

## THE FIRST THEATER IN OREGON.

BY CLAUDE RAFAEL.

The hands of the office clock were just pointing to the hour of five when I locked up the books, thus ending my duties for the day. As I emerged from the office, I saw passing along the other side of the street an old Oregon pioneer, and friend of my youth. I hastened after him and took him by the hand. It had been some time since I last saw him, and as our acquaintance had been during my boyhood days, I was not at all surprised at his slowness in recognizing me. It took, however, but a few early reminders to cause him to exclaim, "I declare! I declare! Howdy-do, boy? Howdy-do? Glad to see you. Grown up to be a man. I declare! I declare!"

"Yes," said I, "boys are like weeds, they will grow."

"That's a fact, Rafael; that's a fact."

"When did you come in town?" I asked.

"Just got in; came down on the cars. Let's see. It's been about ten years since I was here last. But what a difference between now and thirty years ago, when I use to come here in a canoe. Eh!"

"Yes," I said, "time keeps moving on, leading the march of improvement, and drags us along with it. But let's not stop here. Come and stay with me to-night."

"No, thank you, Rafael, I'm registered at the Clarendon."

"Well, come and take dinner with me, any way, and I would also like to have you go with me to the theater to-night."

"Theater! well, I would really like to go there. I guess I will accept, for its been about thirty years since my last attendance at such a place, and that was the first theater in Oregon."

"Yes. Well, come along with me," said I, "I would like very much to hear about Oregon's first theater, and must insist on your relating it this evening."

When dinner was over I wheeled the arm-chair out, saying, as I did so: "Now, Mr. Newell, I want to hear all about that early theater attendance of yours. We have plenty of time between now and the raising of the curtain at this evening's performance, so sit right down here and begin."

"Well! well! but you must know

that it was different in those days from now."

"Yes, and that's just why I want to hear about it."

"You'll excuse me, then, if it don't come up to your expectations, and particularly if I relate it in an off-hand sort of way?"

"Oh, certainly," I said.

"Let me see," said he, "I believe I told you that it was about thirty years ago."

"Yes," said I.

"Well, it's a little more than thirty years. Just trot back with me over the past to May, 1846, when I was Captain of the 'Great Mogul,' running from Canemah to Champoeg, on the Willamette."

[For the information of such of our readers as are not Oregon Pioneers, it may be well to state here that the "Great Mogul" was a flat-bottomed scow, propelled by oars, but at that time considered the crack craft on the river.—Ed.]

"Well, in May of that year, Her Britannic Majesty's ship "Modeste," sailed up the Columbia river and dropped anchor at Vancouver. That place, you must understand, was then included in Oregon. This vessel was officered and manned with a happy and jolly crew, and as they tarried, they received much hospitality at the hands of Oregonians. The jolly tars took it into their heads that they would make a theater out of their ship for the time-being, and extend in return, hospitality to their many friends. It would have done your eyes good to have seen the scenery that these tars painted for their stage. I tell you! Mt. Hood was no hole in the ground in those days. It was just as big then as it is now, and a representation of it on canvas formed the drop curtain. Their first entertainment was a success; also their second, and the news soon spread throughout the country of the good times on board the ship "Modeste," and everybody wanted to go. I remember I got the fever bad, and I told my girl—if you will allow me the expression—that we would attend the next, sure; and she seemed delighted at the idea, as she had never attended a performance of such a nature. It might be well right here to say that my girl's name was Annie, and that she was then attending boarding school in Oregon City, her folks living

on Tualatin plains. Well, it was but a short time until it began to be circulated that the grandest time of all was going to be had at Vancouver, about the middle of May. So I told Annie to hold herself in readiness. It generally took us the best part of a day to make the distance between Oregon City and Champoeg, and well I remember the last trip before the affair; how hard I worked to enable me to get back early, so as to get everything ready for an early start next day for Vancouver. But the harder we worked the more difficulties we met with. Being pretty well loaded, and the water quite low, we often dragged on the shoals, and it was near Rock Island that we stuck fast. Darkness began to gather about us. I thought about my engagement with Annie for the theater, and felt like jumping out, wading ashore, and footing it the balance of the way to Oregon City, leaving the boat in charge of the men. But on second thought I resolved to stick to my "ship," and ordered the men to shift cargo. After this was done we all got out into the water with hand-spikes and began prying her off. By this time it was far in the night, but after a great deal of hard work we succeeded in getting the craft once more into deep water. However, it was then too dark to navigate, so we tied up to the bank and turned in for the night. In my dreams that night I was wading to the theater, carrying about one hundred and twenty pounds on my back. At the first streak of day I was astir, and had my men on the move. We got along all right the rest of the way, arriving at Canemah about 8 o'clock in the morning. There was no time to be lost, and I did not remain to give any orders, but rushed frantically along down the trail past the falls till I reached the door of Annie's boarding house. I had caused the poor girl much anxiety, but whether it was from fearing that something serious had happened to me, or being disappointed at the idea of not being able to attend the theater, I will leave you to judge. I told her, panting, and in broken words, that we would go if it took us till midnight to get there, and that I would call for her as soon as I could get things ready, and then rushed off. The Calipooia, plying between Oregon City, Portland and Vancouver, had left the day before, and the regular