

# ANNALS OF IOWA.

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## EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

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### MR. COFFIN'S GREAT REFORMS.

It is known to tens of thousands of people in every State of the Union how earnestly Hon. L. S. Coffin, of Webster county, labored for years to secure legislation which would compel the adoption of safety appliances in coupling cars and running trains on the railroads, and thus prevent the immense suffering and loss of life which had long been visited upon the poor brakemen. The number of casualties were known to have amounted throughout the United States, to from 20,000 to 30,000 per year. The clumsy and antiquated devices by which cars were coupled together, and running trains brought to a stop, had been in use, with little or no improvement, since the early days of railroading. How he studied the subject for several years, and brought about one of the noblest reforms ever projected by an American citizen, he tells in the article from his pen which appears in this number of THE ANNALS. Mr. Coffin is now close upon eighty years of age. He writes from memory of these events which occurred years ago, and if any inaccuracies appear, they are due to the lapse of time. His intention has been to adhere strictly to the truth. His statements bear that stamp most unmistakably, and that he can tell the story more faithfully than any other living man will not be questioned by any of his thousands of acquaintances and friends. The preparation of this article by Mr. Coffin, the leading actor in this great movement for the prevention of suffering and the saving of human lives, was undertaken by the advice of his friends in Iowa and other states. It is not only highly interesting but it adds important pages to the history of our times. Mr. Coffin tells the story of a struggle of years—

how he traveled up and down throughout the country, writing for the newspapers and periodicals, addressing large audiences, and urging state legislatures to memorialize Congress, until public sentiment was largely in favor of the proposition and the reform made possible. The Iowa legislature had passed his bill, but this only made more fully apparent the absolute need of a general law which would secure uniformity in all the states. He therefore went to Washington and brought the subject to the attention of Congress. Here, after a severe contest his bill became the law of the nation. The fight was a long and severe one, and he had arrayed against him some of the most powerful influences of the time. He generously gives to Senator Allison and Speaker Henderson, from our State, credit for some most efficient work in winning the grand success. They stood by the measure from first to last.

It is true that the subject of safety appliances on railroad trains had received attention before Mr. Coffin became interested in the work. State laws had been passed by Connecticut as early as 1882, and later by Massachusetts, New York and Michigan. But these laws, being only of local application, had not been enforced. Practically, they were dead letters. The subject had also become one of much interest and discussion at the annual meetings of the Master Car Builders' Association. In May, 1889, a circular was issued by the Interstate Commerce Commission to the various Railroad Commissions for the purpose of securing their views in this important matter. Nineteen states responded. The third annual report of the Interstate Commerce Commission (1889), gives a detailed account of this agitation and discussion. Mr. Coffin fully recognizes the work done, the substantial help given, and the stand taken by the states that had acted on this matter, and by the Interstate Commerce Commission. But it was through his efforts that public sentiment was finally aroused throughout the country and the work pushed to a successful issue—the bill passed by Congress and practical results secured.

It should be a matter of pride to all intelligent and justice-loving Iowa people that this important and most philanthropic measure will always be identified with the name of an Iowa man, and that its incorporation into the laws of the nation was due to the efforts of one of our citizens—an Iowa farmer.

This great measure was no sooner safely placed upon the statute book than Mr. Coffin started another humane movement, which though of far less scope and importance, is yet one of the most commendable works of Christian benevolence. It is known to all readers that beyond the pittance of a suit of clothes and five dollars in money, the State makes no provision for the benefit of convicts discharged from our penitentiaries. They are turned out upon the world destitute, discredited and distrusted, with poor prospects confronting them. It is little wonder that so many of them, from the cold neglect with which they are treated, drift back into crime to be soon returned to the penitentiaries. Mr. Coffin is of the opinion that a large majority of these men, if given a helping hand when they leave the prison walls, can be saved to society and to themselves, and become good citizens. In carrying out this idea he has erected a beautiful and commodious home—"Hope Hall, No. 3"—on his well known Willow Edge Farm, three miles west of Ft. Dodge. The purpose of this home is to give the ex-prisoner a temporary resting-place, surrounded by good influences, until employment can be secured for him.

This home has been erected from funds contributed almost wholly by Mr. Coffin, though he has had timely and important aid from many of the good citizens of Ft. Dodge and others. It is patterned after a similar enterprise—"Hope Hall, No. 1"—at Flushing, N. Y., and another—"Hope Hall, No. 2"—at Chicago. These institutions were projected and built, and are under the successful management of Mrs. Maud Ballington Booth, whose writings and eloquence on the rostrum have made her name a household word throughout the country. "Hope Hall No. 3" was ded-

icated by Mrs. Booth on the 24th day of October, 1902. It is not expected to be open for the reception of ex-prisoners before the coming spring.

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### THE IOWA HISTORICAL RECORD.

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A printed slip in the October number of *The Iowa Historical Record* announced the discontinuance of that periodical. It is to be succeeded this month (January, 1903) by a new quarterly magazine under the title of *The Iowa Journal of History and Politics*. *The Record* has been published by the Iowa State Historical Society since January, 1885. Its successor, like *The Record*, will appear under the auspices of the Society. *The Record*, while its support has never been adequate to its merits, or sufficient to justify any but the most meager expenditures in placing it before the public, will be greatly missed by all who have read it from its commencement. Its eighteen volumes are a most valuable repository of the materials of Iowa history. It contains the writings of many of our representative men of the time during which it was published, the most of whom have passed away or removed to other regions. What they have contributed to its pages will remain an imperishable monument to their memories. The Iowa library which has secured and carefully preserved the volumes of *The Record* may be considered very fortunate, for they will long be consulted by the students of Iowa history.

The most flattering prospects would seem to greet the new periodical at the outset of its career. It will have abundant materials for its pages in the researches and writings of historical scholars in this State and elsewhere. The last legislature generously provided the Society with funds adequate to its needs. These forecasts of prosperity are very largely due to the untiring efforts of Prof. B. F. Shambaugh, who is to be congratulated upon the distinguished success he has fairly won.

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