

LX. THE OLD FORGE.

At the lower end of Twin Lakes, shortly after the organization of the county, a forge was erected for the purpose of smelting and "forging" bog Iron ore, of which there was an abundance in the region of country round about: In the beginning it was planned and operated by Charles Crocker, of Mishawaka, who afterwards associated with him French Fisher, of the same place. Timothy Barber had previously built a grist mill at that place, and it was thought by Mr. Crocker and Mr. Barber that there was a great future for "Sligo," the euphonious name they gave to the embryo city. But the country was sparsely settled at that time, and the grist mill failed to do business beyond the making of a living for the proprietor, and the forge, failed to produce the amount of iron ore expected, and after paying for its "forging" and hauling a long distance to market there wasn't much left for the proprietors. The "forge" was kept going until gold was discovered in

California; shortly afterwards Mr. Crocker disposed of his interest in the business and about 1850 went overland to California, where, before he died many years ago, he became immensely wealthy, leaving an estate that ran up into the millions. A few years ago, LeRoy Armstrong, who had lived in that region in his boyhood days, visited the old "forge," and wrote his impressions of it to a Chicago paper, from which the following is taken:

"The forge provided nearly the only means of earning money, Felling trees, clearing forest land, planting, tending, and harvesting the scanty crops occupied much of the pioneer's time, and after it was done there was the barest living. But now and then in the dull season they could prepare charcoal or haul it to the forge; they could mine the ore or haul it to the forge, or they could employ their teams and their time in hauling the iron to the large towns to the north.

"There was a famous axe factory and wagon works of note and excellence, both located at Mishawaka, which city was a leader in the state at that early day, dating its rise and drawing its prosperity from the bog ore found and worked in its vicinity, and to these places the Twin Lakes metal was hauled. People here away, Crocker and Fisher among them, hoped and believed they would see a greater city spring up here, and all their efforts were directed to that end. Crocker never made a trip to the north but he spread the news of his works at Sligo and the excellent advantages of the neighborhood. He hoped sometime to see a city on the bluffs above the lake and to be the leading man in that development. Had he remained here and continued his exertions he might have been gratified. But, after carrying on a business under difficulties that would have staggered a weaker man, he caught the California fever and abandoned Indiana for the more promising future in the west.

"From a history of Marshall county written by Dan McDonald, 1881, I take the following passage:
" The old forge, located at the corner of Twin Lakes, gave promise of being a place of considerable importance. Like the famous Duluth, the sky came down at equal distances all around it, and hence it was considered pretty near the center of the universe. Charles Crocker, 1850, was the presiding genius, but the phylisus of fortune failed to bring him the golden

fleece, and he sought the golden shores of the Pacific slope to replenish his depleted exchequer. How well he succeeded is shown by the fact that in 1880 he was assessed for \$9,000,000.

Jacob Gebhardt," says Mr. Armstrong, "was the hammer man in the old forge. He has loosened the lines of his recollection on recent events country round to tighten them more and more every day on those of an earlier period. Charles Crocker, He remembers Crocker well, and states that that man could do more business with a ten-dollar bill than all the rest of the community could with \$100.

Gebhardt's duties consisted in part in building up the fire, which was done by laying a base of charcoal, and then erecting a cone of that material mingled with ore. All the ore was kept well to the center. The mass was fired from the base, and the flame was urged to fierce heat by a current of air from a great bellows, that filled and respired under the impetus of water power. Great care was required in the treatment of the work about the time when the metal began to fuse. At exactly the right moment a break as discovered in was made in the wall of livid coal, and the prisoned metal ran out in shapeless masses on the ground. As it hardened into solidity the hammer man, before he died beat it with a sledge until the cinder ran from it in a stream and hardened into grotesque forms. The iron was then grappled with a pair of tongs swung on a lever, and by slow purchases it was lifted to the anvil where the great trip-hammer was set to work upon it. The trip-hammer was itself run by waterpower from the little race that tapped the dam score of feet away. .When the iron grew too cold for beating, it was returned to the fire, the glowing charcoal was heaped upon it again, and again it was lifted with the utmost difficulty to the anvil. They called it bar iron when all was done, but it was far from uniform in thickness and width, but was cut into lengths for convenient handling, and was then ready for transportation into South Bend and Mishawaka.

Sometimes as many as forty men were employed about the forge. The work was prosecuted night and day, for Crocker's energy was tireless. Scores of other farmers were busy digging the ore, some .just below the dam, from the bog ore some five miles away; others were washing it free from soil in the creeks or lake, and still others hauled it to the fire. Men were hired from far and near to make the long trip to the foundries and these brought back with them whatever Crocker found he could sell at Twin Lakes. He owned the store there and made something of a profit on his goods. It seems to be the verdict of good judges that bog ore, instead of making an inferior iron, makes th best. It was of a very compact and tenacious nature. Axes and wagon tires were the supreme test, and no metal has ever been put into them which has lasted so well.

"Crocker was just getting ready for his California trip in 1849, when the forge burned down. He was in Mishawaka at the time, and had completed a deal by which the forge passed to other parties. When the news of his misfortune reached him, he hurried to Twin Lakes, and within ten days, hampered as he was by inadequate appliances, had the forge ready for work. But the disaster only delayed his departure one year. Early in 1850 he sold out and got ready to join the stream of fortune hunters, few of whom gave so little promise of success as did he. When he had settled up all his business he remarked to Gebhardt, the hammer man, that he was worth more than he thought.

" How much have you ?' asked Gebhardt. " 'Well, counting the horses at \$80 apiece,' replied the future millionaire 'I am worth \$1,500.'

" And that was all he took with him out of Indiana. No, not quite all. He had fallen in love with an excellent girl at Mishawaka, the daughter of a certain druggist. The young lady s father declined to receive Crocker's suit until such time as he was worth \$5,000.

"Crocker came back with that much gold in just one year, and married the girl of his choice. She went with him through the burdens and blessings of those many years, and he died with a fortune too large to count."