

## THE WRITINGS OF JUDGE GEORGE G. WRIGHT.

## VI.

## SHEPHERD LEFFLER.

Virginian. I knew him at school at Indiana State University. He was very prominent in early Iowa politics. Lived near Burlington in Des Moines county. Belonged to a family of great influence. Democrat,—his brother Isaac a Whig. Was U. S. Marshal in 1841-5. Other brothers and relatives stood remarkably well as farmers and business men in earlier Iowa. Shepherd was elected on the Democratic ticket at large with S. C. Hastings to Congress in 1846,—three competitors—Joseph H. Hedrick of Wapello county and G. C. R. Mitchell of Scott. He was president of the First Constitutional Convention. He was a terse talker—no surplusage—quick—a born politician—admirable presiding officer—had a desirable home near Burlington—was a lawyer, I believe, but never practiced—made a fairly popular canvass—not especially profound on political views and yet not a parasite of his party. How true this, when the record shows that he was a member of the House, Second [and Third] Territorial Legislature; of the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Territorial Council, and having presided over the First Constitutional Convention, he was a member of the Second,—elected each time from Des Moines county—and then in Congress, 1846. With more energy—had life been spared he would have had still further honors if in the power of his party to confer them. He was one of the men to whom the State may well refer with pride and pleasure.

## S. C. HASTINGS.

His colleague above referred to (S. C. Hastings) was very prominent. Legislator, presiding officer, member of congress—Chief Justice of our Supreme Court—Chief Justice in Cal-

ifornia—a leading capitalist there—a money maker—owner of large ranches—few men were more actively connected with either Iowa or California politics and affairs. His home was at Muscatine (first called Bloomington). Among his townsmen were Judge Joseph Williams, Stephen Whicher, Ralph P. Lowe, W. G. Woodward, Jacob Butler, Scott Richman, Henry O'Connor, D. C. Cloud, John G. Deshler and others.

He was of the shrewd men of the world. His motto was to "win." Tall, straight as an arrow—dark complexion—fine looking—adroit and plausible in all his movements—a manner that captivated and led others to do and think as he did—he was a formidable antagonist whether at the bar, in legislative halls or at the huskings. He succeeded not so much by his strength of statement or argument as by personal influence or address or quiet private appeals of which he was perfect master. His habits were such in those early days that he was a leader of men, especially of young men, and few succeeded better in accomplishing their ends. There were many greater men, and yet by his diplomacy, frank assertiveness and fine presence, he had success beyond many of his fellows.

#### JOSEPH WILLIAMS.

His long-time colleague, Joseph Williams, was among the unique characters of this early age.

He was from Pennsylvania—a Methodist—a Democrat—the best teller of stories I ever knew—could play the fiddle, or, as far as I know, any instrument—could sing any song, whether in English, Dutch, Irish or Indian—lead a prayer or class meeting—talk as few others to a Sunday school or Bible society—and among the most interesting temperance talkers I ever heard. In the midst of hearing arguments he would write poetry. I remember that one afternoon in Ottumwa—he, chief justice—when the court was held in districts—he was apparently listening and taking notes of all arguments—that night made a temperance speech in the old court house, opening it with singing a song composed while listening—to the tune of "Lucy Neal"—the title "Little Billy Neal," and with which he captured the audience at

once and held entranced for an hour. The Judge was near-sighted—wore glasses—was of medium size—sinewy and well-calculated for pioneer life. His influence was always on the side of temperance, good morals, obedience to the law, good government, the church and the school. His manners were genial—his hold upon the people such that whether talking to a jury or to a mixed audience (and many were the evenings that he thus talked on temperance or to Bible societies or of agriculture in Iowa)—he was always aiding in giving us better society, better citizens and in the upbuilding of the State.

I never thought him a great student or lawyer, and yet his opinions (he did not write many) compare very favorably with those of his associates and compeers. For one of his organization—so ready to drop the pen and engage in something else, and especially in a social way—he had strangely enough the fault of prolixity in his opinions and especially unusual detail in his statement of a case. This may have grown out of early associations and the habit of following old-time judges in the other states. But he was very systematic in his statements. The young men of the bar all liked him. He never knowingly offended the tyro at the bar any more than the nestors. Though fairly dignified, he never let an occasion pass for a good joke whether in court, consultation, social circle or elsewhere. Had wonderful powers as a mimic and few his equals as a ventriloquist. He was at home in the most polite circles and could command respect and attention in the hardest and most boisterous crowd.

I have said he could play the violin. So could Jerry Church who lived in his cabin below Des Moines. They had lived and played together in Pennsylvania—had not met for twenty-five years. Williams came here to hold his fall term. Learning before reaching "The Forks" where Jerry's cabin was, and directed to him, [he went] by path to it. Jerry did not know him. He talked to him of lands and land buying until they got to the cabin. Getting off, and still unknown, he observed Jerry's violin—asked to look at it—handled it—tuned the strings—Jerry watched him, and presently Williams struck up "Arkansas Traveler"—

Jerry walked around, looked at him, and finally exclaimed, "Ain't your name Joseph Williams?" The Judge nodded his head, kept on playing, and Jerry said: "I knew it, by thunder, for no man living or dead, plays that tune that way but Joseph Williams and myself." And thus their acquaintance was renewed.

We had spent an evening over an elegant lunch of quail, venison, etc., and after that in the rooms of the Des Moines Improvement Company (Johnson, General Clarke and others representing the Company) in the Clinton. Williams told stories and sang songs. He was stopping at the Parke, three or four squares away. This was in 1857, I think. Ed. Johnstone, Coolbaugh, Grimes, Gillaspay, Neal, Woodward, Stockton, Lyman Cook and others present. We left Williams there. Very cold and ice everywhere. The next day it was told that Williams at twelve o'clock proposed to leave, when General Clarke, a most polite and courteous gentleman, insisted that he should remain all night. Williams gave reasons why he should return to the Parke. Clarke [said:] "If you go, I go with you, for I cannot permit one who has contributed so much to our amusement to return alone," and against the Judge's protest, go he did, and they started to walk arm in arm. Arrived at the Parke, the Judge says: "What is this I see,—a gentleman whose hospitality I have enjoyed about to brave the inclement night alone? Never, and you will allow me to return with you." And return he did, and when the Clinton was reached Clarke made a like speech, took the Judge's arm and escorted him back to the Parke. How often their politeness led to these trips I know not, but the tradition is that they finally separated half way, each going to his lodgings alone. I can well believe this, for it is perfectly characteristic of both.

In an early day at the old capital (Iowa City) there was an exquisite, long-mustached, lily-fingered pianist from the East—music teacher, Professor! At every social gathering, the Professor, if there was a piano, was called out, and he handled the keys with eyes upraised, head thrown back—sang in the most dramatic manner, and threw his hands, arms and head with all the spirit and abandon of the quack,

whether in music or in anything else. One evening Judge Williams took the piano,—the Professor present—and so perfectly did the Judge mimic him in tone, manner and touch that he refused to play, and soon after left the city for other worlds to humbug and conquer.

[Judge Williams] had an old friend—of the best circles and habits, who fell into dissipation. Finding him one day by the wayside, outside the city in a drunken stupor in the gutter, he raised him up, worked with him, seated on a log until he was fairly restored. At once he commenced the work of leading him to a better life. After some time, he said: "Judge, it is no use, there is not enough left of me to talk about, to trouble over or make a man of." Quick as thought, the Judge said: "John, there is! there is plenty, and by the grace of God you can be restored in all your former happiness to home, family, society and church." John said, "I will try," and promised he would come to the Judge's pew the next Sunday. Come he did, reform he did, and was soon and for years remained among the best and most influential of their citizens.

And thus it was he was always doing good. I know he was laughed at and made fun of by many who called him a mountebank and wanting in dignity, men who did not imitate him in sobriety, work as he did for temperance and the church,—men who were jealous of his hold on the people,—I say I am not unmindful of these things, and yet hesitate not to say that while he had faults and perhaps quite too many, he nevertheless was useful beyond many of his compeers, and was certainly helpful to the State far more than many of those critics and fault finders.

It was my privilege to be present at his funeral, and the affection and esteem in which he was held at his home (Muscatine, where buried) was most gratifyingly evidenced, in that high and low, rich and poor, black and white, were there by hundreds—almost by thousands—and the humblest were the most affected, lingered longest at his coffin and seemed to feel that their loss was personal and greatest. He was so generous in his nature—never accumulated much—he was always as kind and ready an adviser and helper to those ever so poor as to those in all circles—that

all felt that they had lost the most valued friend. I give it as my opinion that few public men in Iowa—though he had his faults and weaknesses—ever made a better impress upon the moral and material interests—did more in laying those foundations which now afford such good ground for praise and commendation.

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#### MASS MEETING AT DUNLEITH.

Rev. Henry Clay Dean,

Of Burlington, will address the people of Jo Daviess county, at Dunleith, on Monday Evening, November 1st.

Mr. Dean is one of the most distinguished clergymen of the state of Iowa, as he is one of the soundest and most eloquent speakers in the West. He is a clergyman but never preaches politics in the pulpit. As old ministers of Revolutionary days, when the clouds of war gathered dark in their country, donned the armor of battle, seized the weapons of blood, and went into the fight with the Bible in one hand and the sword of the patriot in the other, so goes Mr. Dean into the political struggle, with the Constitution as the Bible of his political faith, and reason as his weapon. With these he assails the sophistry and falsehoods of error, and demolishes the fabrics of bigotry and sectionalism.

Let the Democracy of Dubuque—nay, let every man in Dubuque, who wishes to listen to Mr. Dean's stirring appeal, turn out on Monday next, and pay the good people of Dunleith a friendly visit.

Ample preparations will be made for the occasion by the Democracy of Dunleith.

Remember, Monday evening, at 7½ o'clock.

Dubuque, *Express and Herald*, Oct. 28, 1858.

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#### ENLIGHTENED MINNESOTA.

The Legislature of Minnesota afford striking proof of their wisdom in passing a direct vote instructing the secretary to subscribe for all the newspapers published in the Territory and to cause the same to be bound and filed for future reference. The legislature of every state should take the same course, and thus place in the archives of the state day by day a chronicle of passing events as selected from mirrors that show every hue of opinion.

*Fort Des Moines Star*, November 23, 1849.

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