



Pioneer roads and experiences of travelers ...

Archer Butler Hulbert

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CHAPTER VII WITH DICKENS ALONG PIONEER ROADS SOME of the most interesting descriptions of pioneer traveling are from the racy pages of Charles Dickens's American Notes, a volume well known to every reader. No description of early traveling in America would be complete, however, without including a number of these extremely witty, and, in some instances, extremely pathetic descriptions of conditions that obtained in Virginia and Ohio in Dickens's day. The following description of a negro driver's manipulation of reins, horses, and passengers may be slightly exaggerated, but undoubtedly presents a typical picture of southern stage driving: "Soon after nine o'clock we come to Potomac Creek, where we are to land; and then comes the oddest part of the journey. Seven stage-coaches are preparing to carry us on. Some of them are ready, some of them are not ready. Some of the drivers are blacks, some whites. There are four horses to each coach, and all the horses, harnessed or unharnessed, are there. The passengers are getting out of the steamboat, and into the coaches, the luggage is being transferred in noisy wheelbarrows; the horses are frightened, and impatient to start; the black drivers are chattering to them like so many monkeys; and the white ones whooping like so many drovers: for the main thing to be done in all kinds of hostling here, is to make as much noise as possible. The coaches are something like the French coaches, but not nearly so good. In lieu of springs, they are hung on bands of the strongest leather. There is very little choice or difference between them; and they may be likened to the car portion of the swings at an English fair, roofed, put upon axle-trees and wheels, and curtained with painted canvas. They are covered with mud from the...

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