



*W. J. Atkinson*

Reproduced from a pen-and-ink sketch by G. W. Maxon of a photograph in 1913  
by Hostetler.

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## WILLIAM I. ATKINSON—AN APPRECIATION

BY MONTAVILLE FLOWERS<sup>1a</sup>

Life may be given in many ways,  
And loyalty to Truth be sealed  
As bravely in the closet as the field,  
So bountiful is Fate.

William I. Atkinson had climbed up the long ascent that leads to the temple of great men, had passed through the portico, and stood smiling before the opening door when he received the call into life beyond life. To his family, his state, and the people in a far-flung business field, he had long ago reached a height in personality and attainments that towers far above the crowd. Beyond that, except for a nation-wide acquaintance with public men, his name had not been heard; but he had all the qualities that ripen into the kind of greatness that multitudes acclaim—his natal heritage and boyhood discipline, his rich character and full preparation, his experience in public life and his plans which fitted aptly into the trend of political events in his state—all these wanted but the element of time to lift him to the breadth of acquaintance and opportunity which have always brought their possessor into general renown. The strain that sounds saddest through the deep pathos of his death is the pity that he did not live to mature and gather the harvest so clearly seen developing out of his natural worth and assiduous culture.

<sup>1a</sup>Montaville Flowers was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, January 7, 1868. He was graduated in Liberal Arts from Northern Ohio University, Ada, Ohio, 1890; from the Cincinnati College of Music, Voice and Oratory, 1894; and received his Master's degree from Ohio University in 1905. He was superintendent of public schools of Norwood, Ohio, for six years; for four years was director of university extension, University of Cincinnati; was president for several years of the Interstate Lyceum Bureau; was president of Flowers Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts from 1903 to 1907; president of International Lyceum Association from 1910 to 1912; has been a lecturer on dramatic art since 1896, and on Japanese problems, Oriental problems and world problems; was head of lyceum and speakers' bureaus of Progressive National Headquarters, New York, and was editor of "What Every American Should Know About the War," 1918. His home is in Pasadena, California.

The emotion that opens the lips of those who now speak of him is the tenderest wish to do his great human heart justice in their praises. To receive the approval of one's fellow men while living is the strongest incentive to right living, but the desire to be spoken fairly in death is a passion so deep and intimate that few of us have courage to bespeak it for ourselves. These desires broaden the sympathies, deepen the affections, sweeten the thoughts, soften the judgments, give birth to tolerance, fortify the courage, and temper the acts of our lives. When Mark Twain died the populace felt a sudden loss as if something good had been taken from each one, leaving a void within that nothing could fill; at the passing of Luther Burbank, men, women and children stopped their customary thoughts awhile, their souls perceiving that something within them that had been vital and good had gone out. These emotions vibrate from the harp of the affections where unconsciously to us, but for a long time, these great spirits have been playing love melodies; we feel the place they have occupied in us only when their music ceases and they are no more.

So it is with Atkinson, in kind and in degree. His was a nature and a service that reached deep into the souls of his friends and touched thousands who knew him but little with the same effect. They loved him because he was wholly lovable. Their remembrance of him will be lasting and profound. The grief felt against the unfair taking off of Abraham Lincoln is as deep now as it was in 1865 and far broader the world over.

For this reason, with this purpose, biographies of such spirits should be written in which the wellsprings of their lives should be sought and studied, their daily work reviewed and attuned. When we discover the native impulses from which a man's life flows, whether he, himself, knows them or not, as they reveal themselves through the garment of deeds with which he clothes himself, the pattern of life that he makes becomes understandable, whether it be ugly with discord and evil or glorious in design and execution of good. And as we trace back the sources of his success and his hold on men's affections to definite motives and qualities of spirit, we may profit ourselves by their emulation; for to make ourselves better is the objective of all study, all remembrance of the dead, all living.



Our slender life runs rippling by and glides  
Into the silent hollow of the past;  
What is there that abides  
To make the next age better for the last?

#### LOVE FOR MOTHER

In this the life of Atkinson offers a rich, absorbing, gratifying study. It is marked with definite characteristics under which pronounced impulses and capacities are seen clearly playing. The first of these life directing forces was his love for his mother. This was the first natural outlet for a profound emotional capacity which later gave itself freely in many directions. It was the joint product of heredity and early circumstances. He was born on a farm near Clarksville, Iowa, March 17, 1876. His father, Henry Atkinson, was a native of Yorkshire, England, who had settled in Iowa in 1854, seven years before the Civil War, before the impetus and population which have made that state one of the richest and best improved of the Union, had passed west of the Mississippi. In 1860 this pioneer had married Miss Sophia Clouky, of French-Canadian parentage. Their son, William, born sixteen years later possessed the natural but unusual heritage of magnificent, large physique, athletic, attractive and impressive. It housed an unusual psychic force characterized by the fearless, substantial tenacity of the English, coupled with the quick, deep capacity for affection and emotion of his mother's people, controlled by the rounded intellectual and spiritual capabilities of both of these highly developed human stocks.

Six children had been born into this family before William, so that he came into a great domestic organization, working steadily to a great end; for during these sixteen years and for thirteen years after his birth the parents were acquiring a farm, buying eighty acres at a time, working away with all forces year in and out, as only those who have passed through that period and that process can understand, to raise their crops, feed and clothe the babies, get them off to school; to save a dime here and a dollar there, to pay their debts, then to buy another eighty acres and pay for that, and again to repeat the process until their goal, two hundred and forty acres, was reached. Those who know this life need not be told its emotions, its discipline, its fruits in habit

and character; those who do not know it never can be told, never can understand. In this environment, this high tide of labor, love and aspiration, young Atkinson lived his boyhood and found the principles of his life. This fact is more than passing, it is determinative.

And just when they had finished paying for the farm, when William the youngest of the seven was thirteen years old, the father died. There is always a peculiarly strong and pathetic tie between the mother and the youngest child in such an overwhelming tragedy in family life. This dependence of one upon the other, this bond too sweet to be described, lasted through life; when the son was at school at a distance he wrote his mother many and tender letters and spent hard earned and saved pittance for flowers to send to her. In his trunk, found after his death were some of these letters that each had saved and a mother's shawl carefully treasured. Deep emotional capacity! It was his life's ambition to own the old farm where father and mother had begun life, where the children were born, whence they had been sent to school as fast as they grew up to the mark, whence they left the old nest to make their own.

This emotional endowment and the thrill that came from its exercise played through all his work, it stimulated him to tremendous effort in football games in college, it was exemplified in the intensity of his friendships. For he desired friends, made them readily, kept them long and would go far in time and labor for them, recompensed enough by the pleasure it gave him to serve them and to see them succeed. It turned him definitely into his vocation, the lyceum and Chautauqua fields which offered fullest scope for giving popular inspiration and pleasure.

Mother devotion and boyhood environment flowered in purity of motive, in clear and unconcealed position on every question. It characterized his ideals toward wife and home. In 1909 he married Miss Rachel Patti Maxon, who was a talented reader of Brooklyn, New York, but he lost his bride within a few months. Five years afterward, as in reverent memory of her he drew for a friend the picture he held of her in his mind—of her sweet countenance and dainty form, her glorious wealth of dark hair, her fairy movements going about in a pretty plaid dress while

he sat in their kitchen and watched her prepare their meals—in voice almost too low to be heard he said, “My love and pride in her, my happiness and joy in life were too great to be described; and then, suddenly, she had to die; I lost her.” But full life and love came to him later on; in 1916 he married Miss Ila Fay Bartram, daughter of Dr. Robert Bartram of Albia, Iowa, a woman of great poise and strength, of deep sympathy and understanding of his nature and appreciation for his work; he had been speaker of the House in the General Assembly of the state and she had been teaching in the schools of Des Moines. It was a happy union; guests in their home felt their atmosphere of mutual love, saw their attitude of mutual confidence and respect; his bearing toward her was full of dignity and reverence; her memory of him is a rich legacy.

It is the heart and not the brain  
That to the highest doth attain,  
And he who follows love's behest  
Far excelleth all the rest.

“As you measure to your neighbor he will measure back to you”; and this was Atkinson's return. His was an exuberant spirit which drew forth an immediate reaction. When he arrived at a convention whether he were in the lobby or on the floor, things at once brightened up and speeded up. Individual and crowd felt the bigness of his heart power and its free expenditure and at once responded in kind. This fact was wonderfully expressed at his death. There was a universal faith among all his friends when they learned of his illness that he would win the victory over the dread malady that attacked him, though it had slain General Grant and many a valiant man since that. They could not contemplate that his great frame, his determined spirit and confident hold on life would relax and go down before that enemy.

So when the fearful message came that one night he had quickly gone, they had never so felt the dire tragedy of such a death; and from the press, from friends in every walk of life, from many who did not know him personally, from every part of the country, there poured out to his wife a general cry of sorrow and sympathy.

One clear thought is carried in all of these expressions—his



great capacity for friendship—all of them attest the intensity of his affection for his friends, the sincerity with which it was returned by all and the deep personal loss that each one feels and shall always feel. This universal accord is typified by a quotation from a single letter which is quoted without name, for it is so nearly what everyone had to say that each may regard it as written by himself: "He was such a splendid man, so generous in all his impulses, so genial and so warm-hearted and so lovable to us all who had the good fortune to know him, that his passing is a real personal loss to us all."

#### HIS LOVE FOR EDUCATION

The second directing force of his life was his intense love for education. His desire for it was compelling, his pursuit of it continuous. What though a million boys and girls may secure it by personal effort, this effort is never commonplace; each individual case is heroic. His is a true instance of such heroism. He worked his way through two universities! What that comprehends! We know about what his farm boy tasks were during those common school years; he worked nights and mornings and summers while in high school; he was a teacher in the rural schools of Butler County, Iowa, assistant principal in the schools of Clarksville, then principal of the Ridgeway schools. When he finished there he was twenty-three, and if his love for education had not consumed him, he would have continued teaching for he was on the upgrade in it; or he would have gone into something else. But to Atkinson he had just begun to educate himself. He entered Upper Iowa University, 1899 to 1902; during these three years he took his apprenticeship in football in which he later so distinguished himself, and he made his start in the lyceum field, for he had begun booking lecture courses in 1901. There are no open or lost links in his career.

His development into the lyceum field was coincident with his college life; Frank A. Morgan, owner of the Mutual Lyceum Bureau, for whom he worked first says: "Mr. Atkinson made his first sale for me for the season of 1901-2 and I paid him a commission of \$10, the next season his commission was \$339, for 1903-4 it was \$606, and in 1904-5 I paid him \$693, which

was a much larger sum in those days than it would be at this time. He represented the Mutual Bureau in Iowa for at least fifteen years, becoming district manager for Iowa, South Dakota, and Southern Minnesota. We always worked together in the greatest harmony; for a considerable part of that time we never had a written contract, and we had no difficulty whatever in making settlements, as he was always abundantly fair in his attitude toward the business and never wanted any more than he was entitled to."

Having established this basis of self-support he entered Iowa State University in 1902 and at the end of four years he was graduated in political science and in law and that same year was admitted to the bar. He never practiced law, for his life had been determined by his activities before graduation; but his knowledge of law had prepared him for his place in the state legislature later on and for the great record he made as speaker of the House of that body, through his knowledge of parliamentary law. If another Samuel Smiles were to write another great book on self-help to be the inspiration of other generations of self-made men, he would use Atkinson as a full illustration of the process.

By the time he had finished the State University he was thoroughly schooled in the Chautauqua field and imbued with its enthusiasms, for Chautauqua was an outstanding factor of public interest at that time. In the summer of 1906 it was entering upon an era which for brilliancy and influence has not been surpassed by any social movement of any time. In a quotation from the Iowa City *Clarion* of July 26, 1906, some words are underscored here because they are key notes: "The *first Annual Assembly* of Johnson County Chautauqua will come to a close tomorrow night and has proved to be a *grand success* from every viewpoint. The busienss management has been ably handled by Mr. W. I. Atkinson who is well known in Iowa City. It has been his duty to secure the talent, get out the advertising matter, and attend to a thousand and one things that require an enduring patience and a large amount of hustling. Mr. Atkinson has met the emergencies that arose with a promptness and efficiency which stamp him as the right man in the right placē. On the opening night there was an immense crowd of over 3,000 people



to get a glimpse of a real Chautauqua, and they were admitted free of charge."

The *First* Chautauqua! In a University town and a community of that size. *Three thousand people admitted free of charge! Grand success!* Think of those things. Here are some cues to Atkinson's early originality. These things are great in a young man's enterprise. And here is a list of the forces young Atkinson was dispensing during the first summer after he graduated. (He had conducted Chautauquas for three or four summers before that.) George R. Stewart in two lectures "Lop-sided People," and "Is Fun Divine or Devilish?"; Senator E. J. Burkett, "The Young Man and the New Woman"; Sylvester A. Long, "Lightning and Toothpicks"; Roney's Boys, the Georgia Jubilee Singers, the Patterson Sisters Concert Company, "Sunshine" Hawks, J. Adam Bede, L. G. Herbert, Captain Jack Crawford, Father Nagle, Bishop Hartzell, and Miss Rachel Patti Maxon, who, with her readings won her audiences and with her womanliness won Atkinson for a husband! Romance of inspiration and influence! And how they reacted upon him to direct his life!

And how they reacted upon hundreds of thousands of men and women everywhere! Hundreds of men and women are in public life and professional life today who received the inspiration to rise to large usefulness from a lecture course or from a Chautauqua. And there is this distinction about the inspiration that comes from that source—it carries an impulse to serve and to do good to mankind for the sake of doing good, not for the mere recompense of money; this inspiration is pure idealism, true religion. W. I. Atkinson felt it and put the full driving power of a great nature back of it. He hated the trend toward commercializing this idealism and never participated in any enterprise that might accelerate that trend. He was a fine judge of the worth while, and upheld a standard of quality as high as the abilities of talent possessed and the community could command. It was his pride to provide, as many times he did, by the simple force of his kindling enthusiasm, a lecture course costing \$500 for a community of 300 people.

And what an attachment the people whom Atkinson gave such opportunities had for him is seen in a typical letter written to him by John Kendrick Bangs, dated March, 1914: "My dear

Brother Atkinson: Do you know, I think your heart must be built upon the same lavish scale as the rest of you! You think of such tender courtesies yourself, and are generous enough to let others share in such opportunities as present themselves to you.<sup>1</sup> You are indeed a Salubrity yourself, and I shall ever rejoice in that day when nearing Fayette, you first dawned—or better, loomed—into my life. May you always be a part of it!"

So it was that when he left the University he did not leave education but was always in the midst of it, pursuing it in a continuous acquisition of facts. He was always thoroughly posted on men and events. He had the keenest kind of judgment on political issues and the drift of things that was based on his fund of facts. He helped many a boy into college and helped him through, too, without the slightest ostentation, too liberal for his own economic well-being, for that was his hobby. In the legislature he was the champion of education and its institutions and out of his experience was able to offer concrete ways to improve and advance the schools of the state. This service was recognized at the time and today stands to his credit among the educators of the state. On April 20, 1915, a distinguished figure in educational advance, President H. H. Seerley of Iowa State Teachers' College, wrote Atkinson as follows: "Your favor announcing the result of certain measures that were in the Sifting Committee was highly appreciated by me. I congratulate you upon the admirable spirit that shows in your administration of the affairs of the House and the high esteem by all those associated with you."

He always went back to his alma maters to attend the annual home-comings. They miss him there and speak about him. He accepted his appointment as trustee of the Upper Iowa University as a great honor and carefully discharged his responsibilities. He spent himself in these enterprises.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Atkinson had written to Mr. Bangs telling about the death of a mutual acquaintance, stating that he had sent a letter of sympathy to the widow and suggesting that Mr. Bangs write her also.

<sup>2</sup>At the time of his death Mr. Atkinson was involved in the following organizations and their work: Member Board of Trustees, Upper Iowa University; member of the State Historical Society; supreme director, Mystic Workers; member Board of Directors, International Lyceum and Chautauqua Association; director Waterloo Base Ball League, member First Congregational Church, Waterloo; Rotarian, Waterloo; Knight Templar, member Order of the Mystic Shrine, member Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, member of the Knights of Pythias, owner The Western Lyceum Bureau, president Federated Lyceum Bureaus.

## LOVE FOR PUBLIC ACTIVITIES

For enveloping his life the third of his characteristics is his love for public activities. For him the broad field was the amphitheatre of public interest, and the big game was public service. He had the spirit of the sportsman. Sports were not an incident or a digression with him, they were a basic element in his program. Seven years in college football, four of them at Iowa State University where he played right guard, helped to win many a hard fought game, and led his team to the championship of the "Big Ten," made him understand the human need that is satisfied by great games and great public events and established in him the spirit of true sportsmanship: "Play within the rules, play to win but to win with honor, for it is the *sport* and not the *score*, that is the aim and glory of play." So when he won the speakership of the House of Representatives under strong competition and a splendid grace, he appointed his competitors to the chairmanships of the best committees! He hated low-brow competition in his business and took great delight in beating the low-browed game with just a little keener wit than the cheat possesses. Many a time he did that, and many a laugh he took at that.

But it is in politics that sportsmanship comes into fullest play, requires its widest knowledge, demands its seasoned skill, has its most open arena, offers its broadest opportunities, takes its biggest chances, and writes its greatest history. He loved that, though he was not deceived by it. He knew political technique and political hazards and the flighty character of the public mind; he laughed at its antics, joked about the flies caught in its web, and as a wise observer was wary of its caprices. Political activity knows but one criterion—success. That the crowd blindly follows till history comes along to point out the errors of this false criterion. Such caprice and such error by the small margin of seventeen votes lost Atkinson his seat in the legislature at the close of his second term and delayed his way up; but time proved that Atkinson was right and the voters were wrong, and they had come back to him with increased affection and almost penitential apology.

The poise, the strength and the promise of what the man might



become in politics were revealed in his service in the Legislature.<sup>3</sup> Now it is the folly of the people and the dread of the politician for the people to ask for and the candidate to pronounce his position, *prefacta*, on every shade and figure of political calico. Subterfuge and innuendo, silence and downright misrepresentation are the red cloaks with which the political bullfighter banter his questioners, perhaps deceives and finally lances them in this gross game. But Atkinson would have none of this. Straight-forward speech was his habit, flowing out of heredity and his home life on that farm; but he did not seek to irritate his questioners and often covered his position with the comedy of humorous illustration as we shall see. Though friendly and happy in every outgoing impulse, he was never cornered and could be depended upon to have convictions on real issues and to stand and fight hard where his convictions lay.

He announced his candidacy in 1912 in a letter sent direct to the voters from which these characteristic paragraphs are taken; this preliminary statement which expresses the very genius of our political institutions, as Thomas Jefferson or John Marshall might have expressed it, reveal the true Atkinson:

If nominated and elected I will appreciate and accept the confidence with the sole purpose of serving the general welfare of the people.

I come directly to you with my candidacy to solicit your support rather than to appeal thru the politicians and those who assume to influence others.

If I go to the legislature, I want to go free and independent of any special interest, to represent you and every citizen in the county, and to carry out the wishes of the majority as expressed in the party platform from time to time, or I will not accept the trust.

But no sooner had he announced his candidacy than the usual flood of inquiry began to come in about all kinds of proposed measures. Again his political quality is revealed by the answers he made. On April 16, he made this reply:

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<sup>3</sup>Mr. Atkinson held membership on the following committees during his first term in the legislature: School for the Blind, chairman; State Educational Institutions, Normal Schools, School and College Textbooks, Public Health, Soldiers and Orphans Home, Roads and Highways, Appropriations, Enrolled Bills.

Outstanding movements while he was speaker during his second term ten years ago (some of these were a few years before the public mind was ready for them) are as follows: Prohibition law effected, 1916; extension of the Capitol grounds, extension work of State Agricultural College, first movement for good roads, Perkins Hospital at Iowa City.

My business has kept my time occupied this spring to such an extent that I have not been able to look after political matters as thoroughly as I should like to have done. I am not familiar with the bills to which you refer having never had occasion to read them, and am not sure that I ever shall have occasion to.

I should not care to express an opinion on any bill no matter what the nature until I am thoroughly familiar with its contents.

If I am elected I expect to take the time to post myself on all matters so as to be able to vote intelligently on any question that may come up.

That reply is as clear as the straight lines of Abraham Lincoln and indicates a disposition and ability to meet the public clamor that would have carried him far and successfully in the highest executive positions of this government.

To show that this was not subterfuge or an arbitrary closing of argument, here is a quotation from a letter to a gentleman who afterwards became a member of the Cabinet of the United States; this letter was written three weeks later, during which, apparently, Atkinson had been going into these bills that were inquired about:

As I have not yet received even the nomination, I have not taken the time to inform myself on all these propositions. When I started my campaign, I made a resolution not to promise anything to any politicians, or others, so I would be absolutely free to exercise my own judgment on any matters which might come before the session in the event I was elected. So far I have adhered to this rule, but I do not have any objections to stating my position on these proposed laws, so far as I have informed myself.

And then he entered upon a discussion of the practical value of five of these measures.

#### SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

Thus he went to the Thirty-fifth General Assembly in 1912, and immediately won the confidence and regard of that body, so that when he was re-elected in 1914, he was made speaker of the House. Here the quality of his statesmanship began to show itself, his leadership in clear political thinking began to be appreciated. There is a quality in his utterances that make them of lasting value, because they interpret our political ideas in their

original purity. His address to the members of the House that had elected him, upon assuming the speakership, is so brief yet so complete, and is so characteristic of his thinking, so prophetic of what he might have done further up the line of political power, that it is an essential part of his history. Each paragraph, like the stanzas of the great poems that have left their impress upon the race, is the full expression of a striking idea which could stand alone, and together they make a complete literary structure. Upon this address any statesman would be willing to take rank and to be remembered:

Members of the House of the Thirty-sixth General Assembly: First, I want to thank you out of the abundance of my gratitude for the distinguished honor your confidence and generosity have conferred upon me. It is needless for me to observe that I am profoundly impressed with the grave and weighty responsibilities of the position. In importance, it is perhaps second only to the chief executive of our state.

It will be my earnest endeavor to preside over your deliberations with strict and unwavering impartiality, and in the discharge of whatever power the position confers upon me to be guided only by the desire for the most effective and efficient service on the part of the members of this body, both individually and collectively.

You are the direct representatives of the people of Iowa. Through you the people speak and act, but in acting each individual legislator should bear in mind that while primarily he is chosen by the people of his county, in a broader and truer sense he is legislating for the entire state. Many and conflicting interests will come before you, but you should be governed only by the single and fixed purpose—that which is best for our state. Our eyes should be set on the future. The past is recorded. It cannot be recalled. We can, however, assist in pointing the way for the future. It should be our ambition that when the Thirty-sixth General Assembly adjourns to have made such a record that the annalists of our state will say that we have made the state of Iowa better and greater.

In the past few years there has been a quickening in the spirit and sentiment of the state pride which has found expression in a movement for a greater Iowa. It is a broad and comprehensive term as well as movement, and to such a cause, forgetting party as well as all divisions of thought among our citizenship, we can heartily unite in its promotion. Let there be no halting in our march of progress.

In conclusion, I can only say, let us address ourselves seriously and earnestly to the work before us, and strive to make a record that each of us will be proud to transmit as a legacy to those who follow.

As speaker he proved himself a parliamentarian of the first



order and so fair and impartial that not a single appeal was taken from his rulings throughout the sessions of a difficult and stormy assembly. When the Assembly adjourned many of its members wrote him letters of appreciation. One of them said: "As one not of your political party I desire to remind you of your manly, unprejudiced and impartial rule as speaker of the Thirty-sixth General Assembly. I am sure, sir, that it must be a pleasure to you to know that when you were tried you were found to be a man." Another after his death wrote his widow: "I served with him in the General Assembly. His seat was a citadel of honesty."

But he had adverse criticism, too, which came with threats to vote against him at the next opportunity. He took them calmly and replied with great courtesy: "I believe the sentiment of the majority of the people of Butler County was strongly in favor of the repeal<sup>4</sup> and believe that a legislator should, as nearly as possible, follow the wishes of the majority of his constituents. I have endeavored to act fairly in all matters, and am sorry that my action did not meet with your approval although I have no apology to make for the way I voted here on any matter."

These quotations established his fitness for higher offices and the state knowing these things was ready to see that he had them. The office of lieutenant governor was within his reach and apparently after that the road was clear to the highest gifts that suffrage and political conditions can bestow. But he felt the necessity of providing for the future and saw that there is no opportunity to do that in politics. To inquiry from a reporter as to whether he would run for lieutenant governor he made this characteristic reply: "You can say for me that I would rather be able, when I am fifty years old, to say that I am the owner of 240 acres of the best land in the world, than that I was once lieutenant governor. I am going to make my old homestead in Butler County that kind of land, instead of trying to make myself lieutenant governor at the same expense. And just now I am putting in a lot of double-dipped fence posts and some of the best fence in the country."

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<sup>4</sup>The Mulct Law by the repeal of which and other legislation enacted, the prohibition of the liquor traffic became effective in Iowa on January 1, 1916, three years before national prohibition.

## NECESSITY OF GOOD NATURE COMBINED

Here is the revelation of two threads that run through the fabric of his life. One is an intense practical sense woven through the strong cord of necessity. The latter required him to work his way through school, turned him at once at the close of his University life into the lyceum instead of the practice of law, and caused him in his political course to turn aside to fortify the coming years with a competence before he cared again to take the hazards that lie in the course of a political career. Meantime came the World War with its diversions and its economic upheavals. But he was well on in his preparation, and his call to political life was coming to him again when another greater necessity made him surrender while still a strong soldier in the full tide of the battle.

The other element revealed is, that he took life like the laughing philosopher. No characterization of him would be at all complete with that element omitted, because by it and for it he will always be remembered by his friends. He was a buoyant spirit, jolly, full of fun, with a keen sense of what constitutes comedy. He had a rich fund of stories and used them, not as a mere raconteur to entertain, but to illustrate a point or to give sort of a conundrum answer and avoid direct reply, so as to watch the confusion of the listener as the latter tried to figure him out. He was magnificent in using the story to parry questions and his application was always apt.

Some of these stories he must have made to order, and in telling them he had a twinkling eye and an infectious chuckle that were irresistible. When reporters were trying to find out his plans for the future after his two terms in the legislature, to one he made this response: "The other day some one accused me of running for governor. If you had asked me about that, I should have told you a story. One day a southern preacher met a darkey and said to him: 'Rastus, have you been stealing chickens lately?' 'No, preachuh, ah aint stole no chickens.' 'Are you sure Rastus, you aint stole one single chicken?' 'Honest to goodness preachuh, I aint stole no chickens at all.' The preacher went on his way and Rastus remarked to himself: 'I sho am glad he didn't ask me if I had been stealing any ducks.'"

Of like noncommittal kind, and as apt, was his reply when asked to state his position on state politics and candidates at that time. He said he wished to maintain a position of strict neutrality, because he said, "I am in the position occupied by Mark Twain when he was asked to preach on heaven and hell and replied that he must refuse because he had friends in both places."

Atkinson did not consider himself an orator but his clean-cut way of stating his position, as is seen in his address to the Legislature and his political letters, and his facility as a story teller made him very popular as an after-dinner speaker, and he himself enjoyed that. He was a good counselor in committee, seeing clearly and coming directly to the point, always with such good sense that he was sought on many boards. For he was essentially constructive, enthusiastic and practical.

#### THE FINAL CALL

And so he filled his days and nights and came to his final call: A life of great activity in the highest fields, driven by the finest motives; a soul full of affection that gave itself freely in service to all he knew and in the noblest of causes for the general good. His recompense came to him in kind; his size and prowess in football had won for him the affectionate title of "Big Bill," as those he championed called him on the field, and as "Big Bill" Atkinson he was known through life. He was everywhere said to be the best known man in the state of Iowa because he did not forget others and others could not forget him.

On the first day of August, 1925, he saw the end. It was like going home to be in Iowa City, even though he were in a hospital. In Iowa City he had known the ecstasy that lives in triumphs of magnificent physical prowess and of full, unfatigued mental powers; now he was there to know the perfection of ultimate spiritual victory. He entered the hospital calmly, knowing that these were the last moments of the final quarter of the brief, wonderful game of life; confidently, trusting the Great Umpire who, himself, had carried a Cross to Calvary.

For months he had faced his developing tragedy with indescribable fortitude, bearing intolerable suffering with uncomplaining patience. The love that he had so freely given all along his



way was returning to him in evidences of boundless sympathy. His sick chamber was filled with flowers like a florist's bower, a rainbow about his sunset; they filled him with thoughts deep and tender; he saw them as the spirits of friends, thousands of them, coming now to strengthen his own; he looked upon them with measureless appreciation and understanding; and as he looked with failing eyes, they stretched farther and farther away, making a pathway that blended with the flowers within the Eternal Garden. And—over this beautiful way his spirit passed.

No farther seek his merits to disclose,  
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,  
(There they alike in trembling hope repose)  
The bosom of his Father and his God.

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#### THE WELSH IN AMERICAN HISTORY

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A very useful and upright class of citizens are the sons of David among us, and men of Welsh blood have played an important part in our history, according to Dr. Alexander Jones: "Seventeen of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were of Welsh origin, among them Thomas Jefferson. Other eminent Americans of Welsh descent were John and Samuel Adams, Jonathan Edwards, Yale, the founder of Yale College, General Harrison, Richard Henry Lee, and John Marshall. No less than six of our Presidents have had Welsh blood in their veins—Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Harrison, and the two Adamses, John and John Quincy. Fourteen of the Revolutionary Generals were of Welsh origin, of whom Gen. Wayne was one. Martha Washington was the grand-daughter of a Welsh clergyman." Dr. Jones also adds (this was in 1855) that there are fifty thousand native Welshmen in the United States—and not one office holder among them.—*Des Moines Valley Whig*, Keokuk, Sept. 5, 1855. (In the Newspaper Division of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.)

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