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JOHN H. HOLLIDAY

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VOLUME V

NUMBER 4

AN INDIANA VILLAGE

NEW HARMONY

BY

JOHN H. HOLLIDAY

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1914

BLACK GOLD

NOTE

This article was written originally for the *Indianapolis Sentinel* after a visit I paid to New Harmony in July, 1869. Later it was revised, some additional facts being added and the whole brought down to 1881, when it was read as now presented to the Indianapolis Literary Club on April 4 of that year. The reader should bear this fact in mind.

J. H. H.

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AN INDIANA VILLAGE

NEW HARMONY

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A few months since there passed away a prominent citizen of Indiana, who as one of a surveyor's party traveled all over the region known as the New Purchase when there were probably not a score of white families living within a radius of fifty miles of Indianapolis. Where there is now a flourishing city and a prosperous country, his eye had gazed upon an unbroken, trackless forest. It is hard to picture the marvelous change that had been wrought within the limits of his manhood. In no age has there been, and in no age can there ever again be such a wonderful development. The pioneer now has scarcely put a roof over his head before a railroad is at his heels, bringing with it the comforts of civilization, and following in its wake comes a stream of population that in a short time has subdued the forest or covered the prairie with continuous farms. Rapid moving and aggregations of population there may be, but they come armed with all the facilities of modern life, and are within easy communication not only of older settlements but of the whole world. Fifty years and more ago the pioneer coming to Indiana to carve out a home in the wilderness, turned his back upon the world and his life was one of hardship and privation. One of the early preachers, yet surviving, who came from central New York, has said that when he brought his wife away her friends bade her farewell forever, and now he can write to a daughter in Japan and receive an answer in less time than he then could to a point barely twenty-four hours distance from Indianapolis

by rail. When we consider what stupendous changes have taken place and remember that this wilderness of sixty years ago is now almost the center of population of the nation, it seems impossible that one man's life should have covered it all. Yet when Judge Test was carrying the surveyor's chain and establishing the metes and bounds of townships and sections that he probably never expected to see occupied, there was in Indiana a well-settled town which looked as if it might have been lifted up from the banks of the Rhine or the Neckar, like Aladdin's palace, and set down upon the lower Wabash. Quaint it would have seemed even to the eye of a traveled beholder, with its high houses of red brick and stone, with peaked roofs, odd architecture but massive construction; its frame dwellings with no front doors; its streets set out with large rows of shade trees; its uniformity of design and cleanliness; and its surroundings of well-cultivated fields and vineyards, encompassed with forest. But to the Indian who yet lingered in the vicinity, or the roving white man, it must have presented a strange appearance as he stood upon a neighboring hill and watched the smoke pouring from the factories and saw the busy laborers moving about. Very different it must have seemed from the straggling village in the woods made by the Americans, where nothing rose higher than the mud chimney of the log cabin, and where the stumps thick in the corn patches and the fresh rail fences marked the newness of the settlement and the resources of the settlers. Probably it was then as it certainly had been a few years before, the largest town in the State, but that distinction it soon lost. The flow of immigration passed it by and to-day it is not so large as it then was, simply a village, in size like many others, but in appearance and characteristics quite different. Its existence then was an anom-

aly, but it was due to the same causes that brought the Puritans to New England and the Huguenots to the Carolinas.

In 1757 there was born to a small farmer of Iptingen in Württemberg a son, who was called George Rapp. He received a common school education, worked with his father on the farm and in the winter was a weaver. At twenty-six he married. His life was like that of his class, but the man was no ordinary peasant. He was fond of reading and of thought. Religious feeling was much excited in the country during his early manhood, and Rapp, a devout believer, studied his Bible with the zeal characteristic of his race. He found in it a very different scheme of life from that in which he was placed. He was a literalist, and reached and surpassed the conclusions that literalists hold to-day. The lethargy of the established church was in sharp contrast with the activity of the Apostles. Christ might come at any moment, yet men were living as if there were no Christ. He longed for a return to the former things, for the close union of Christian fellowship intent only upon the eternal verities. He talked to others and found believers. At thirty he began to preach in his own house. His congregation, when it attracted notice, was denounced as separatists and persecuted by the clergy with the usual result. Yet there was nothing dangerous in their creed. Submission to the authorities was a principal tenet; all they asked was the right of private judgment and freedom to worship as they chose. Within six years three hundred families had become adherents of Rapp, and, after ten years of waiting, seeing no prospect of peace or toleration, they determined to go to America. In 1803 George Rapp, his son John and two others, having left the church in charge of Frederick Rapp, an adopted son, landed at Baltimore,

and, after prospecting in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Ohio, bought five thousand acres of wild land in Butler county, Pennsylvania, twenty-five miles north of Pittsburgh. On July 4th, 1804, three hundred of the colonists landed at Baltimore, and six weeks later the same number at Philadelphia. There was still a remnant which, however, deserted the main body and settled in Lycoming county, Pennsylvania. The six hundred, made up of mechanics and peasants, but all thrifty, some having considerable property, were settled temporarily in Maryland and Pennsylvania, while a number went with Rapp to prepare their property for occupation, and in February, 1805, organized themselves into the Harmony Society, based upon the apostolic church and having all things in common. The rest, when they came, agreed to the plan, and with one hundred and twenty-five families began the community variously known as the Rappites, Harmonists and Economists, probably the most successful materially of all recorded schemes of voluntary association. This community was welded together by a profound faith, for which each member was ready to suffer persecution. They were headed by a man of strong, practical sense, indomitable perseverance, intense conviction and force. His assistant, Frederick Rapp, is described as "a man of uncommon ability and administrative talent." The members had the phlegmatic temperament and slow movement of the German peasant, with his constancy of purpose, animated by a supreme desire and controlled by a strong mind. There were no scoffers, no drones; cheerful obedience was given; each labored for the good of all. Harmony was built, factories were established to produce all that was needed, agriculture was carefully pursued, and stock breeding cultivated. The community was frugal and industrious, and flourished. The wilderness blos-

somed, comforts accumulated, children were born, and the members, happy in their present state, looked hopefully forward to the coming of the kingdom and a rest at the right hand of the Master. But a wave of religious feeling passed over the colonists, and George Rapp announced that to attain a purer life, to reach a higher sphere of which they had no conception, the carnal man must be crucified; in other words, celibacy must be practiced. In view of the second advent and the approaching resurrection, in which there was to be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, and in order that they might be numbered among the one hundred and forty-four thousand "who should stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion, and who were to be such as were not defiled with women, but were virgins," he urged his people to this further preparation and purification, and, always leading, put away his own wife and bade his son do likewise. He was obeyed by almost all his flock, and, under the enthusiasm of mistaken faith, God's arrangement of mankind into families was set aside, the husband and wife separating and living henceforth as strangers. The adoption of celibacy, in the belief that those who practiced it would receive the most perfect happiness in the next world, completed Rapp's system of theology, which embraced the tenets of orthodoxy, except that punishment was not eternal and that the second coming was at hand.

The Rappites, however, intent upon the things of the kingdom, were not averse to a comfortable life here and had a remarkably keen eye for the main chance. They found it difficult to get markets, and, getting into some disputes with their neighbors, decided to sell out, which they did at a sacrifice for \$100,000, and bought thirty thousand acres of land in what was then Gibson but is now Posey county, Indiana. As before, a party of pio-