



Congregational Church erected in 1848



Methodist Episcopal Church erected in 1851

Old Places of Worship at Keosauqua, Iowa

ANNALS OF IOWA.

VOL. XI, No. 7. DES MOINES, IOWA, OCTOBER, 1914. 3D SERIES

THE WRITINGS OF JUDGE GEORGE G. WRIGHT.

HENRY CLAY DEAN.

I will endeavor to describe a minister and well-known character who settled in Van Buren county, say 1849, remained in Iowa until some time after the war and then went to Missouri, and died two or three years since. I refer to Henry Clay Dean.

Was a Virginian—Methodist minister—and when I first knew him a most active Whig in politics, though during or soon after the war of the Rebellion he became a most extreme Democrat in his political views and relations. Had several of the best appointments in the State from his conference (Iowa); was elected and served as chaplain in the United States Senate; finally left the ministry, practiced law, farmed, talked politics, lectured and speculated.

I knew him well. For one or more years he was my near neighbor. I had many reasons for the warmest feelings towards him, as he had to return the same, and yet, say in 1853 or 1854, there arose ground for estrangement, not necessary to detail (possibly both in the wrong), and after that our paths were quite divergent, socially and in every way. And yet I believe I can do him full justice.

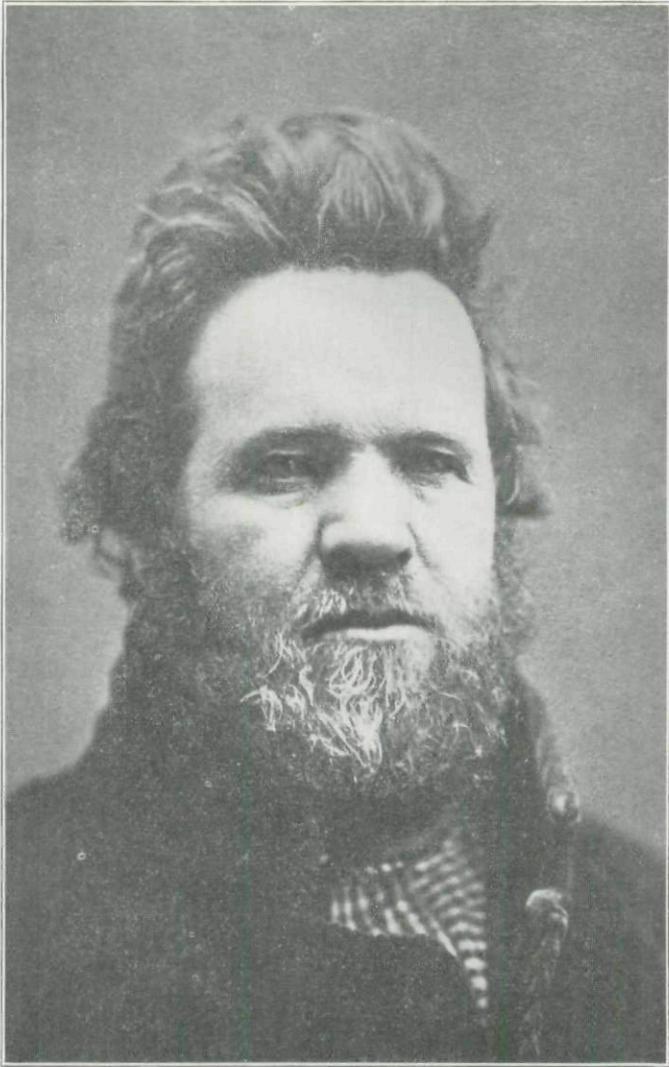
In many respects he was the most remarkable man I ever knew. Of the poorer class of Virginian—moderate education—a natural orator—ready command of words—memory most extraordinary—heavy, gross organization—utterly regardless of his dress and personal appearance—looking dirty and shabby, and this whether in the street, in the home circle or in the pulpit. Yet, taking him all in all he had as much if not more mental force for one of his strong animal nature, or gross organization, than any man I ever knew.

As illustration of his garb and personal appearance it was told that coming into the court house at Keosauqua many persons spoke to and shook hands with him, when a stranger

present inquired if they knew who he was and where he resided. His name was given with the further explanation that he hadn't any residence, and when asked why, the answer was that a man was supposed to reside where he had his washing done, and since he never had any, he hadn't any residence. The sentiment was a natural one, and I give same to show how he appeared and how he was regarded.

I have heard him preach sermons which would compare with the finest efforts of any bishop, and Oh! such sermons! You forgot the man in the divine and orator. His was a memory which could read the best authors, the most finely prepared articles, and appreciate not the thoughts alone but the very language, from apparently the most casual reading, and weeks and months afterward repeat over almost the words, certainly the thought or ideas, and with most wonderful effect. Happy in illustration—imagination the most brilliant and sparkling—ability to arouse with wonderful effect the emotional nature of an audience—strong in statement and apt in logic and application—an apparent student of the bible—with all the world of history and poetry at his command—sermons impressive and eloquent, he was ever very popular in the pulpit, and when at his best, sought for as a lecturer, a talker in any field or from any platform.

The consequence was that he drew large crowds and was noted not only in this State but elsewhere, and yet with all his power and force in the pulpit and on the platform, he was, let me say, so eccentric—so utterly regardless of the walk and manner of the Christian minister that he failed most signally in sustaining himself with his church or the best elements of society. It was often said that if he would preach his Sunday sermon and could then be locked up during the week, he would be the most popular and effective of preachers. For it was no uncommon thing for him, if not before breakfast on Monday morning, certainly soon after, to start around his town, invite opinions as to his efforts of the day before, talk politics, to go into shops, offices and stores and discuss the merits and demerits of his neighbors—praising this one and dispraising another—leaving his family to get



Your friend
Henry Clay Dean

From a photograph in the Edgar R. Harlan collection of the Van Buren County
group of famous men, Historical Department of Iowa

along as best they could—eating as opportunity offered, until you were made to feel that the minister was sunk in the loafer, almost, the man of brains and great mental power in the mountebank and gossip.

Not that he had vices as we generally speak of them—was an eminent man (when in the ministry), but that his conduct was so out of keeping with his profession and teachings that his usefulness was greatly impaired if not, indeed, more than counterbalanced.

I have spoken of his eating. In this respect he was a gourmandizer; supposed to be ready to eat all the time and more than any two ordinary men. Of full habit—heavy-set—not tall, say 5 ft. 5 in.—fleshy—big head—small hands and feet—how in view of his habits he was or could be a student I do not know. Nor do I believe he was. True, he was a great reader—reading (because of his day's work or want of work in the streets) late into the night. But his reading was not continuous or apparently as a student, but for amusement or employment. And yet he had the marvelous capacity of appropriating and being able to use what he thus read, far beyond the most patient or laborious student.

At times he was eccentric to the point of surprise and would shock you in the pulpit. Once I remember he was engaged in a most earnest and successful revival. There were dozens at the altar, and he exhorting and appealing, walking up and down the aisle. In a moment he stopped and said: "You all know that good man, our old friend, Uncle Johnny Spencer, the best man God ever made. Well, he lost his horse and wanted I should tell you of it and give you a description, etc." And thereafter, at no little length, he described the horse, when he left, how valuable he was to poor Uncle John, etc., and then turned to his praying and exhortation. The effect can readily be seen.

If not in this way, then in some other, he would astonish you by the unexpected, the unfitting and inopportune. He was vain, and loved to have his efforts applauded and praised. Said he to a friend, of an evening when engaged in a revival much as above described, and when one seeking him naturally

supposed that he was talking to him of his spiritual condition (for he certainly was not without the need of such talking)—“Gee!” said he, “What did you think of that sermon?” (the one he had just preached). “Don’t you think I got hold of and preached it well?” And such things were not uncommon.

As a lawyer he was not a success. Never studied law. In the argument of a legal proposition he was, therefore, far from being at home. To the jury, especially in a criminal case (and those he sought most), if he could get loose and go to them on the facts it can well be believed that he would be at times strong and effective. With his command of language, with imagination, power to reach the feelings and emotions, he would often succeed when the true or nicer lawyer would fail.

It is true he was sought for in the political field. But he soon lost his hold there and his later efforts added but little if any to his reputation. Several years before his death he retired to a farm in Missouri, was seldom seen—very rarely heard of in connection with the affairs of the world—and was remembered for his eccentricities, his former efforts in pulpit and on the political and lecture platform rather than from any great good accomplished or an old age great and strong as promised from his earlier years. We have had but few cases which had in them greater elements of usefulness and strength and yet more to hold down and keep back. How strange such an organization and temperament!

Speaking of Uncle Johnny Spencer recalls an incident political. He was a large man—a shouting Methodist—always responding whether in church or at a political meeting—could neither read nor write, and yet, though he died at an advanced age, had a class of small children in Sunday school for years and years. Was an old-fashioned Whig.

A friend of his, and brother in the church, and a Democrat, being a candidate, was making a speech, Uncle John one of the auditors. The candidate said with emotion that there was too much partisan feeling—that what he wanted was good men, etc.—that there were just as good, true and re-

liable and honest Whigs as Democrats, and that the same was true of Democrats. Two or three times he had repeated this, and when applied to Whigs the old man would shout, "Yes, I believe that!" but was silent when the candidate argued for the Democrats. Finally the speaker made a personal appeal to touch John for the truth of what he was saying, respecting his claims, when the response was again favorable as to the Whigs, but when it came to the Democrats, he said: "Hell, I don't know or care about that!" And the orator collapsed, and left that field or that line of argument forever.

REV. DANIEL LANE.

Contemporaneous with this strange Methodist light [Dean] was another man, of the Congregational church, in all respects as different as two men could be—who settled in Keosauqua in 1842, remained in Iowa for say forty years, and returned to his first home in Maine and died within the same year—Rev. Daniel Lane.

Of no one could I speak in praise with more truth nor with a more grateful spirit than of that good man, in this year of 1890 [which] is about to close (I make these notes on the last day).

Daniel Lane was one of the well-known and far-famed "Iowa Band" and had as colleagues such grand and able men as Ripley, Spaulding, Robbins, Salter, the Adamses, and others who impressed themselves upon the church history of our State and accomplished as much in the moral and educational upbuilding as any framers of any or all the professions ever in Iowa. In the prime of young manhood—coming to a new and rich territory—with possibilities equal to any North or South, East or West—just from the best schools—earnest and enthusiastic in their work—devoted to the cause of the Master—ambitious to advance their church in this new land—with such hearts, such advantages and with

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