



Very Cordially yours,  
William Salter

## HISTORICAL ADDRESS.

---

A DISCOURSE in commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Adoption of the State Constitution by the People of the Territory of Iowa. August 3d, 1846. Delivered in the Congregational Church of Burlington, Iowa, August 2d, 1896.

---

BY WILLIAM SALTER, D. D.

---

Numbers xxiii, 23: What hath God wrought!

When the eye of civilization first rested upon Iowa (two hundred and twenty-three years ago this summer) it was seen to be a wilderness, inhabited only by a few bands of savages, or rather traversed by them as a hunting-ground from year to year. They lived in scattered villages upon the banks of the streams, and much of the time were at war with one another. In vain the Great Spirit, the Master of the world, had said to them:

“I have given you lands to hunt in,  
I have given you streams to fish in,  
I have given you bear and bison,  
I have given you roe and reindeer,  
I have given you brant and beaver,  
Filled the marshes full of wild fowl,  
Filled the rivers full of fishes;  
Why then are ye not contented?  
Why then will ye hunt each other?

I am weary of your quarrels,  
Weary of your wars and bloodshed,  
Weary of your prayers for vengeance,  
Of your wranglings and dissensions.  
All your strength is in your union,  
All your danger is in discord;  
Therefore be at peace henceforward,  
And as brothers live together.

If these warnings pass unheeded,  
Weakened, warring with each other,  
You will fade away and perish!"

And so it proved. History has justified the counsels and the warnings of the Great Spirit, the common Father of both the "red men" and the "white men." Wars and fightings are the common destroyers of mankind. For one hundred and sixty years after the discovery of Iowa the aborigines of the soil were most of the time engaged in exterminating wars with one another, or with other tribes. For several generations the Sioux of the north and the Osages of the south were the hereditary enemies of the Sacs and Foxes and the Iowas, who held the largest portions of what is now the state. They fought with one another with even more desperation than they pursued the wild animals that through these years still held their own in the land—the buffalo, the elk, the bear, the deer and the wolf. They also took part at one time and another in the wars which more eastern tribes waged, now against the French, now against the English, and afterwards against the Americans, as their respective settlements advanced westward. In the war of 1812 there was an organized band in this region that took part against the United States. It was known as the "British Band." It was the band that brought on the Black Hawk war of 1832, which resulted so disastrously to the Indians. That war brought about the beginning of a removal of all Indians from this region, which removal was completely accomplished by successive steps in the course of thirteen years (1833-1846).

Meanwhile France, that claimed the country by virtue of discovery, but had never entered into any occupancy of it, ceded it to Spain (1762). Neither did Spain occupy it, or interfere with the disposition of the soil, save in grants of land to Canadian Frenchmen at two different points on the Mississippi, one in what is now Lee county, the other

in Clayton county. It was also alleged that Spain made a grant of land to another Canadian, Julien Dubuque, at the city which bears his name; but the United States Supreme Court decided adversely. The Canadians referred to were only traders and adventurers, and made no permanent settlement. Spain retroceded the country to France in 1800, and in 1803 France sold it to the United States. The same policy that France and Spain had pursued with reference to the Indian possessions of the country was pursued for thirty years by the United States. There was no interference with the Indian tribes. They continued to roam over the land and hunt and fish, and chase the buffalo and follow athletic games and sports at their own sweet will. It was then a paradise of base-ballers as to-day. No white man was permitted to enter their country except by special license as a trader. The United States included this region in the boundaries of the District of Louisiana (1804), of the Territory of Louisiana (1805), and of the Territory of Missouri (1812), but exercised no actual jurisdiction here save to aid in keeping the different tribes at peace with one another, and at peace with the United States, save and except also that as a part of what was known as the Missouri Compromise (1820), slavery was forever prohibited upon this soil. The aborigines remained the sole actual possessors of the region for the ninety years of French ownership, the forty years of that of Spain and the thirty of the United States, in all for one hundred and sixty years after its discovery. The country had been discovered by a missionary, and some efforts had been made to introduce Christianity here, but those efforts had been repulsed by the natives. President Monroe suggested in one of his messages that tribes from other parts of the country should be removed here, and the region made a permanent Indian Territory.

As already intimated, it was the Black Hawk war, which was waged against advancing civilization in the

adjacent state of Illinois, that resulted in opening Iowa to civilization. It was just sixty-four years ago to-day (August 2, 1832,) that that war was closed in the utter route of Black Hawk at the battle of Bad Axe in Wisconsin. The following year (June 1st, 1833,) a narrow strip of what is now Iowa, lying along the Mississippi river, was thrown open to the white people, and in the course of the next thirteen years an entire change came over this region. First, as attached to the Territory of Michigan for temporary government (1834), next, as a part of the Territory of Wisconsin (1836), and then as a part of the Territory of Iowa (1838), finally, the state of Iowa with its present boundaries emerged fifty years ago (August 3, 1846), through various struggles and hard travail from the primeval night, in which it had been hidden for ages, to become a component and vital part in the life and history of a great nation, and to enter upon its full inheritance in the advancing civilization of the world.

This is one of the wonders of history. It calls us to recognize the hand of overruling Providence. It justifies the devout explanation: "What hath God wrought!" No human eye foresaw the great achievement. No human mind planned it. Mr. Calhoun in the United States Senate discouraged the organization of the territory of Iowa from fear that it would be settled by people who would be unfriendly to slavery. In fact the contrary was the case (for at least a number of years) when the political influence of Iowa went to the support of the slave power. In time there was a reversal of sentiment, but the fact illustrates the mysterious agency that from mistaken and froward counsels, and through dark and devious ways, sometimes evolves a benefit for mankind, "from seeming evil still educating good."

A state organization was early coveted by some of the first settlers in Iowa Territory, but a majority preferred to continue under the benignant care and support of the

general government, and twice voted down a proposition for a convention to form a constitution, viz., in 1840 and in 1842. At a third trial of the question in 1844, a majority of votes was in favor of a convention, to which delegates were subsequently chosen, who met at Iowa City in October of that year and formed a constitution. There were two distinctive features in the constitution: 1st. It made the Missouri river the western boundary, and the St. Peter's river, or a principal part of it, the northern boundary. 2nd. It prohibited the creation of banks. Each of these provisions excited long and earnest discussions. The first was unacceptable to congress, as creating too large a state. It may help to explain the feeling of congress at that time upon this subject if it be remembered that the question of the annexation of Texas was then before the country with a proviso for forming four additional states out of the same, and that the necessity was felt for the creation of more free states as a counterpoise thereto, in order to keep the balance of power between the north and the south. Said an eloquent senator: "An empire in one region has been added to the Union! Look east, and west, or north, and you can find no balance for that." This feeling for making smaller states in the northwest expressed itself in an act of congress (March 3, 1845), making a meridian line seventeen degrees and thirty minutes west of the city of Washington, D. C., the western boundary of Iowa. This line runs about 40 miles west of the city of Des Moines and would have cut off the State from the Missouri river and the Missouri slope. The acceptance of this boundary was made by congress a fundamental condition of the admission of Iowa into the Union.

The second distinctive feature of the constitution was the prohibition of banks. As a constitutional prohibition it was original in and to Iowa, though copied in one or two other states. It expressed views which have become

notorious and popular again. To have incorporated them into a state constitution was a triumph of "populism" under a different name fifty years ago. Business men demurred to it as crippling facilities of trade, while affording no security against the circulation of bills of banks of far-away states.

The act of congress imposing new boundaries, proved confusing when the people were called to vote upon the adoption of the constitution, but the sentiment was overwhelming against those boundaries, and they were rejected, as also the constitution, at the April election in 1845. In this muddle of the matter a session of the legislative assembly of the territory, which had previously been arranged to convene in anticipation of the adoption of the constitution by the people, submitted the question again to the people, with the proviso that the ratification of the constitution was not to be construed as an acceptance of the boundaries enacted by congress. The vote was close but decisive, 7,235 for, 7,656 against the constitution, at the August election, 1845.

A compromise on the subject of boundaries was seen to be necessary. Leading men of the territory, among them Dr. Enos Lowe, of this city, set their wits to work and, in conference with the delegate to congress, the Hon. A. C. Dodge, and with the committee on territories in the house of representatives, it was agreed to secure a repeal of the boundaries fixed by congress, and the enactment of others in their stead, as was done by an act of congress, approved August 4, 1846, making the Missouri river the western boundary, and the parallel of 43 degrees and 30 minutes the northern boundary. In furtherance of this project the eighth legislative assembly of the territory provided for another constitutional convention, which met in May, 1846, and changed the boundaries as stated. This convention sat only fifteen days and made no other material alteration in the constitution framed in 1844. The

prohibition of banks remained. Upon the submission of the question again to the people they ratified the altered constitution in another close but decisive vote, 9,492 to 9,036, a majority of 421 in 18,528 votes. The large and respectable opposition came from those who regarded the prohibition of banks as an obnoxious and injurious measure, crippling to commerce, manufactures and trade. The constitution, however, was adopted. The majority ruled and everybody concurred, hoping for the best, the minority confident that time would show the necessity of amendments to the constitution. It will be fifty years ago on the morrow when the signal event of the adoption of a state constitution by the people of the territory of Iowa took place. It was the work of the white citizens, the red men had no part in it. Many still remained within our limits, but negotiations were in progress for their removal, and in a few years the whole soil with a very small exception in favor of a band of Musquakies, was open to the hand of industry, to the plow and the spade, to the planting of homes, and to the civilization of the school and the church and the court of justice and the railroad and telegraph and literature and science and art.

In the course of fifty years what a transformation has ensued! I need not give statistics. We may say to ourselves, we may say to one another, yea, we may say to the whole people of the United States, "Lift up thine eyes round about and see; all they gather themselves together, thy sons from far, and thy daughters at thy side, with a multitude of flocks and herds, and silver and gold and incense; and they show forth the praises of the Lord, who has made a little one to become a thousand and a small one a strong nation, and hastened it in His time, and beautified the place, and made it glorious."

In this commemoration a place of peculiar interest belongs to our own fair city. For here were some of the prime factors in this advance of civilization. Here con-

vened the first three legislative assemblies of the territory of Iowa (1838, 1839, 1840). Here had previously convened the first legislative assembly of Wisconsin Territory in its second and third sessions. Here was the home of the second and third governors and of the chief justice of the Territory of Iowa, also of the two delegates to congress. And here was the home of a number of men of strong minds and superior character, whose ability and worth won for them wide respect and consideration in those early days. The majority of opinion in this city and county was against the constitution. The vote in Burlington was 405 for, and 452 against; in Des Moines county 801 for, 954 against. And in the election of members to the first general assembly of the state in the following October, candidates were chosen from this county who had opposed the constitution and who proposed its amendment. After ten years of experiment with the constitutional prohibition of banks, and several gubernatorial vetoes upon acts of the general assembly for the repeal of that prohibition, a more enlightened policy prevailed in the new constitution of 1857, under which we have lived and prospered for nearly forty years.

In the rapid growth of other portions of Iowa, Burlington and Des Moines county have lost their earlier relative importance and influence. In the first general assembly of the state Des Moines county had two senators and four representatives; now, it has one senator and two representatives. Burlington has furnished two governors to the commonwealth, three United States senators and five representatives to congress.

The great and overshadowing interest connected with the jubilee of Iowa centers in what came about ere the year closed, namely the admission of Iowa into the Union by act of congress on the 28th day of December, 1846. Iowa was the child of that Union, and the "only child," as Senator Grimes' immortal words express it, "of the Missouri

compromise," which compromise was regarded by the patriots of its time as of equal sacredness and binding force with the constitution of the nation. Iowa owes everything to the Union, as was nobly said by one\* who was here in the city fifty years ago, who bore a brave part in the exciting discussions of the period, and who was afterwards lieutenant-governor of the state: "Iowa, her affections, like the rivers of her borders, flow to an inseparable union." It is the inscription upon the stone which the State furnished to the Washington monument. Our people have vindicated and verified that statement in the tremendous sacrifice made by the best blood of our sons. But still grander victories and still higher assurance of devotion to the Union, in a more advanced civilization, and in carrying both the moral and the material development of the state to a glory beyond all Grecian and Roman fame, and in the van of the progress of the ages, as the thoughts of men are widened with the processes of the sun, are in reserve for successive generations of the people of Iowa.

While, then, we review the past with grateful memories, with tributes of veneration to the founders of the State and to the defenders of the nation in the life struggle, let us also seriously contemplate the future, and do our best to make it luminous with honor and glory, that it may go well in long years to come with those who shall dwell upon the soil.

Advance, then, ye future times, ye coming millions, sons and daughters of the creative purpose that still slumbers in the womb of time, receive your inheritance of a free and mighty commonwealth; guard, enrich and perpetuate it to the final consummation; and let man and woman and childhood be lifted up to the highest measure of virtue, happiness, peace, prosperity and glory attainable by mortals beneath the skies!

---

\*The late Lieut. Gov. Enoch W. Eastman.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.