



HOMER HORATIO SEERLEY
1848-1932

Homer Horatio Seerley

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No two men had more to do with the fostering of popular education in Iowa in the nineteenth and early twentieth century than Henry Sabin and Homer Horatio Seerley. What Henry Barnard and Horace Mann were to the United States, Sabin and Seerley were to Iowa. For many years Sabin was superintendent of schools at Clinton and later State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Seerley also for several years was city superintendent of schools, but in 1886 he became head of the Iowa State Normal School, which in 1909 became Iowa State Teachers College. He held this position until 1928, serving in all 42 years.

The ancestors of Homer Horatio Seerley were mainly Germans who had settled in the colonies, apparently in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. According to a family tradition the founder of the American branch of the Seerleys had come from Alsace-Lorraine or Switzerland. One ancestor had fought in the Revolutionary War under George Washington. Another had fought the British in the War of 1812. The name Seerley was originally spelled Zierle.

Homer Horatio was born in a log cabin at Broad Ripple near Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1848. The family moved to Illinois in 1852 and settled near Toulon in Stark County. Another move in 1854 brought the family to Keokuk County, in Iowa, locating at Rodman's Point, which later became South English.

The parents of Homer Horatio, Thomas Seerley and Louisa Ann *nee* Smith, were both of colonial stock. The father came to Indiana from Maryland, and the

mother from Virginia. They were pioneers brave, industrious and frugal, deeply religious, and the fact that they gave their first-born the names of two well-known figures of antiquity would seem to indicate that there was a definite penchant for education in the Seerley home, though neither of the parents had anything that could be called a higher education, which all their children, three sons, acquired.

The first winter in Iowa the family lived in a one-room log cabin, a "side building" to Rodman's tavern. The father bought 80 acres of land for which he paid with two Mexican War land warrants, each of which entitled the holder to enter 40 acres of government land. Soon the father was busy cutting logs which he brought to a portable horse-power mill to be sawed into lumber. This he used for a two-room frame house into which the family moved in the spring of 1855. In this the family lived until after the Civil War.

Later in life when he was president of the Iowa State Teachers College, Seerley wrote that these years were a period of "continuous hard times that never could be surpassed. There was no chance for labor, no market, and no money except Wild Cat currency that needed a bank note detector to find out its possible value. The winter weather, the blizzards, the snow drifts, the winds, the lack of suitable clothing for protection all added to the pioneers' woes and independence. But there was plenty to eat. Game abounded, also many kinds of nuts and wild fruit, sheep sorrel for pies and other local possibilities for tea such as barks. There was plenty of green wood for fuel. A \$10.00 cow was a big help to the family. In a few years wheat bread could be added to what had been a regular fare of corn bread and lye hominy."

Before coming to Iowa, little Homer Horatio had already made his debut as a scholar. A grandfather taught him the alphabet. At four years of age he attended a school regularly taught by his father for one term. This was while the family was living in Illinois.

The father, Thomas Seerley, became the secretary of the new school district in which the family lived in Keokuk County. A schoolhouse was built in 1855. We may be sure that young Homer Horatio was a diligent student in this school during his boyhood.

Though life was strenuous in this pioneer community, there were compensations. Of this President Seerley reminisced many years after: "What picnics! Food served on tables in common. What camp meetings! What exhibitions of forensics! What round town ball games! What competition in foot races; long jumps; hop, step and jump, bull pens; etc. all games that were famous for the athletes of that day."

Young Homer Horatio learned much in the pioneer country school, but he learned much more at home. The best teacher of his boyhood was his father, who "had a very large part in the elementary education of his sons and gave them more care, more instruction and more benefit than all the teachers employed. Every night during term time he looked after the studies pursued by the boys and helped in all their difficulties. He was a companion for his sons all through their childhood. He made the home a place where the boys could have the best times. He cultivated in them respect for religion, esteem for morality and desire for the best habits. And in all these things he was seconded and helped by his wife, true helpmate and a devoted woman, who worked co-operatively with him for the welfare and the progress of their children in training and development."

With the encouragement of his father he studied the Bible so diligently that he was able to repeat from memory the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—an accomplishment of which he was justly very proud.

Homer Horatio was 12 years old when the Confederates fired on Fort Sumter. His war activity was limited to serving occasionally as fifer when there were campaigns to stimulate recruiting. Much more important was the work he did on the home economic front, for when his father was away from home trying to earn

some much-needed hard cash, much of the farm work and management devolved upon the young teen-age boy. That he was able to do this and even to hold his own with the older men, the following incident is evidence:

One day in early autumn he took a load of wheat to market. The attendant shorted him on the weight, and when he went to the office for payment the clerk gave him \$10.00 less than it should have been. The boy knew this and protested only to be told that they made no mistakes there and to get out and stay out.

Young Seerley attended a rural school in Keokuk County until he was 18 years old. Since he liked study and school he also thought he would like to teach. There were normal schools at that time in some of the Eastern states but none in Iowa. There was, however, a Department of Didactics at the State University of Iowa at Iowa City. Thither, accordingly, the aspiring student betook himself, walking the entire distance of about 40 miles.

His parents encouraged him in this, but they could only give him moral support. So he had to intersperse studying to prepare himself for a teaching career with teaching. By scraping and scrimping, constant planning and contriving, he managed to continue his studies at the University until in 1876 he received the M.A. degree.

While at the University he was joined by his two brothers, John J. and Frank N. The three rented a room for \$3.00 a month. They "did their own washing, cooked their own meals, and survived on \$150.00 a year, paying for clothing, books, subsistence, and travel." Still, as Seerley later wrote, "Those were better days than it might seem because everybody learned self-reliance, self-dependence or self-control without joining Boy Scouts or Y.M.C.A." In those years the three Seerley boys laid the foundation for the successful careers which all of them attained—two in education and one in politics and law.

The Seerleys were Lutherans. The three sons must

therefore have been baptized and confirmed as Lutherans. While attending the University, however, young Seerley became converted and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church through the preaching and influence of the Reverend John Bowman, "a pioneer Methodist minister of unusual pulpit power."

In spiritual growth and personality, also, he owed much to Dr. Stephen N. Fellows of the Department of Didactics at the University; and to a lifelong friend, Professor Jonathan Piper, an impressive lecturer in the early days of the county institutes. David Sands Wright writes in *Fifty Years at the Teachers College* that what Gamaliel was to Paul, Fellows was to Seerley, and if Piper was the Elijah of Iowa's educational prophets, Seerley was the Elisha.

Young Seerley began his professional career as a teacher in Keokuk County. There he taught rural school three years—presumably three winter terms. The pay was \$30.00 a month. According to a report of the county superintendent, young Seerley was not at first a howling success as a teacher. The superintendent reported that in Seerley's school "the order was poor, method of instruction middling, and the general condition of the school bad." This may have been an unfair evaluation of his work, for he had the good will of his students, they were anxious to learn, and he loved to work with them.

In 1873 he began teaching in the public schools of Oskaloosa, first as high school assistant, then as high school principal, and from 1875 on as superintendent. The action of the school board in electing him to the superintendency "was entirely unexpected on his part, and was done without his knowledge."

In the Oskaloosa schools he gained experience in teaching all the subjects taught in the high school. Of foreign languages, German and Latin were taught. He was especially successful in teaching Latin.

On the playground he had a happy way of becoming acquainted with the children. Having a good memory he

soon learned the names of all the pupils though there were about 500.

Attending school in Oskaloosa were some of the grandchildren of the Reverend Asa Turner of Denmark, Lee County, a well-known Congregational minister of early Iowa. Sometimes Superintendent Seerley called on "Father Turner" and whenever he did, the latter never failed to impress upon him the importance of teaching temperance in the public schools and also of the need for spiritual guidance of the children in and out of school. That Seerley accepted this charge wholeheartedly we may be sure. It may be seen in his baccalaureate addresses while he was president of the Normal School and Teachers College.

By character, training and experience, young Seerley was well qualified for the superintendency in the schools of Oskaloosa where the people had high educational standards for their children. That his efforts were appreciated from the beginning of his incumbency we have proof in the *History of Mahaska County* (1878). The author of this history writes: "Superintendent Seerley labors indefatigably for the interests of the schools, and during the three years that he has occupied his present position there has not been an appeal to the school board."

At the age of 27 Seerley was still single. In Oskaloosa he met his life's partner. Of his marriage David Sands Wright writes: "Superintendent Seerley believed in the Scripture, 'It is not good for man to be alone,' and he wisely chose one of the brightest and best of his Oskaloosa high school students for his life companion. Such a marriage is ideal. From the endearing relationships that grow out of the association of teacher and pupil the transition to the tie that binds in the domestic relation is natural and simple. The woman of his choice was Clara E. Twaddle whom he led to the marriage altar on the ninth day of July, 1878."

The educational interests of Superintendent Seerley included not only the pupils and teachers of Oskaloosa, but those of the whole State as well. He showed this

in the interest he took in the teachers' institutes where he and Professor Piper were co-workers.

Interest in teachers' institutes and normal schools, where standards were set for elementary schools, was surging through the State. Academies and colleges added normal departments. The State University had its Department of Didactics. Plans for State normal schools were broached, and in 1876 the Iowa State Normal School opened at Cedar Falls, using the buildings of a former home for soldiers' orphans.

For the principal of the new institution the Board of Directors chose the then superintendent of the city schools of Mason City, J. C. Gilchrist. In *Fifty Years at the Teachers College* David Sands Wright writes of Gilchrist that the "predilections of his boyhood, the dreams of his youth, the books he read, his choice of a vocation, his entire life, were marked by one dominating purpose, to be a teacher of teachers, and in this chosen field to take rank as a leader in the walks of education."

Financial help his parents could not give him. So he had to work his way through academy and college. He attended Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio, whose president, Horace Mann, became his bright educational ideal.

Before coming to Iowa, Gilchrist had had several years experience both as teacher and administrator of normal schools in different parts of the country. He was a hard worker. At the Iowa State Normal School he carried the same load of teaching as the other members of the faculty, in addition to his many administrative duties. Generously, he placed his valuable library at the disposal of the students and faculty members. This was a real boon to the new institution, which at first had very little of what could be called a library. The State of Iowa was indeed fortunate in having an educator of such caliber to direct the school during the first ten years of its existence—from 1876 to 1886.

Still there were criticisms and dissatisfaction. When the Board of Directors met for the transaction of busi-

ness in June, 1886, two candidates for Principal were placed in nomination—J. C. Gilchrist and Homer H. Seerley. The result of the voting showed five votes for Seerley and one for Gilchrist.

Seerley was informed of his election by telegram. The action of the Board came as a complete surprise to him. He had not even so much as thought of himself as a candidate for the position. He was happy in the work where he was. Still, the election sounded like a call of destiny, and he asked for time to consider it.

After consulting with two members of the Board of Directors and a prominent State senator, and interviewing members of the faculty and students of the Normal School and citizens of Cedar Falls, he accepted the position.

Many years later David Sands Wright described in his characteristic way the official beginnings of the Seerley administration, which was to continue for 42 years.

“The sixth of September, 1886 was an eventful day in the history of the institution, but never had one of its school terms opened with less formality and dress parade. Mid unwonted quiet, the new Principal took his seat upon the platform, the members of his faculty, new and old, ranged about him. From the pews of the assembly hall, two hundred upturned, expectant faces breathlessly awaited sensational developments. The Principal came to the desk, read a brief portion of Scripture and offered a simple prayer. A few necessary announcements were made and the students were at once dismissed to their respective classes. To everyone except the head of the school, the unexpected had happened. There were no words of greetings, no cant commonplaces of speechifying, no threats nor admonitions, no references to the past, no promises for the future. Bartlett, Hull and Wright were not permitted to discharge their elaborately prepared ‘extemporaneous’ remarks at the unprotected heads of the innocent students. It was to be a business administration and it started out in a businesslike way.”

At the first faculty meeting the new Principal stated

his policy and purposes. He reminded the faculty members that the position had come to him unsought. He said he had no enemies to punish nor friends to reward. He would pursue no policies in opposition to the faculty, which had been elected by the Board of Directors.

The fact that only one member of the Board of Directors had voted for Gilchrist shows that the Board no longer considered him the best man for the position. This could not have been because the Board considered him deficient as a scholar for he was probably a better scholar than Seerley. Neither was it because of any serious disagreements between Gilchrist and the faculty. Rather it was because of the strict rules which Gilchrist had made for the general conduct of the students. For instance, there was the rule against "making selection." This rule became the object of much amusement, and was honored by them more in the breach than in performance. And on the very last day of the school year of 1880, a lady student married one of the professors—and they lived happily ever afterwards.

Also, there was much dissatisfaction with the kind of requirements Gilchrist had made for admission to the School, whereby he had offended many of the city and county superintendents of the State. Generally, too, the students considered the required final examinations to be an unnecessary torture.

Principal Seerley—in a few years it became President Seerley—knew the lay of the land. He had been brought up in Iowa, and labored and studied to get an education in Iowa. He had been a teacher in rural and city schools and a teacher of teachers in the early teachers' institutes. At the Normal School he saw the need for modifying or abolishing the objectionable rules for student conduct and for more acceptable requirements for admission to the School. But whenever changes were made, he was always careful first to feel sure of the support of the Board. This became easier after his friend, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Henry Sabin, had become chairman *ex officio* of the Board.

Criticism of the School was tenacious. Some critics doubted that the change in the administration had been wise. Others denounced it unreservedly and predicted that the downfall of the institution in Cedar Falls was imminent. There were several private normal schools in Iowa at this time. Gilchrist became principal of a private normal school in Algona and later dean of the Department of Didactics at Morningside College in Sioux City.

In 1897 he visited the Iowa State Normal School, the first and last time since he left the School. On that occasion he gave an address, which was an eloquent tribute to the genius of his model teacher, Horace Mann. All who heard him felt "inspired to the best and noblest in living."

September 6, 1886, the first day of the Seerley administration, the enrollment was 232, a slight falling off from that of the previous year. It was the same the following year. But a marked improvement began during the third year and this continued during the succeeding years of the nineteenth century. In the school year 1901-1902 there were 1,522 women and 590 men enrolled.

People were now beginning to speak of the Iowa State Normal School as the biggest institution of its kind in the United States and therefore in the World.

This enviable goal had been attained though the State had not been too generous in the financial support of the institution. Only an insignificant amount of income could be derived from the small fees paid by the students each term of three months. Even after the School had ceased to be a boarding school, there was urgent need for more buildings.

In 1882 the Board of Directors asked the General Assembly for \$70,000 for the construction of a new building. The amount was cut down to \$30,000 and passed. It was insufficient for the size of the building needed. But an appeal to the people of Cedar Falls was generously met by an additional \$40,000 subscribed. Even

this was barely enough. The new structure had to be built without a basement.

It contained an apartment for the Principal, rooms for students and faculty members, recitation rooms, and a large hall for chapel exercises and general meetings.

In 1890 the State built a cottage as a residence for the President and his family. Another structure, the Administration Building, was erected in 1895 at a cost of \$35,000. In this the President had his offices. It also housed the growing library of the School, besides space for more recitation rooms.

With the constantly growing enrollment there was soon need for more buildings. In the later nineties the line from Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul," often ran through the minds of the Normal School faculty. The members of the General Assembly caught the spirit, and in 1900 they voted the sum of \$100,000 for a new building in addition to \$70,000 for the general expenses of the Normal School.

The cornerstone for the new building, the Auditorium Building as it was called, was laid November 13, 1900 amid much jubilation and speech making, congratulations and felicitations on the part of the students, the faculty members and numerous visitors. Various exercises occupied the whole day. By the following autumn the building was completed and ready for use.

Formal dedication, however, did not come until January 20, 1902. This day was the biggest day so far in the history of the Iowa State Normal School. A special train brought the entire membership of the Senate and the House of the General Assembly, the Governor and his staff, besides other State dignitaries. There were numerous other visitors. Speeches were made by President Seerley and other members of the faculty. In his usual eloquent style Governor A. B. Cummins delivered the dedicatory address.

The Auditorium Building measured 71 feet in breadth and 232 feet in length. It was three stories in height

and had a full basement. A part of the basement contained a gymnasium, which would also be used for banquets. The auditorium part had a seating capacity for nearly two thousand people. It was the finest assembly hall at that time in the State of Iowa for "beauty and completeness of appointment." The rest of the building contained recitation rooms and rooms for the literary societies.

The General Assembly was becoming more generous to the State educational institutions. It voted a millage tax to the State University in 1896, and another to the State College at Ames in 1900. In 1902 it voted a similar tax to the Normal School and this was continued for a period of 15 years. This tax made possible the construction of several other fine buildings—a science building, a gymnasium, a library and other buildings.

The outward growth of the School came as a direct result of the inward growth. As enrollments climbed, new courses were added. Of the language courses, Latin came first, then German, French and even Greek. Advanced courses in history, economics and political science were added. The lively interest in music swelled the size and number of classes in music and music organizations. In education and methods, courses became more numerous—too numerous. Practice teaching was required of all who expected to graduate and the lessons taught by the student teachers had to be taught according to the five formal steps of the recitation—aim, preparation, presentation, elaboration and application. Near the turn of the century much more attention was given to chemistry and especially to physics. Manual training and domestic economy were added. Military drills for the men were discontinued, but gymnastics were henceforth required for both men and women.

Gradually a four-year college course was evolved, and the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Education began to be given in 1907. Two years later the General Assembly changed the name of the Iowa State Normal School to the Iowa State Teachers College. At the same time

the three State educational institutions in Cedar Falls, Ames and Iowa City were placed under a State Board of Education.

The new Board did not at once take kindly to the idea of a four-year college course at the School in Cedar Falls. In the second annual report of the Board it even proposed cutting the institution down to the status of a normal school with a two-year college course. At once President Seerley and the faculty were up in arms against this proposal and the change was not made.

President Seerley had not hurried the development of the School towards the college status. But he always moved with the progressive forces in American education. The Iowa State Normal School had been founded to train teachers for the common schools of the State. But the term "common schools" in the present century took on an extended meaning and came to include both the elementary school and the high school, especially after the idea of school consolidation had gained ground. A proper preparation for teaching in the high schools necessitated a college education.

From the beginning of his educational career Seerley had taken a deep interest in the improvement of the rural schools where most of the children of the State until the present century, began and completed their formal education. He believed it to be the special duty of teachers in general to work for the betterment of the rural schools. He had advocated this in lectures in the early teachers' institutes and continued it in articles in the educational press and in public addresses.

Much was done at the College to help the rural school teachers. Special instructors were appointed to teach courses for prospective rural schoolteachers. Study centers in different parts of the State were set up where rural schoolteachers could continue their education while teaching. Nearby rural schools cooperated with the College and became model schools where the teachers taught under the supervision of College professors. What was spoken of as Rural School Revival was clearly and actu-

ally under way. But soon it merged into the larger program of the Consolidated School, which gave the children of the rural districts the same educational opportunities as the children of the cities.

Much of President Seerley's educational thought and theories may be found in his book *The Rural School*. It has the subtitle *A Study of its Foundations, Relations, Developments, Activities, and Possibilities*, in length so characteristic of Seerley's writing style. In spite of the title it deals mainly with the graded school as found in the towns and cities at the time of its publication, which was in 1913. However, on the first pages he speaks in glowing terms of his experience as a teacher for three years in rural schools. And he pays a heartfelt tribute to the patrons of the rural schools in these words: "They are the salt of the earth. They deserve every opportunity that civilization can confer. The Nation, the State, and the County should combine to enlarge the province of the elementary school to train the masses for an intelligent citizenship."

To a large extent this fine goal was attained with the rapid growth of the Consolidated Schools, which solved the rural school problem by bringing the rural school to town—for only a very few consolidated schools were located in the open country.

Simplified spelling seemed to President Seerley to be a desirable educational reform. For a number of years the School's bulletins were printed with the shorter word forms recommended by the National Simplified Spelling Association, of which he was a member. In this matter, however, he didn't have the support of the members of his faculty, and in a few years the standard word forms were again used in the publications of the School.

But simplified spelling is still a live issue. Some simplified word forms continue to be used and are even gaining ground. Newer forms are also gaining acceptance. The mistake that President Seerley made was that he acted unilaterally in a revolutionary way instead of trusting to time and evolution.

Professor Leonard W. Parish of the Normal School faculty and President Seerley collaborated in writing an Iowa history and civics book. Parish wrote the civics part and Seerley the history part. It was too factual and too much in the form of brief outlines to have much of an appeal to youngsters for whom it was intended, unlike *The Making of Iowa* by Seerley's friend, Henry Sabin. This little book became something of an Iowa history classic and had a wide sale.

Often President Seerley was called on to lecture to clubs, societies, schools, and educational groups. In a public address in Council Bluffs on April 2, 1877 he praised the universal education as tried in America as having no parallel in history. In the public schools he saw "God's hand in civilization directing the hosts of progress, reform, and improvement. All workers in these lines are His agents in pushing forward the great enterprises of public welfare."

In "The Dangers of the Adolescent Period," an address delivered in Sioux City on April 22, 1898, he brought a severe charge against his age and generation when he said: "The assumption that ignorance of self as an animal and the actual functions of life will be a protection against the vices and evils of youth and maturity is the most threatening theory in the practice of a generally prudent civilization." Still he did not think it devolved so much upon the school as upon the home to study and understand the biology of adolescence in its social implications. But it should be remembered that he said this long before the First World War.

His "Columbus Day Address" given on October 21, 1892 is especially noteworthy. It is a eulogy of both Columbus and the United States. Of the United States he said: "The old civilization has been compelled to sit at the feet of the new civilization to learn the lessons of liberty, methods of government, and the power of the individual. The United States as a modern type of free government has been the schoolmaster of all Europe, and so well have the lessons in some cases been learned

that a few promise to surpass even their teacher in the contents of peace and a higher civilization—and as a consequence the rights of man are today on a much higher plane in all the nations of the earth wherever America is known and wherever the stars and stripes are unfurled as an emblem of liberty to the downtrodden and oppressed peoples of the world.”

In an address at the time of the annual meeting of the Iowa State Teachers Association in Des Moines in 1903, he praised the American public school as “the best agency any civilization has ever invented to prepare an intelligent people for manhood’s glory, citizenship and masterfulness in character, but experience and common sense have also taught the American people that many things are needing to be brought up to a better standard of efficiency.”

In the early days of the Normal School the Principal, in addition to his administrative duties, carried the same load of class work as the members of his faculty. For some years Seerley also taught classes in psychology and education. This state of affairs changed as the administrative duties increased with larger teaching staffs and larger enrollments. But unless out of town, Seerley always conducted the chapel exercises, assisted by members of the faculty. All the students were required to attend. Chapel exercises consisted of the singing of a hymn, a reading from the Bible, a short prayer, and general announcements. Sometimes there would be an address by a visitor at the School. At times Seerley himself would give a short talk. This would often turn on the subject of the importance of conduct and character, for Seerley ardently believed that there could be no complete education without spiritual growth. And in this he was fully upheld by the members of the faculty.

President Seerley was a deeply religious man. One of his favorite hymns begins with the line: “If on a quiet sea towards heaven we calmly sail.” The burden of the hymn is that when everything else in life fails, spiritu-

ality holds. To this belief Seerley adhered firmly throughout his long and useful life, and he never missed the opportunity to impress this upon the students.

The Normal School and the Teachers College were State institutions. Religion was not a part of the regular courses of study, but the religious atmosphere was everywhere. Religious organizations, Protestant and Catholic, were favored and encouraged. As already stated, there were daily chapel meetings with readings from the Bible, prayers and hymn singing. On Sundays there were well-organized Bible study classes for Protestant students, directed by a faculty member, but taught by the students themselves. Sunday evenings there were well-attended evangelistic meetings at the School. There were also prayer meetings under the auspices of the School's Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A.

Neither in Gilchrist's nor in Seerley's time was discipline ever a serious problem. In 1891 Seerley reported that the "moral as well as the social standing of the students could hardly be improved upon, as the young ladies and gentlemen who resort here are in the majority of cases, persons of high moral rectitude and exemplary character. The surroundings restrain those who might act in an imprudent or frivolous manner."

A similar report could have been given for almost any year during the administrations of Gilchrist and Seerley.

Probably the most serious disciplinary problem with which Seerley had to contend during his long career at the School concerned two faculty members—a widowed music teacher and a married man. In a long letter the infatuated man had expressed his ardent love for the widow. The letter he had put into his overcoat pocket. He left the overcoat in the hall of a boarding house while lunching. A Becky Sharp of a girl student picked it out and turned it over to the School authorities. At the next chapel meeting Seerley announced that the two were no longer members of the faculty. Whether the girl who took the incriminating letter from

the man's pocket was in any way disciplined is not known.

Every year at commencement time President Seerley gave the baccalaureate address. These addresses were sermons as much as discourses on educational matters. Excepting during the First World War they contained very little about politics or current events. The leading thought throughout all these addresses was that the American school system, in spite of some imperfections, is the best and the most democratic in the whole world. But no education can be what it should be without the cultivation of the spiritual life. Frequently these addresses had as mottoes passages from the Bible.

Excerpts from Seerley's commencement addresses from 1887 to 1928 will show the trend and permanency of his thought, faith, and ideals.

For the 1887 address he took for his motto *Revelation* 3:8: "I set before you an open door and no man can shut it." During the course of the address he said:

"There never has been a time in the history of the world when the individual occupied so large a sphere of activity as today.

"It is not enough to say that a man is a first class lawyer, physician, teacher, farmer or merchant—the proper place has not been reached in the true province of human excellence until genuine manhood and womanhood stands superior to any distinction attained by success in any vocation.

"How to get a living is not so important as how to live. The present does not occupy the sphere that is allotted to the future. This life—on this earth—is brief, transitory, uncertain, that life in the world to come is eternal, abiding, and positive."

In 1892 he said:

"In the providence of God it remained for the intelligent, the pure in life and the great in spirit of truth, to have a glorious part in the doings of the evening of the 19th century. It is theirs to be partakers in the greatest events that history has ever seen, to be co-

workers in the present and noblest civilization that has ever graced this progressive world, to be teachers of the children whose privilege it shall be to excel in wisdom, strength, power, individuality and usefulness, all the generations of the past."

Quoting St. Paul he said in 1897:

"Paul does not suggest any doubts, he does not talk of executive ability, nor shrewdness, nor earthly cunning, nor enterprise, nor enthusiasm, nor education as necessary for permanent success—he sets up but one condition and that an absolute, indispensable one, the love of man to God."

In 1904 he stressed sacrifice:

"Service implies also that there is genuine sympathy with inferiors and that the strong is ready to contribute to the progress and upbuilding of the weak, the experienced is ready to contribute largely in helpfulness to relieve the helpless and the dependent." Salary may not be full payment for such service.

In the address of 1907 he answers what he calls the greatest question in civilization which he says is that "of explaining the wonderful accomplishments of great men.

"The question of questions is one of ability to meet the demands of everyday life. This ability must be abundant, it must be exhaustless, it must be consecrated, it must be fully developed. The test will come and it will be a severe one, but it cannot be such as to overcome the faithful and sincere soul whose preparation is complete. The test will be positive and exacting, but it will not be a surprise to him who puts his trust in his God, and knows the manliness of his valor. The test will be frequent and continuous but it can always be met by those who know themselves, their resources and are willing to sacrifice selfishness to attain it."

In the address of 1908 he defines what he considers true Christianity, and he did it in no uncertain terms. This may have been because of an agitation at the College over the basis of Christian faith after a student

had been reading John Fiske's essays on "The Jesus of History" and "The Christ of Theology."

Seerley commented:

"The worst sort of atheism is not that of an announced faith that opposes the principles of Christianity in an open and hostile way, it is not that of ridiculing the professions of piety and claims of religion as being absolute cant and fraud, it is not that of an avowed hatred for all that is good and true and that curses and defies God of nature and revelation. No! it is not these forms of infidelity and despicable contempt for the holy and the sacred that is worst in the world since the most hideous and most ruinous of all atheisms is a character-fraud which is produced and advertised by a worthless and deceitful life while claiming to be truly representative of Christianity through an assumed though false profession of goodness, holiness and truth."

In 1910 he voiced his belief in a better World and a better America.

"There never was a time when multitudes of men were more anxious to preserve their whole prospects by properly caring for their lives than there are today. This disposition to be good, to prove capability, to do something worthy and to be something notable in order that they may be able to serve long, largely and effectively, is evident everywhere. That investigator has conducted his study to poor advantage not to ascertain that the world is getting better, that the wicked are systematically destroyed and the righteous continually prevail and will inherit the earth. Sin means death, righteousness life; folly means failure, wisdom means success; these are the phenomena of the physical life, the mental life, the moral life, the higher life. Christianity is in the world to triumph to the end. Its day of success may be postponed by the indifference and the rebellion of men but its day of glory and victory is gradually coming nearer to the time of fulfillment. The true child of God needs not worry over the unsatisfactory things that are in these modern times. America is the battlefield of

the world where the contest of contests is being waged. It is the great melting pot in which the contributions of the ages are to be placed in order to be reborn in greater purity and magnificence; it is the great testing-out place where all the religions of the world are to be composed and where harmony and unification of nobleness and greatness are to be completely realized. It is here Christianity has its untold opportunity; it is here that it will wield a mighty influence in establishing righteousness; it is here the purity of the heart will be exalted; it is here that the nobleness of purpose will be enthroned; it is here that magnanimity of action will be given freedom, and it is here that godliness will exhibit human souls that possess the most remarkable efficiency that has ever been found in all the ages of history.

"Sometimes men seem to forget that the things which Christianity stands for represent all the things in civilization that actually live forever."

During the First World War, fierce sentiments flared at the College. Germany and things German—which had formerly been held in high esteem—were roundly denounced. President Seerley may have shared these sentiments to some extent. He praised higher schools of learning because their students and faculties were among the first to rush to the defense of their countries, but he deplored "that genuine Christianity had broken down desperately in certain personalities."

In 1918 he admonished the graduate "to be ready to die as to self in order that his pupils might live in the beauty of the eternal promises."

In his baccalaureate address in 1926 he took for his subject: "The Greater Issues in American Life—Government, Education, Immortality."

First he read the last chapter of *Revelation*. Then he spoke briefly of his coming to the Normal School in 1886. "The call to come I considered more as a call of Providence than as a call of ambition to enter upon a very uncertain field of undeveloped educational work with the supreme purpose to do, as nearly as I could, the kind

and character of work that the people of Iowa hoped to have done for preparing public school teachers."

At the close of the school year in 1928 President Seerley spoke for the last time to a graduating class. He was then 80 years old. His text for the address was from *Genesis* and *Revelation*: "And God said, 'Let there be light,'" and "The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all, Amen."

He asked the graduates to take the following pledge:

"Live true. Honor ideals. Maintain character. Economize time. Invest personal service in others. Earn productive life. Make a record for responsibility and reliability that will enable you to be one of the noblest and best loved representatives of your day and generation. Anything less than these standards is beneath the promises vouchsafed by Almighty God to everyone of his consistent, faithful children. Any results less than these providential possibilities are below the inheritance of Modern Christianity and are not worthy of a citizenship produced, trained and educated in these great and permanent freedoms and characteristics of a representative democracy."

Iowa was not in every way prosperous nor its people very certain of any improvement in the near future, in 1928. Still President Seerley seemed hopeful, for he continued:

"This wonderful period of history owes its greatness and its special distinction to the noble inheritance of the past, to the great experiences and attainments of humanity in all time, to the discoveries of society in all realms of science and civilization. This day and this generation are debtors to the ages to such a degree that the only way to pay off these remarkable obligations is to live such wholesome, productive, exemplary lives that the total outcome will mean definite progress for the immediate and permanent future of civilization, now appearing and expanding."

President Seerley resigned in 1928. In recognition of his long and eminent services to public education in Iowa

his full salary of \$8,000 a year was continued for two years after his resignation. He continued to live in Cedar Falls until his death on December 23, 1932. He was survived by his wife, one son, and two daughters. A third daughter had died in infancy.

In 1928 the Iowa State Teachers College had an enrollment of nearly 2,700 during the regular school year, a faculty numbering over 200, a beautiful campus with some 20 buildings, and a land area of over 200 acres.

The College was gaining in recognition as one of the leading institutions of higher education in the United States, not only in comparison with institutions of its own class but with collegiate institutions in general.

The North Central Association in 1930 gave the College accreditation on the regular list of colleges and universities. And in 1940 the Association of American Universities admitted the College to equal standing with the best institutions of higher learning in the country.

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