi, it separates into two channels—the northern called the *Cut-Off*, while the latter preserves the name of *Arkansas*.⁶ The *Cut-Off*, is the most commonly-used channel. The bottoms on each are low, and the greenness extends to the water’s edge. Immediately after entering the *Cut-Off*, you see a change in the water. Instead of the red color of the Arkansas, it assumes the chalky color of the Mississippi—is cooler and more pleasant. Within a mile or two of the Mississippi, *White River* comes into the *Cut-off* from the north. It rises in Missouri, and is called *White River* from the extreme clearness of its waters, before *Big Black* runs into it above its mouth. The junction of *White River* with the *Cut-Off*, is a most singular sight. Here is a mass of red, or chalky water, there a mass of water which seems to be black-boiling and whirling around, and seeming as distinct as though the latter was not water but oil. A little further on, and the waters mingle and discharge themselves into the great Mississippi.

Two years ago, in the month of June, the crops were promising in Arkansas. There came a succession of heavy rains, and the river rose to *high-water*

6. This is shown on the map in the front of *Nuttall’s Journal of Travels*.

mark. The rise was red, and salt, and evidently came from the desert prairie. The rains ceased, and the people supposed the rise was over. Suddenly the river began to swell higher and higher. The water came down colder and clearer. The snows had melted on the Rocky Mountains. Higher and higher it rose--*fifteen* feet, at Fort Smith, above high-water mark. The bottoms from Fort Smith to the mouth were overflowed. The river was filled with fragments of houses, dead cattle, huge trees, rushing on to the Mississippi. Cattle, hogs, even deer and bear, unable to escape from the bottoms, were all drowned. Many people built rafts, and placing themselves and their horses upon them, fastened them to trees, and lived out the inundation. The crops were ruined; whole farms were filled up with sand; and the channel of the river entirely altered. Such is the Arkansas.

I entered the Territory of Arkansas at Fort Smith, which is situated on the Arkansas, on the Indian line.⁷ At that time there were no troops there, and the only appearance of a military post about it, were some few old buildings which had served as barracks. It is a place containing three or four stores and some half dozen houses; and is very prettily situated on a huge bluff on the south side of the river. The county of Crawford, except on the river and creeks, is generally low land, thinly covered with oak timber; and though a large county, it is but thinly settled.

As the August election approached, there began a stir in the county of the subject of politics. Candidates were riding in every direction, electioneering; and now and then a hot quarrel took place among the excited partizans.

The overflow had covered the little town of

7. Fort Smith was founded to keep peace between the Osage and Cherokee Indians. It was established in 1817 by a group of soldiers under the command of Major Stephen H. Long. It became an important stop for travellers to California. *Arkansas Guide*, pp. 144-46.

Van Buren,⁸ and the population thereof, in a number about a dozen, had established themselves in booths at the foot of the hill beyond the town; and there, where I rode in one day in June, I found a multitude assembled.

"Holla, stranger!" cried one tall fellow, in a hunting-shirt of leather, as I rode up; "Come, 'light-and take a little old rye, anyhow."

"That's the master," cried another; "dern my skin, if he can't speechify it better nor any of 'em. Master, if you'll run for the Assembly, dern me if I don't vote for ye."

Twenty such greeted me, as I dismounted and made fast my horse. I soon discovered the object of the *gathering*. There was a barrel set on end, with a board across it, and I at once divined that the rival candidates were to address the people. I inquired if the candidates for Congress were there, and found they were not. It was a meeting for the county candidates, whom I saw busy among the people, shaking them by the hand, and making themselves boon companions. It was a perfect Babel.

"Hurra for Sinclair! He's a horse. Who'll drink Crittenden's liquor? Here goes for Sevier! Good morning, 'Squire; how's your family? Come up and drink with an old acquaintance, who's a candidate. Bates forever! the people's candidate! He's a horse in a cane-brake! Go ahead, steamboat! Brown's a roarer! Five dollars on Martin!" Such were some of the cries which struck my ear.⁹

8. Van Buren was an important frontier post established in 1818. It was known as Phillips' Landing until it was renamed in honor of President Martin Van Buren. It was an out-fitting post for Texas and the Indian country. *Ibid.*, pp. 252-53.

9. "Robert Sinclair was councilman (senator) from Crawford County in the General Assemblies of 1831 and 1833. Bennett H. Martin was representative from Crawford County in 1833. Richard C. S. Martin was representative from Crawford County in 1829, 1831 and 1846; councilman in 1835; and state senator in 1836 and 1838." John L. Ferguson, *State Historian of Arkansas*, to Jacqueline Bull,

Directly, Martin—one of the candidates for the House of Representatives, a warm Crittenden man, and afterwards elected—mounted the barrel. I assure the reader that he may hear as much oratory in the West on a stump, as in the East in a Court-house, or in old Faneuil itself.¹⁰ The impression of oddity soon wears off, and I am inclined to believe that the Western manner of electioneering is to the full as proper and more honest and open-handed than the silent canvassing in the East.

Martin is a lawyer, who had quit brick-laying for brief-making and special pleading. He is a man of strong natural good sense, and a sarcastic and satirical humor, which tells well in a candidate. His speech was about half an hour long, and he was succeeded by Judge Bates, a man of great talent, a polished writer, full of classic lore, but no speaker. When he was on the bench in Arkansas, a lawyer,—also formerly a Judge, and of whom I may hereafter speak—named Hall,¹¹ was in the habit of interlarding his speeches at the bar with frequent Latin quotations. In one cause, particularly, he was very profuse of his learning, so much so, that when Bates delivered the opinion of the Court, he did it off-hand *in Latin*. Hall listened, but only knowing a few quotations learned from law books, he was compelled to the great amuse-

¹² September 1969. Crittenden is identified later in this sketch. James Woodson Bates was a territorial judge. *Arkansas Guide*, p. 385. Ambrose H. Sevier was born in Green County, Tennessee, on 10 November 1801. In 1820 he moved to Missouri and in 1821 to Arkansas. He served in Congress as a representative of the Territory of Arkansas, 1828-1836, and as a senator, 1838-1848; he was serving as minister to Mexico when he died in 1848. *Biographical Directory of the American Congress*, pp. 1795-96.

¹⁰. Faneuil Hall, built by Peter Faneuil in Boston, 1740-1742, served as a market house and an assembly hall. Many meetings of American patriots were held there during the Revolution. *Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia*, 9: 379.

¹¹. A list of Arkansas lawyers in the early period gives the name of Samuel S. Hall of Little Rock. William F. Pope, *Early Days in Arkansas* (Little Rock, Ark., 1895), p. 217.

ment of the bar and the spectators, to require of the Judge to *translate* his opinion into English.

Bates was succeeded by three other candidates, two of whom were farmers and the third a lawyer—the latter by far the *weakest* of all. I had expected a display of bombast and noise, and was agreeably surprised by good strong sense, keen satire, and almost an entire freedom from violence or affectation in all the speeches. I was still better pleased when I afterwards saw Crittenden and Sevier—the rival candidates for Congress—meet on the stump. Robert Crittenden is since dead. He was a brother of John J. Crittenden, Senator from Kentucky, and is universally allowed to have been a more talented man than either of his brothers. I have listened to him frequently, since then, in various places, and I esteem him one of the most eloquent men I ever heard. His voice was full and rich, his language copious, strong and yet brilliant; and he excelled equally in pathos and irony. His opponent, Colonel Sevier, is a very common man. He never made any figure at the bar, and his only character in Congress has been that of an industrious and persevering man. He was evidently no match for Crittenden on the stump, and seemed to be well aware of it.

I am extending this letter to an unwarrantable length, and with one tale of perilous adventure, by *flood*, if not by fire. I shall close.

In the month of January, 1833, there was an inundation of the Arkansas. I was living at that time opposite Fort Smith, and, in company with my host, got into a pirogue, when the rise was at the highest and took a trip, like fools, seven miles down the river, to the town of Van Buren aforesaid. After reaching that place, we began to consider—what we had not thought of before—how we were to get back; and the result of our joint cogitations was that, as it was impossible to get back in the pirogue, we must return on foot. The first four miles were easily accomplished, as it was over the

upland; but at the end of that distance, we arrived at the edge of the bottom, through which we had about three miles to go. It was overflowed in some places to the depth of ten feet. We looked down upon the cane-for it was full of that article-and held another consultation. On we pushed, however, and commenced floundering through the water, among the cane. It was generally about deep enough to immerse us to our necks; and when the reader remembers that it was in January, he will doubtless be aware that it was not very pleasant. We had proceeded but a little way, when my companion lost his reckoning and became lost. He turned from home, and commenced wandering about in every direction, until I took the lead, as the oldest woodsman. After proceeding about a mile and a half, with great caution, we came at length to the bank of a little gully, about fifteen feet wide, as we learned by the break in the cane. Here we halted, and consulted how we should cross. I cannot swim an inch, and nothing was left but to hunt for logs. We proceeded down the creek until we had found a small one, when I held one end until he straddled it, and cooned it over; and he did me the same service at the other end. We kept onward. The ground became more elevated; and just as we got out of the water, we found ourselves on the bank of what is called Garrison's creek-a stream about sixty feet wide. At low water, the banks are twenty-five feet above water; now, the water was level with them. We attempted to build a raft, but could only find one log, about twenty feet long, and two others about eight. We stripped some hickory bark and tied them together, and straddled the further end of them-but were no sooner on than the long one toppled over, the short ones went under, and so did I, clothes and all; so we gave up that idea. I then took one of the short logs, put one end under my breast, and tried to cross in that way. It wouldn't do. Over and over went the log, and I got another bounteous ducking.

By this time it was getting dark, and the air was growing keen and cold. Just then we heard an axe across the creek, and commenced hallooming, which soon brought a man down, splashing through the water, to the bank of the creek. I advised my companion to go over and hire the man to fell a tree, on which I could cross, and therefore he took to the water, with his breast on one end of the long log. He kicked away manfully, and when the end of the log struck the shore, jumped off and swam for it. Having made his bargain with the stranger, he went home, and the latter went again to his house and brought his axe and a brand of fire. In the meantime I was nearly frozen. There was only one place where I could move, and that was in a circle about six feet in diameter, round a tree. On one side there was a man, with a fire flaring near him, chopping away at an oak tree four feet through; and on the other I was pacing round my circle, which I wore as deep, hard, and smooth as a buffalo-path. At the expiration of about three hours, the tree came down, and barely reached the shore. The upper end was covered with water, and I had to get on it a-straddle, with the water up to my neck. However, I reached the shore in safety; and though I suffered no inconvenience from sickness in consequence of my adventure, I learned never to go down river again, in an overflow, without knowing how I was to get back.

Yours, **ALBERT PIKE.**

NO. II

SIR- I see that you have published my first letter from this out of the way land. That emboldens me to try my hand at another. Court has just adjourned and so has the Territorial Legislature, and I am a little at leisure. After I get through with the Arkansas River, we will look at the capital.

I left Crawford county in July 1833, and travelled down the river some forty miles, to the county of Pope, where I intended to *take up* (as they say



here) a school. After travelling over a fine, rolling, upland country, I descended into the bottom of a creek called Little Piney, nine miles from the river-and came at once upon a small log house. I stopped to take a survey before entering; for I had been directed to the *settler* who lived there. It was like most other settlements in this country. A field of about forty acres was under cultivation,-filled with huge blackened trunks, gigantic skeletons of trees, throwing their bare, withered, sapless branches forth, as though a whirlwind had been among them with its crashing destruction. About the house were a number of peach trees, scattered about with very little regard to regularity. The house itself was roughly built of logs, and in front was a shelter made of poles, covered with green branches. The owner of the clearing was sitting in front, dressed throughout in leather, and playing lustily on a fiddle. Hearing that sound, I judged there would be no churlishness in his disposition, and I marched boldly up. He greeted me heartily, and without any attempt at politeness, and in two minutes we were on the best terms in the world. He too had been at Santa Fe, and, as old travellers over the prairie, we had a claim upon one another's

kindness. The heart naturally warms to one who has been through the same scenes of danger, difficulty, and privation as yourself.

With due reference to those respectable gentlemen of former ages, called troubadours, romancers, et cetera, I incline to believe that the best and most gallant knights of olden time were much such men as the bold and stalwart backwoodsmen. The same bold, brave, and careless demeanor-the same contempt of danger and recklessness of the finer courtesies, and sympathies of life-the same fighting, revelling, carousing, and heedless disposition-the same blunt and unpolished manners exist in the latter which are recorded to have belonged to the former. My present host was one of the purest specimens of the bone and sinew of the West. Tall and athletic, he would hardly have feared a death-grapple with a bear. His frame was close knit, muscular, and well proportioned. He combined the activity of the panther, the strength of the lion, with much of the silent, quick, and stealthy movements of the Indian. He had been a journeyer over deserts and mountains, and a soldier at the battle of New Orleans. Of course he was an excellent Jackson man.

My object being, as I said before, to get a school, I opened the subject to my host, and inquired what might be the prospect? "Why," said he, "if you would set in, right strait, I reckon thar' might be a right smart chance of scholars got, as we have had no teacher here for the best end of two years. Thar's about fifteen families on the creek, and the whole tote of 'em well fixed for children. They want a schoolmaster pretty much, too. We got a teacher about six months ago—a Scotchman, or an Irishman, I think. He took up for six months, and carried his proposals round, and he got twenty scholars directly. It weren't long, though, before he cut up some ferlieues, and got into a primary; and so one morning he was found among the missing."

"What was the trouble ? "

"Oh! he took too much of the essence of corn, and got into a chunk of a fight—no great matter, to be sure; but he got whipped, and had to leave the diggings."

"And how am I to manage to get a school ? "

"I'll tell you. You must make out your proposals to take up school: tell them how much you ask a month, and what you can teach; and write it out as fine as you can (I reckon you're a pretty good scribe, and in the morning there's to be a shooting match here for beef; nearly all the *settlement*," (laying the accent on the last syllable) "will be here, and you'll get signers enough."

I followed his advice. The neighbors gathered in the morning; I was duly introduced to them, and soon had twenty scholars subscribed. Reader, didst ever see a shooting match in the West? I dare swear you never have, and therefore there may be no tediousness in a description of one. I hate your set descriptions; laid out, formally in squares and parallelograms, like an old-fashioned garden, whereon art hath not so far advanced as to seem like nature. You can just imagine the scene to yourself. Conceive yourself in a forest, where the

huge trees have been for ages untouched by the axe. Imagine some twenty men—tall, stalwart, browned hunters; equipped in leather with their broad knives by their sides, rifles in hand, and every man with his smoke blacked board in his hand. The rivals in the first contest were eight sturdy fellows, middle aged and young men. The ox for which they were to shoot was on the ground, and it was to be the best six shots out of eleven. The four quarters, and the hide and tallow, were the five prizes; they were to shoot *off-hand* at forty yards, or with a *rest* at sixty, which is considered the same thing. Two judges were chosen, and then a blackened board, with a bit of paper on it about an inch and a half square, was put up against a tree. "Clare the track!" cried the first marksman, who lay on the ground at his distance of sixty yards, with his gun resting over a log. The rifle cracked, and the bullet cut into the paper. "Put up my board!" cried another—"John, shade my *sight* for me!" and John held his hat over the *sight* of the gun. It cracked, and the bullet went within half an inch of the centre. "My board!" cried another; "I'll give that shot *goos!*" and he did; fairly boring the centre with the ball. The sport soon became exciting. It requires great steadiness of nerve to shoot well, for any irregularity in breathing will throw the bullet wide of the mark. The contest was longer than I had anticipated; but was decided without quarrel or dispute. The judges decided, and their decision was implicitly obeyed. The whole eleven shots of one man who won two quarters, would be covered with a half dollar. You have made a show of Davy Crockett; but there are thousands of men in the West who are better marksmen, better bear hunters and every whit as smart as Davy himself.

Speaking of him, however, reminds me of an anecdote of him, which may perhaps be contained in his autobiography, if not, it is too good to be lost, for it does him more honor than the fact that

he has been in congress. Before he was a candidate, or had any idea of being one, there was a season of scarcity in the Western District where he lived. He went up the Mississippi, and bought a flat boat load of corn, and took it to what he calls "his old stamping ground." When a man came to him to buy corn, the first question he asked, was: "Have you got the money to pay for it?" If the answer was in the affirmative, Davy's reply was, "Then you can't have a kernel. I brought it here to sell to people that have no money." It was the foundation of his popularity.

We naturally slip from the sublime to the ridiculous. Let us leave Crockett and come to school-keeping. My school-house was a small log house, with a fireplace the width of one end-no floor-no boarding or weather boarding-a hole for a window, and one for a door. In that place I taught a collection of urchins two months, and then was taken possession of by the fever and ague, which lasted me another month, and ended my school-keeping in this mortal life. I was to get my pay, half in money and half in pigs; and I managed to get *three dollars* of the former and omitted saying any thing of the quadrupeds. That made four and a half months, during which I had labored at mine office and vocation. For the first six weeks I got just enough to pay my board; and for the last school, as I said before, three dollars. How many pigs I may have at this day in Pope county, it is impossible for me to tell. However, while I was employed in this thankless office, I wrote "hapes" (as my predecessor in the school would have said) of poetry, part of which I have since published in a book.¹² If it did not make me famous, it ought to have done it; for it was all I got for my three or four months' hard work.

I see that some one in your magazine has re-

12. In 1834 Pike published a book, *Prose Sketches and Poems Written in the Western Country*. *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 7, pt. 2, pp.593-95.

viewed my unpretending work* and accused me of affectation, because I wrote in too gloomy and melancholy a vein. Sir, it is easy for men who dwell in New England to chide the luckless wanderer of the desert and sojourner in solitude.--for gloom and despondency; I hope that those who blame me may never suffer what I have suffered. Part of that book I wrote in a foreign country, while traveling about, alone, among men of a different language--part in the *lodge* of the wild indian--part in the solitudes of the mountains; on the loneliness and danger of the desert; in hunger and watching, and cold and privation--part in the worse loneliness of a school-room--*all* in poverty, trouble, and despair. It is easy to imagine a desolation of the heart: I *know* what it is. Enough of this!

The country below Pope county, to Little Rock (which you have misprinted "Dutch Rock") on the north side of the Arkansas, beyond the bottoms, is high, rough and rocky; particularly near the Cadron and the Palarme. Here and there are low valleys, where the roads are most execrable and even dangerous. The country to the north, comprising several counties, I know very little about, excepting the county of Washington, which is much like Missouri, composed of undulating prairies, interspersed with wood land. There is very little worthy of remark on the road from Pope county to Little Rock, except about fifty-five miles above the latter place, where you cross the track of a hurricane. A tremendous tornado passed there some five years ago, with a power almost inconceivable. It was about a mile and a half in width; and no one knows the distance it travelled. It left hardly a tree standing where it swept by. The largest hickory and oak trees were twisted round, and *broomed* up by the blast; and a thick growth of vines and briars has grown up in place of the forest. It has never been my fortune to behold the

* Poems and Prose Sketches: reviewed in 1st No., 9th vol. of N. E. M.

passage of such a tornado; neither am I anxious for the honor. One of the lawyers in this territory, who was caught in such a hurricane once, has described it to me frequently. He was travelling through the woods in the southern part of the territory, on a clear, warm summer day, when he heard a roaring, like the bellowing of the ocean, rising in the distance, and increasing every moment. He sought for some open place, and found one, where a small hickory sapling stood alone, with no tree within twenty or thirty yards. Here he alighted, and holding the sapling with one hand, kept the bridle in the other. In a few moments he saw, afar off, in the direction of the tornado, the air darkened with branches swept onward before the mighty wind. Directly the blast struck him-not like a wind, but like a body of condensed air, pouring on with the swiftness of the lightning. At one moment he was dashed on the ground-and then the tornado would lift itself, and leave a calm below-then it would descend again, and again dash him to the earth. He was stunned with the terrible roar of the mad hurricane, and the crash of the giant trees, over which the chariot of destruction was rolling its mighty, though invisible wheels. Large branches were whirled far away over his head, or fell close by him; and it was a full half hour ere the hurricane had passed away. It had swept a path through the forest as a cannon ball would cut its road through a solid column of Lilliputians.

Little Rock, at which place I arrived in October, 1833, during the season of the legislature, is situated on the south bank of the Arkansas river. Directly opposite to the town is a bottom about a mile wide, only cleared in here and there a spot; and about two miles above the town, an abrupt promontory, called Big Rock, juts into the river on the north side. The town itself is situated on a bluff on the river, far above overflow; and just below the limits of the town, the bottom spreads out again. As Mr.

Featherstonhaugh has published a long description anent this county,¹³ which I take to be extremely learned, for the very sufficient reason that I cannot understand a word of it, and as I am no geologist, I shall give no descriptions of which that science forms an ingredient. I only know that the Little Rock Bluff is composed of slate (granwacke slate, I think he calls it).

Little Rock contains about eight hundred and fifty inhabitants,¹⁴ and is laid off with tolerable regularity by streets running at right angles. The ground on which it is built is somewhat irregular; but could easily be graded so that it would slope regularly from the summit of the ridge to the river; in which case it would much resemble, in size and situation, the town of Newburyport.¹⁵ The houses are a motley mixture; consisting of every variety, from brick blocks of two stories to log cabins-standing in juxta-position. Far the greater number, however, are shingle palaces. There are no public buildings (unless you give the churches that name, of which there are three, two wooden and one brick), except the State house-to erect which, congress gave the territory ten sections of land, which sold for thirty-two, thousand dollars. It is a great, awkward, clumsy, heavy edifice, of brick, with a smaller building on each side-one a court house, and the other for secretary's office, &c. The main building is partly covered with *tin*; and is commonly called "Pope's folly" --after the Hon. John Pope, Ex-governor of the territory, its projector.¹⁶

13. G.W. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion through the Slave States*, 2 vols. (London, 1844) 2: 42-64, 207-12.

14. Featherstonhaugh gave the population of Little Rock in 1834-1835 as 600. *Ibid.*, 2:49. The first population figures for Little Rock did not appear in the Federal census until 1850.

15. Newburyport, Massachusetts.

16. The state capitol, now the War Memorial Building, was built from plans drawn by the well-known Kentucky architect Gideon Shryock. It was begun in 1833 and was