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Portrait in the collections of the Historical Department of Iowa, by Ralph Clarkson, Chicago, 1910.

ANNALS OF IOWA.

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

HISTORICAL PORTRAIT COLLECTIONS.

Nearly every state in the Union has done and is doing something by way of collecting and preserving its historical materials. All are refusing to destroy the documentary materials accumulated through the administration of state business, and many are making efforts to acquire, preserve and display for the public benefit these illustrative materials. Thus are being formed not only the excellent collections of books in the different state libraries, but there are also being created some most valuable collections of object materials as well, which are even more instructive than books to the mind of many classes of citizens. These form the State Museums.

Iowa has taken an advanced position among Western commonwealths, favoring what the late Doctor G. Brown Goode made so much of, namely, popular museum education. Special effort has been made to well illustrate by portraiture the lives of the eminent men of the State. It is often a tremendous task to secure an appropriate record of the forms and faces of men of whom it would seem easy to record in writing a good account.

The Historical Department of Iowa, having been more fortunate than similar activities in some other states, wishes to present through *The Annals* some of the considerations that have brought its portrait collection into favorable notice, and thus answer frequent inquiries in relation to this part of the work. There is scarcely a month in which we are not requested to give to some official, society, department or other functionary, an account of our methods.

It is assumed that any Iowa person who has performed such a part as to imprint himself upon the records of the State or Nation, and who inevitably will be encountered in a reasonably exhaustive research into the period of his activities, is an historical personage. It may be that his influence will be found solely in the nature of public duty, as in civic or military office. It may be wholly within a private sphere, as in business. Or it may have a semi-public quality, as in educational or eleemosynary enterprise. Wherever there was an influence, the weight and result of which contributed much to progress, that influence emanated from an historic character.

In the investigations that are being made or that may be made into Iowa and Western history, there are vast hindrances to the complete knowledge of men and events of no more remote a period than the opening of the Civil War. The aids that do exist are almost as numerous and quite as valuable among collections derived from private individuals as from deposits in public archives. Therein lies much of the peculiar value of biographical and genealogical materials, so eagerly sought by the Historical Department of Iowa. Value that lies in documentary evidence of the life of a man lies also proportionally in all records of his personality. Hence our zeal in obtaining the best possible portraits as well as documentary materials of Iowa people. A potent precedent consulted in our labors is the rule of the National Portrait Gallery of London:

“The rule which the Trustees desire to lay down to themselves in either making purchases or receiving presents is to look to the celebrity of the person represented rather than to the merit of the artist. They will attempt to estimate that celebrity without any bias to any political or religious party. Nor will they consider great faults and errors, even though admitted on all sides, as any sufficient ground for excluding any portrait which may be valuable as illustrating the civil, ecclesiastical or literary history of the country.”

The Historical Department of Iowa recognizes in its portrait feature a duty no less important, relatively, than is that of the greater institution of England. It designs to benefit

the same elements of our society, present and future, as are the beneficiaries of that enterprise. Iowa and England have practically the same area. They do not differ in their civil, ecclesiastical or literary history, as they do in population, or wealth, and not so much in these, perhaps, as in their respective wealth of art, and other instrumentalities for culture. The English people can not be more prone to cherish their collections than is the tendency with us, and meeting this obligation is the incentive of our work in portrait collecting. We are moved to industry in the work that even England was without until toward more modern times.

Taking, then, as the basis for our efforts in portrait collecting, the purpose of illustrating the civil, ecclesiastical, military, business and literary history of Iowa, we have determined for us, by documentary sources, the names of personages, of whose lives we wish all that is obtainable, especially including portraiture in some of its various forms. Iowa newspapers, legislative journals, minutes of ecclesiastical conferences and military reports, afford fair aids to the discovery and appraisal of men of prominence, and the contents of these publications almost determine the weight of a personality. Discovering, for instance, a movement and a leader, who is by us forgotten, but whose personal history is necessary to an adequate study of present or past phases of our development, we feel it incumbent upon us to have at hand for the present, and particularly for the future, ample aids to an understanding of him and his purposes.

Our efforts in this direction result in the acquisition of biographical material, embracing portraits in some form. These may be daguerreotype or tin-type; zinc, copper or steel engraving; mechanical or hand work; on paper or canvas; in color or in black and white; in miniature or heroic proportions; in sculpture, whether plaster, bronze or marble; in the original or duplicate; whether the subject be living or dead, the artist known or unknown, and the object be a gift or a purchase, to be displayed on walls, in cases or bound in volumes, the point is that there be obtained something; the

very best obtainable, whatever that may be. Hence our portrait collection is, and ought to remain, primarily an historical collection, influenced, enhanced, but not dominated by rules and reasons of high art.

Of course our highest aim is a portrait done in oil at the height of the vigor and fame of the subject and the best in point of fame, style and medium of the artist.

But it is impossible to fix, and unwise to desire, an absolute standard of art merit in a collection, or to disparage the acquisition and display of the inferior in art value of portraits of men whose lives and labors are worthy of commemoration. Of standards there are almost as many as there are critics. The point to be considered is whether a given portrait of a given man is the best portrait of that man and not whether that portrait be a work or in a class esteemed alone by the art connoisseur. The art value, it must be remembered, is not an element of indifference; far from that. It is indeed, scarcely even secondary. But where the consideration is for the subject and not for the artist, the loftiest thought is: Does it, of all available records, the most permanently and fairly represent the face, form and spirit of the subject.

VISIT FROM THE INDIANS.—On Tuesday forenoon last the quiet stillness of our city was somewhat disturbed by a visit from a band of Sioux Indians, numbering about fifty, and accompanied by Chief "Mad Bowl." They entered the city in regular order, marching in straight lines, and keeping step to a rude, wild song, accompanied by an instrument somewhat resembling a tambourine, beat upon with a stick. They were arrayed in their best blankets and woolen leggings, their faces painted with gaudy colors, and their heads decorated with flaunting feathers. Their chief was seated upon a fine pony, and rode with all the dignity of a monarch. It was altogether the best representation of our Dácotah neighbors we have ever seen, and the appearance they presented was truly novel and interesting.

They visited Kennerly, of the firm of Frost, Todd & Co., a gentleman widely known and much respected among the Sioux Indians, who gave them about \$30 worth of provisions. They also visited other stores, and in the afternoon departed, laden with about one hundred dollars' worth of provisions given them by our merchants.—*Sioux City Eagle*, Dec. 12, 1857.

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