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"The Folklorist"

"The Homesick Missourian"

"Wah-Wah-henawah -  
The Road to Paradise"

by

Mary Alicia Owen

Paper--Mary Alicia Owen

THE FOLKLORIST

BELOVED MISSOURI

"I have always been thankful that a kindly providence decreed that I should be born in Missouri. Her "rocks and rills, her trees and wooded hills", her flowers and fruits and farms, her gorgeous "sunups" and sundowns" with no equals in the world, (I've been told) are all a part of me, or I of them. Like Rupert Brooks with his England, where ever I may rest is part of Missouri.

I hope you will pardon me for quoting a many times printed poem I wrote years ago. I have only the manuscript now, for the printing on straw paper, like many of my good resolutions, went to pices. It is entitled "The Homesick Missourian" and you may not think it poetry after all." *Mary Alicia Owen*

THE HOMESICK MISSOURIAN

I am wearying for my prairies  
Where the little rivers run  
All fringed with trees and blossoms  
That half keep out the sun,  
While between lie fields and orchards  
And pastures too, galore,  
And barns and goodly houses  
With children at the door.  
'Tis my own, my dear Missouri,  
The land of golden corn,  
The sweetest land the wind blows o'er,  
The land where I was born.

I long to see the clover  
Beleaguered by the bees  
Far sweeter than the honey  
Its fragrance on the breeze.  
I want my grassy orchards  
Where the big red apples glow  
On boughs bent down in garlands--  
Eve tried them, long ago--  
Now they grow but in Missouri,  
Land of fruit and corn,  
The sweetest land the wind blows o'er,  
The land where I was born.

I want to watch the hazels  
Shake down their winter store  
And the walnuts and the shellbarks  
On the earth's leaf-spangled floor.  
Life's fullness and life's richness  
I can find no other where  
O, my own, my dear Missouri,  
I am longing to be there,  
There in my own Missouri,  
With its hazelnuts and corn,  
The sweetest land the wind blows o'er,  
The land where I was born.

And I want my mighty river  
 To which the "cricks" all run,  
 Where the <sup>birds</sup> brant are flying over  
 And the fish leap in the sun;  
 And my lakes that dimple near it,  
 And the sedge where plovers call  
 And the lilies where the ducks hide--  
 Dear Lord, I want them all  
 That belong to dear Missouri,  
 The land of game and fruit and corn.  
 The sweetest land the wind blows o'er,  
 The land where I was born.

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This was written before our blue bird sang above our hawthorn, lovely state.

And the folk-lorist and his primitive and original lore,  
 not garnered from books for a book is the opinion of one person--  
 but "handed down" from generation to generation--is he and his  
 lore to be considered a part of the fauna of Missouri?--I cer-  
 tainly think so. I notice that a new encyclopedia says that  
 among his contemporaries Mark Twain was considered a humorist,  
 but now he is classified as a great folklorist. It makes me feel  
 like calling to his shade, "Mark, instead of hanging around Hanni-  
 bal, you should have come over to the Platte Purchase that won-  
 derful sacred ground of the Indians, Wah-wah-ha-nawah (The Road  
 to Paradise) the Indians hated so to give up and including Platte,  
 Buchanan, Andrew, Nodaway, Holt, and Atchison Counties.

I beg that you listen to this account: " *Mary Alice Owen*

"WAH-WAH-LENAWAH"

## THE ROAD TO PARADISE

By Mary Alicia Owen

It is a great thing to belong to Missouri, the state one-third greater in area than England, and equal to Portugal, Switzerland and Bohemia combined the state which is central geographically, pivotal in politics, comprehensive in climate and products. It is a blessing brighter still to belong to that choicest corner of the great commonwealth, the Platte Purchase. It is the crown of blessings to be identified with what was, before it was the rich and populous city of St. Joseph, before it was Robidoux's Landing--the Mecca of Steamboatman and fur-trader--(one terminus of the Road to Paradise.)

This statement is not a jest, nor is it the idle exaggeration of a misty legend. Long before the Louisiana Purchase raised such a storm of indignation against Thomas Jefferson; long before that worthless old poseur and spendthrift, Louis the Fourteenth, possessed and held Louisiana by right of grab and graft and the sufferings and explorations of La Salle, Tonty, Boisron-det and their followers, this was sacred soil.

How did it become so?

There is no fragment of history chanted by the dying council fires of the red men, no tattered page from the letters of half-forgotten explorers to kings who were better forgotten, to tell. All that we know with certainty is that the pioneers had it from the Indians that these hills once so richly wooded, and the prairies deep with lush grasses billowing under the winds as a sea with its waves or blazing with unnamed and uncountable wild

flowers, were set apart as a land of peace, to which the warring tribes: Sioux, Iroquois, Illinois, Shawnee, Natchez, all the banded Algonquin tribes, and even the doubly hated Apache, could come to rest, to hunt, to make or break alliances or treaties, to recuperate their sick, to bury their dead and, once a year, to hear the prophecies, which, as the ice broke up in the Missouri River, were sighed from its waters by the king of fishes--the giant channel catfish--and interpreted to the people by the shamans or medicine-men.

This was a wonderful rendezvous, the most wonderful of which there is any account, oral or written. In comparison, Hebron and Gilead, Shechem, Naphtali, Bezer, Kadesh, Golan and Ramoth, the cities of refuge of biblical times, seem dwarfed in importance and restricted in scope. To them, solitary, fled the shedder of blood, but here, here was the resting-place of armies, the meeting-place of diplomats, the parliament of tribal rulers, the congress of religions, the haven of the desolate, the beginning of the long ghost road across which dying eyes gazed confidently into the Happy Hunting Grounds, untroubled by the fear that the way might not be clear, or the doubtful spirit lured into the cold, wet, slippery caves which constitute the red man's hell.

As in the time of her greatest pride all roads led to Rome, so in the time of their greatest natural affluence all trails led to the Council Hills and the noble bluffs overlooking a river as impetuous, untrammelled, ungoverned and ungovernable as the Indian lords of the soil who here foregathered, our own mighty Missouri. All trails, I should have said, except one. Feet came and went on the others, but all footsteps pointed one way on the Road to Paradise, and, yet it was so desirable a way that there was often hurrying by night and by day to reach this end of it.

It must have been the most splendid sight the world has seen since the Druids were driven from the oak groves of France and Britain, when the clans mustered here, whether they came down the river in their strong dug-outs (no birch-bark canoe would attempt these swirling waters), or across the land. Whether they came by land or water the order would be the same: the warriors first, in all the bravery of hunting and holiday gear-eagle feathers nodding, buckskin fringes waving, elk-ivory and wampum clicking like castanets, their round, painted shields of buffalo hide before them (if they were plains men, that is, mountain and forest men did not carry shields), their embroidered doeskin quivers at their backs. Then, the old men, the councillors, dignified, severe, without ornament. Then, the ruck of common men, and boys not old enough to be warriors nor young enough to appear with women. Then, the busy matrons encumbered with babies, dogs, baggage, folded tents, all the paraphernalia of forest house-keeping. Then, the gay, frolicking, bedizend, painted young girls. Lastly, the chaperons, the old women, doing their duty by the giddy misses in front of them as tartly as Spanish duennas. If there were any sick, the old women had charge of them, but here they were tenderness personified, dragging their patients along, with as little jolting as possible, on a travois, a sort of stretcher of rawhide fastened between poles, one end of which dragged on the ground, the other, being like shafts, harnessed to the old women, or, at a later date, to a pony. (In rural Ireland, there is still a conveyance something like this called a "Drag-wagon.") Fortunate were these invalids, or at least, they and their people thought they were, to have been brought to this happy country where, doubtless, once the gods had dwelt, and so holy that from it the devils

of disease must take their flight unless they had so torn and mastered the poor body that it was past mending and, therefore, the soul was bound to slip out. Even if this happened, there was still comfort in the coming, for here their feet were already set in the Way of Life.

Even little children's ghosts could start from here at once, although, ordinarily, little children are buried in the path leading from the mother's wigwam to the water so that they may see her every day as they await the time when she shall become a ghost and show them the way to the Land of the Hereafter, they being too inexperienced to find the road alone. The ghosts of the blind and decrepit also, set out at once from here instead of waiting for their robust relatives, who, when their time came, were buried on western hill-tops and had a good view of the ghost-road before attempting to traverse it.

Parenthetically, I may state that some of the fiercest frontier wars have been waged on account of the Indians having been removed from the burying-grounds where lie their children and old people. They are confident that these, without a guide, will wander, hungry, cold and homeless, forever. There is an oriental proverb that if you take the babe from its mother, the whelp from the tigress, the king of devils dare not face either. I infer that complexion is an unimportant detail under the circumstances.

I have been asked why such a variety of graves have been found here: tree and scaffold burials on Prospect Hill, according to the customs of the Sioux; earth burials and ashes up by the Water-Works and on King Hill, stone cysts south of town. As I have said, all trails ran into the road to Paradise. From the hills, the mountains, the plains, the deep river valleys, the desert, the cane brake even, they converged at Council Hills,

Robidoux's Landing, the city of the good St. Joseph. It was good to sojourn here, it was good to die here, the Indian of any tribe drew his last sigh here beside the Missouri in as happy confidence in his beatitude as the East Indian has today on the banks of the Ganges. What guerdon then could induce one tribe to yield its place and right to any other? None, I am convinced. I have enough of the Indian spirit myself to feel that Heaven is a little hearer and a little surer here than elsewhere.

Our own land, of every land the pride,  
Beloved by Heaven over all the world beside,  
Our home, the spot of earth supremely blest,  
Sweeter, dearer, more revered than the rest.

I apologize for departing from the era under consideration and return to it.

On arrival, the first question of the tribe, as with civilized peoples, was the question of food. The brave, among Indians, is not the bread-winner of the family, that is the squaw's business; his duty is to provide the meat. That was here in plenty, from fat young grizzlies, buffalo and deer to ortolans, quail, pigeons and woodcock, of course, not expecting the best turkies an epicure ever spitted for his table in the wilderness. After helping the braves to get ready for their superior work of hunting according to the immemorial custom or women, the younger dames went fishing in the little weed-fringed streams that hide their depleted waters in sewers now; the older ones, after setting up tents, starting fires, heating the bread-stone and getting out the parche maize and cornmeal to be made into cakes when the men returned, would look about for the groves of hard maple and start the sap they intended, later, to bake into sugar in stone pots kept hot with embers. This, of course, is supposing that the season was spring. In summer, the men hunted as before and fished in the Missouri for channel catfish, with great

wooden or stone hooks as unlike as possible to the tiny bone contrivances of their women.

They did not fish in the great river in the spring for fear of catching the prophet.

The women, of necessity, brought the materials for their bread with them, for there could be no planting and harvesting on neutral ground, and they worked with the girls at gathering strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, ground cherries, sweet summer grapes and the misnamed mayapples. The largess of the autumn was still more varied and satisfying. Frost grapes were hanging from every bough, black and red haws, red and yellow plums were in inexhaustable abundance, hazelnuts were crowding out of their brown hoods, walnuts, hickorynuts and acorns were falling with the leaves, yonquapins--the hard brownish-black seeds of the lotus-lillies on the lake--were ready to be plucked from their cases and pounded into the sacred meal used at the feasts of the sun-dances. Wild pigeons, parroquets, quail, geeses, brant, ducks, prairie-chickens were in restless flocks, thick as the plague of grasshoppers which followed the extermination of the fowls by the pale-faces.

An Indian, remember, kills for food and clothing for his family. He doesnot believe in exterminating anything but his enemy. Indeed, so careful is he not to affront the totemic animals, the lesser gods, that he apologizes to his game before he kills it and promises that its bones shall be treated with respect and neither gnawed by dogs nor burned.

If the tribe came in winter--but I have no heart to describe the splendid and varied fauna exterminated for the sport of the white hunter and by the trapper to make a moneyed aristocracy of John Jacob Astor and other members of the American Fur Company and its rivals.

10. However, that tragic epoch was the epoch of Robidoux's Landing not the epoch of the Sacred Council Hills.

When the old men had, subsequent to the return of the food gatherers, and the preparation of the feast, by the aid of fire-drills, lighted the council fire, and passed around the calumet or peace-pipe--an all-important ceremony--before their deliberations ripened into decisions, was the dancing. This was no frivolous saltatory amusement such as that in which our young people of the present day and generation are wont to indulge. It was a series of rhythmic movements, generally by the young warriors, keeping time to the beating of the sacred drum and the intoned prayers of the devout to their manitou and the totems or ancestral animals from which they think they are descended. Dancing was--I think I may add is--so much a part of Indian life that a description and history of the dances would be a description and history of the beliefs, habits, successes and failures of the tribes. There is the farewell to the setting sun, the salute to the rising sun, the scalp-dance to celebrate victory won, the sun-dance for victory hoped for, the medicine-dance for the sick or for better fortune, the honor dance to please and placate the dead, the dance of those about to engage in any enterprise of importance, dances to make the children good and great, dances of the clan or secret societies, and the dances which took place here only after the Sacs, Foxes and Tawas held possession: the planting, green corn and harvest dances.

I do not wish to be understood as stating that the women had no dances. They had their own and did not dance with men except on the occasion when the tribe was assembled to dower portionless young girls. The debutantes--as we may call them--sat in a row in front of a row of old women. When a man chose to dance with one, he threw a present into her lap, which she at once passed back to her chaperon. Then, the two, holding hands, the man going backward.

joggled down the line and back again, when she resumed her place. If, for one moment, the copper-hued gentleman had assumed the attitude of a pale-face Terpsichorean adept with his partner and the lady had not instantly shown her sensitive delicacy by endeavoring to knock out his eye, or at least loosen a tooth, he would have been heavily fined by the council and she would have been rendered forever ineligible by having the end of her nose cut off.

"How shocking to make dancing a part of worship," has been said to me. That depends upon the age and point of view. Dancing is an essential part of all primitive religious and some not so simple. David and Miriam danced. The mediaeval Christians danced round the churches, round bonfires of St. John's Eve at Easter before the altar.. The Talmud has a beautiful passage describing the dancing of the holy men at the Feast of Tabernacles. The Egyptians and Greeks represented the highest culture of antiquity--indeed, in some respects modern art and literature have never equaled them, yet the paintings and papyri of the pyramids and mastabas and the sculptures and writings of the Greeks made it plain that the Egyptians had sacred dances, and the Greeks danced for every god and every occasion. Even those great, conceited, dignified, splendid brutes the Romans had their Sali or dancing priests. Some of these depicted gyrations certainly resemble those of the red men and are not more impressive-looking.

It must have been a thrilling spectacle and beautiful as well, when the dusky watchers, sentinels of the morning star, the day bringer, stood on Court House Hill (a hill, alas! no longer) softly tapping the sacred drum as the hurrying dawn brightened the eastern sky, their strokes growing stronger as the light increased, till, with a fury of sound--booming drum and shouts of exultation--they called the tribe to a frenzy of song and concerted movement, their

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pious greeting to the sun appearing above the eastern horizon. Equally beautiful and thrilling, but indescribably mournful, was the farewell to the sun at day's decline, and to the soul that following the shining track was to find its way to Paradise.

I have seen survivals of these ceremonies on the hills of northern Iowa and by Big Soldier and Wolf Rivers. I am sorry that Wagner, or some great minnesinger like Wolfram Von Eisenback, was not beside me. Only a poet or musician who could paraphrase the themes of the Niebelungen Lied, the Arthurian Legends and the Sagas could do justice to the scenes I find myself unable to bring before you.

Perhaps, I might more vividly picture the human element if the setting remained, but the iconoclast has spared neither hills nor trees, and I humbly confess to a distaste for the level land. Rome, imperial on her seven hills, caught my fancy always, but Babylon, flat-sitting in her sun-baked marshes, never seemed worth even the obloquy antiquity heaped upon her.

There was another phase of primitive life, here, after the march of civilization had obliterated part of the old trails and broken others by placing towns and villages on their course, thus rendering it impossible for many of the tribes to reach here: The Sacs and Foxes both Algonquin tribes, after the disastrous Pontiac war in 1763, united their broken forces. Having grown strong and restless again in the course of years, they intended to unite with Tecumseh and Tensquatawa, the prophet in 1811, but were late getting into the field and retired from near Tippecanoe in good order, to the country of the Illinois. In 1812, they offered their services against the British, were refused and in a passion of pique endeavored to join the enemy, were thwarted and part fled to Canada, part to Missouri. On a journey of great hardship the band bound for Missouri was befriended by a Sioux tribe, the Iowas, and with them

made haste to the neutral country.

So enduring is the gratitude of the Sacs and Foxes that four times a year, at the great council fires, the historian rises up and reminds them that they were fleeing through a frozen land, destitute of food, children dropping and the mothers too weak to lift them up, pursued by hostile tribes, when the Iowas received them, warmed and fed them, said to the enemies, "these are our brothers, if you fight them, you fight us." The recital always ends, "If even a dog of the Iowas comes to campe and there is only meat for the children give it the children's meat."

Probably, when the three tribes came here, they meant to make but a short stay, but they were tired and feeble, they were unmolested, food was abundant and easily obtained, so, when spring came, the squaws planted the store of seeds the Iowas had with them, old customs were renewed, Paradise seemed very near, if not actually in possession.

This time, the tempter in Eden was the warrior Black Hawk. He was related to the people here, he had been deeply wronged--cheated out of the State of Iowa by deeds made by drunk young sub-chiefs who had not right to make them. He was eloquent and persuaded the young hot-heads to engage in the way of 1832. Defeat was inevitable. The land, north, east and south of the Council Hills was thronging with white settlers, the hills themselves were echoing with the firearms of white hunters, their name was on a river map as "Robidoux's Landing," steamboats, as the red men said, "howled" at the landing. "We are not willing to be crowded into the river, so we will sell," said Mohosca (White Cloud), Pe-a-chim-a-car-mack (Bald Eagle), and Ca-ha-quah (Red Fox), chiefs of the three tribes, after much importunity on the part of general William Clark, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, so, September 17, 1836, the Platte Purchase was

made at Fort Leavenworth, all the chiefs and sub-chiefs signing, with Major-General Kearny and some of his officers as witnesses for the Indians, William Clark accepting for the Government.

The Indians were then moved across the river. "Thus, was the Road to Paradise transferred to Kansas", I think I hear some Kansan saying. Not so, we have not yet lost it. Joseph Robidoux preempted the land in 1837, planned his town, and, by June, 1843, had his charter, and Joseph Robidoux, who was a man with intimate knowledge of Indian life, knew their reverence for the place and was, we must suppose, familiar with their legends, so he re-dedicated, it; this time, to his patron saint, Saint Joseph.

He was a good Catholic, but so liberal in his views that he set apart a building site for every religious denomination of which he knew the name. For the temple of Justice reserved the favorite Council Hill, long known as "Court House Hill".

No, Kansas, St. Joseph has not lost that road. We still claim a terminus. Perhaps, we may not at all times have kept the station as clean as we should, or as well equipped as we might have done. Perhaps, we may have shown somewhat too little brotherly kindness to those who, like ourselves, are tarrying awhile before starting on the Great Journey, and our business transactions may have been too sharp and narrow as measured by the Golden Rule, but we are not too old to improve and we are bent on improvement.

Greater St. Joseph is founded on traditions and maxims so old that "The memory of man runneth not to the contrary", and she is too wise to replace them with the sharper's mean advantage of a present that has no future. She has not given up the Road to Paradise, nor will she. Heaven helping her, she means to broaden it.