

IN COMMEMORATION  
OF HON. RICHARD C. BARRETT.

[On the 12th day of June, 1915, there was installed on the corridor walls of the Historical, Memorial and Art Building of Iowa a portrait medallion in bronze of Richard C. Barrett. The presentation address was delivered by Hon. F. F. Faville, of Storm Lake, Iowa, and Hon. A. M. Deyoe, a successor to Mr. Barrett in the office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction, presiding, delivered an address. In the place of Governor Geo. W. Clarke, chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Historical Department of Iowa, Edgar R. Harlan, curator, accepted the medallion.—EDITOR.]

AN APPRECIATION OF RICHARD C. BARRETT.

BY F. F. FAVILLE.

The story of the life of Richard C. Barrett is the story of a successful Iowa farm boy who was blessed with ideals. His was the good fortune to be reared amid the simple and rugged surroundings of an Iowa rural community of a half-century ago, having been born in Bremer county in 1858.

This was before the advent of the automobile, the telephone and the rural delivery of mail. It was at a time when life on an Iowa farm had its large measure of isolation and its full round of genuine hard work. The neighboring village was then visited only for purposes of trade or worship and the "county-seat town" was a distant metropolis seen only at "fair time" or on a similarly rare occasion.

The country school was not then regarded as a "social center," and was by no means the modern "consolidated" institution with its course of study and its up-to-date appliances. It was the little one-room white edifice on the section corner, with its heterogeneous collection of pupils and its "curriculum" embracing the entire range from the primer to Ray's Higher Arithmetic.

Mr. Barrett lived at a time when farm boys spent their evenings at home. The family life was developed. Books,

magazines, and games served to while away the long winter evenings and the duties of summer brought a literal exemplification of the motto "early to bed and early to rise." The old-fashioned custom of family prayers had not yet become obsolete.

In such a home, and under such circumstances was Richard C. Barrett reared. The work of the farm did not destroy his ambition and its isolation did not stunt his ideals. He plowed corn none the less well because he recited *Thanatopsis* to the team that he drove. He followed the ceaseless and unending monotony of the daily grind of farm drudgery with its pinching limitations and was not narrowed nor dwarfed. He looked beyond his daily task. He saw art in the changing panorama of the prairie, and he heard a symphony in the sublime "music of the spheres."

Richard Barrett was never the egotist, but he believed in himself. And he determined with himself that he should try himself out. And so he went to school. He was not *sent* to school. He *went*. No wealthy father purchased him membership in some fashionable college club. No fond and fearful parent turned him over to a college faculty with the vain hope that he *might* learn something. No such misfortune befell him. He was privileged to "work his way." Opportunity did not open the door for him with "soft and lily fingers"—but he opened the door himself.

Like most ambitious young men he debated long and seriously as to his life work. The ministry, law and medicine were all attractive to him and he was tempted to follow one of these professions, but with rare good judgment and common sense he decided that he would be a teacher.

Some one has said, "The first essential of a successful teacher is love for the profession." If this be true Mr. Barrett was essentially successful.

What was his ideal? Was teaching with him a mere matter of salary-drawing or making provision for a present need? Long afterwards he thus described "The Teacher's Greatest Ambition":

To help a child to become unselfish, self-reliant, kind, thoughtful, considerate, honest and independent; to train to habits of usefulness; to promote purity of thought and life; to have even some small part in awakening loftier purposes and holier aspirations; to arouse in the minds of boys and girls an honest and sincere hope to be able to some extent to make happier the school, the home, the community, the state, the nation and the world—should be the greatest ambition of every teacher.

With such an ambition Richard C. Barrett began his life work as a teacher. He commenced in a country school of the type he had attended as a small boy. An insignificant beginning it was, but a most valuable asset it became when in after years as State Superintendent of Public Instruction he did so much to establish the consolidated school, which is working such a revolution in the country schools of Iowa today.

After six years in the school room, in which he was very successful, he was called to the office of county superintendent of Mitchell county and held that position for fourteen years and until his election to the state superintendency.

During this time he became widely known in educational circles. He was a lecturer and an instructor at the leading teachers' institutes of the State, a contributor to various educational publications throughout the country, and a prominent member of the National Educational Association. He was recognized as an expert on "the rural school problem." He brought to the office of State Superintendent a splendid equipment and a broad comprehension of the needs of the schools of the State, particularly those of the country districts.

Without any pretense at revolutionizing affairs, but actuated by a sincere desire to help the schools of the State, he gave to the duties of this office his best, most conscientious efforts. When he assumed the office of State Superintendent, Iowa was one of the very few states of the Union without a law requiring the attendance of children at school. He made a most careful study of the question of compulsory education, examined and abstracted the laws of all of the states on the subject, corresponded extensively with educators regarding

the matter, and investigated conditions in states where such laws had been adopted.

He strongly urged the adoption of such a law upon the Twenty-eighth General Assembly. He submitted a model bill for the consideration of the legislators and worked unceasingly to secure the passage of such a statute, and finally the Twenty-ninth General Assembly passed the law practically as suggested by him. The credit for the enactment of this very important legislation was due in no small degree to his efforts, and it will always be associated with his work as State Superintendent.

Richard Barrett was one school man who was not given to fads nor hobbies, but nevertheless one thing was uppermost in his work, and that was the improvement of the country schools. He knew their every need. He had learned their requirements at first hand. He saw that the inefficiency of the isolated country school could be largely eliminated by reducing the number of schools, and by transporting the pupils to one central school which should be graded and which should have better-equipped teachers.

The proposed change became known as the "Consolidation" movement. It necessarily met with intense opposition, an opposition that has by no means yet entirely disappeared. The question of expense was, and still is, the paramount one with many school patrons. The idea of disposing of existing school houses, incurring the expense of a new modern building, buying conveyances and paying to have the children transported to and from school, and the employing of experienced and trained teachers at better wages, was so revolutionary, that it was viewed as an invasion of the inalienable rights of the rural taxpayer.

Mr. Barrett firmly believed that the plan would work out successfully. He gave much study to all the arguments advanced against the proposition, set them forth frankly and at length in his official reports and discussed them with perfect candor and convincing logic. In 1903 he said:

It was a great day in the history of Iowa when it was declared that the State should have a free public school system. It

will be a greater one when, in the course of time, it is ordered that all children shall have equal school privileges—that the child in the remotest district—the child of the humblest poor, in the backwoods and on the prairie,—shall have educational advantages unexcelled in the best school in the largest and best city in the land.

With this in his mind and on his heart he worked unceasingly to bring about the great result, not only by legislation that would make it possible, but by endeavoring to educate the public to understand the real merits of the proposition. He was greatly interested in the first practical experiment that was tried in the State. He personally visited this school and studied at first hand the objections that had been urged of increase of taxes, impracticability of transporting children and similar matters.

He was thoroughly convinced that the "Consolidated School" would eventually be the solution of the "rural school problem." How wonderfully is his prophecy being fulfilled in the many such schools that have been and are being rapidly established all over the State. I think his untiring labors for the betterment of the rural schools of Iowa, the most important single service that he rendered the commonwealth.

Mr. Barrett was a believer in "higher education." He took commendable pride in the Master of Arts degree which Cornell College conferred upon him. But he was essentially a believer in things practical, especially in education. He once said:

The schoolmaster who attempts to teach art, music, painting, French, stenography, pharmacy, etc., to a boy who cannot spell the common words in daily use, write a legible hand, keep the simplest accounts, compose a letter, recite the principal events of American history, and explain the elementary principles of science, will soon lose caste with the business world.

In 1903 he said to the General Assembly in the official report, regarding the teaching of agriculture in the public schools:

There has been considerable discussion of the teaching of the elements of agriculture in rural schools and more recently the introduction of the study in high schools has been proposed. If into the school life there should be introduced the subjects with which pupils are to deal in life, no mistake is being made by

those who urge the value of the practical. If it can be urged that agricultural subjects should be introduced into schools in cities where only a small part of the patrons are engaged in agriculture or gardening, it can be more strongly urged for rural schools where agriculture is the chief business of all the people. Each succeeding year high schools teach more of the practical, and as laboratories multiply and professionally trained teachers increase, there is likely to be still less of theory and more instruction in how to do the work of the world.

He did not live to see the enactment of our present statute requiring that agriculture and domestic science must be taught in the schools of the State, but he paved the way for that legislation and aided its oncoming in no small degree.

During his administration of the office of State Superintendent great progress was made in manual training in the public schools. Mr. Barrett aided greatly in this work. He issued an extensive outline on the subject, particularly to aid teachers in learning where and how to equip themselves to give manual training.

He also especially urged that the teachers of the State should have better opportunities for training in their profession. He believed that Iowa should supplement her great Teachers' College with others of like character, where more teachers could receive adequate and scientific training for their important work, and he unhesitatingly advocated the paying of better wages to the teachers of the State.

His work in the office of State Superintendent covered six very important years in the history of education in Iowa. At all times industrious, patient and tactful, keeping constantly in mind the greater good, and working ever for the betterment of conditions, he contributed largely toward furthering those things that hasten the coming of a better day.

After his retirement from the office of State Superintendent he completed a course in law and received the degree of LL.B. but he made no attempt to practice law as a profession, and almost immediately accepted a position on the faculty of the State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts at Ames, occupying the chair of Civics. This place was particularly pleasing to him, not only because it brought him in

connection with the work of this great school in which he was deeply interested, but more particularly because it gave him an opportunity to get in close touch with a multitude of young men and women who were seeking an education.

I am confident that no position in which he was ever placed brought as much real satisfaction to Mr. Barrett as to be on the committee on classification of students at Ames. No man could have been better adapted for this position than he. He delighted to meet the boys, especially, who had come from farm homes to enter the great school, and who needed just then a little sympathy and good advice. No austere official confronted them in the person of Mr. Barrett. He was their friend. He knew exactly their difficulties and their ambitions. With a genuine and sincere sympathy he became their confidant and their counsellor. And what joy he found in this service!

In all the thousands of teachers and students that came in contact with Mr. Barrett none ever applied to him for sympathy or assistance and applied in vain. He never had such urgent business that he could not find time to hear of the troubles of some inexperienced teacher or to listen to a recital of the difficulties of some farm boy who needed encouragement and help. How many such lives has he touched in this State and always with kindly sympathy! He was never the misanthrope. He was always an ambassador of helpfulness and good cheer.

In the midst of his activities at the Collège, in the very prime of life, he was suddenly stricken with an infection of the mastoid and died March 3, 1909.

Thus lived and died this kindly, helpful, hopeful man. I can pronounce no greater encomium upon him than to say he was a Christian gentleman in the full and true meaning of that term. He was from early childhood a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church. His interest in young people and his desire to help them caused him to render years of service in the Sunday School, as superintendent and teacher. He made no spectacular parade of his religion. There was no ostentation about it. It was an abiding and essential part of

his daily life. Some people profess their religion. Richard C. Barrett lived his. He neither boasted of his faith nor apologized for it, but no man who knew him at all intimately ever had any doubt of his religious convictions, whether he ever heard him mention the subject or not. Clean, upright, pure-minded, conscientious, he was a splendid example of that type of Christian citizen whose "daily walk and conversation" "make for righteousness."

Emerson said, "The only way to have a friend is to be one." If the Sage of Concord was right Richard Barrett's friends were truly "numbered by his acquaintances." At his death it was said of him that "he was loved by more people than any other man in Iowa." No man ever had a more loyal friend than he was. He was not "one thing to the face and another to the back" of any friend. He was always dependable. I once heard a friend praise him with the homely expression, "he will stand without hitching."

Mr. Barrett had no ambition to acquire wealth. Amid the struggles of this money-making era he caught the larger vision and found his compensation in giving rather than in getting. To touch young life, to inspire to better efforts and nobler things, in a word, to be of service was more of joy to him than the accumulation of money. He was content to

Sit in the house by the side of the road  
And be a friend to man.

He was a great lover of books and of travel, but he found his greatest pleasure in his own home and in the society of those he loved best.

While teaching at Riceville, Iowa, Mr. Barrett married Janet Dean, who was also a school teacher. Their home life was ideal. No task was undertaken, no plan formulated, no success achieved, no disappointment suffered, that was not shared equally by them. Saddened by the loss of one daughter in infancy, they were also blessed with one whose beautiful life has been a constant comfort and joy.

His dust rests in the little cemetery at the Iowa State College, beneath the graceful elms and rugged oaks of his native State.

It is most fitting that on the walls of the Historical Building should be placed a medallion to perpetuate the memory of this good and true man and useful citizen.

With becoming modesty, Mr. Barrett, in concluding his last report as State Superintendent, said:

If the discouraged teacher has been encouraged, if the heavy-hearted has been made to rejoice, if the weak has been strengthened, if the pathway of life has been made to appear smooth, the skies brighter and the days happier by anything I may have said or done, the inspiration for the word or deed came from the encouraging words of helpfulness spoken by teachers.

And he gave this characteristic message to the teachers of the State:

To you who have been my co-laborers and have given your strength to promote the true cause of education, I am debtor beyond ability to repay or words to express. I could not if I would, have you freed from the burdens of the schoolroom, but were the power mine I would give to each of you added strength to bear all of the trials and to overcome all of the difficulties. I would have you remember that while such power is not mine, the Great Teacher has said, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" and from Him you can have help.

He needs no greater eulogium.

In the very prime of life, without a murmur of complaint, with a firm and abiding faith, Richard C. Barrett turned the prow of his frail bark out from the shores of Time, upon the trackless sea "that has never borne the shadow of a returning sail."

Let us be assured that his voyage was in peace, his anchorage in the Harbor of Eternal Joy.

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