

The Molding of a Man

When I was about three years old a guest in our home took me between his knees and asked me when I was starting to school. I looked to my father for the answer, which he gave jokingly: "Tell him you won't go to school until you start to college." I believed him — and I didn't.

At four years of age I was given a primer for a birthday present, one of those old-fashioned, gaily colored, heavy paper things with pictures of an axe, with a-x-e under the picture, bed, cat, dog, and so on, with the noun spelled out under each picture. Mother taught me my alphabet and first spelling from that primer. Then came a McGuffey's *Revised Eclectic First Reader*, then a *Second*. Somewhere in those early years came also a primary arithmetic. I was reading before I was old enough to start to school and it was fun.

The arithmetic was not so much fun, but Mother kept me at it. She had taught a year or two in the Winterset schools before her marriage. She would never allow me to use a slate or a pencil and paper for arithmetic problems until I was well into fractions. I had to carry the numbers in my head and solve the problems. And how I have blessed her for it over the years since.

And so it went from beginning reading and arithmetic on into grammar, history, elementary algebra, plane geometry, Latin, through Caesar and half way through Virgil, and so on. I did not care to go to school because, when I was through with my lessons, I was free to read some book I liked, free to take to the great out of doors, ride my pony as far as I could go and be back by dinner time, coasting or skating in winter, or about anything I wanted to do. Mother was always willing to try one more year.

Yes, I missed the companionship of other boys in school and of learning to get along with them. However, I don't believe I have had any more difficulty in getting along with people in general than have the boys who went to school. My greatest loss was not learning to play baseball.

Under the school laws of today I suppose my education was sadly neglected. The educationists would have my father and mother in court in no time. There were others in Iowa, however, who received similar educations.

In Pella, Iowa, about the same time I was growing up, a banker left the bank at an early hour every day and went home to hear his children recite their lessons. They did not go to public school, either. This banker did not do too badly as an educator. One of his sons became president of the Equitable Life Insurance Company of Iowa. Another became president of the Bankers' Life —

one of the ten "big" in the life insurance field. Still another one of his boys became president of Grinnell College. Yet, under the benevolent laws of today, Father Nollen would be a jailbird.

However, I recognize fully that it would be difficult to write a law permitting those parents capable of teaching their children at home to do so, and at the same time keep those incapable of teaching from trying it.

When I was seventeen years old my mother took me to the dean of Simpson College and told him she thought I was prepared to enter the middle year of the academy, equivalent to third year in high school. The dean accepted Mother's recommendation and I was admitted without examinations. I had no trouble keeping up with my classes, that is, no trouble from lack of preparation. If I failed to make satisfactory grades it was due to laziness or getting into too many other things.

My grades were hardly such, I fear, as to have put me on the "Dean's List" had there been such a thing in those days. Nevertheless, I managed to escape most of the final term examinations which were required in each study of those students whose daily average grade fell below 85.

One term I received a miserable 75 in Latin, which made me ashamed of myself. The next term I raised this up to a 95, which taught me that there is very little excuse for failure.

Frank Mott, four years later, had the same Latin teacher I had — Miss Martha Stahl (later to become Mrs. Randolph Beall of Mt. Ayr). It gave me a sense of great satisfaction to find in Mott's *Time Enough* (a book of personal recollections) that he rated Miss Stahl as a great teacher, as I certainly do, although I doubt if I appreciated her at the time.

I think Miss Stahl was the most thorough teacher I ever knew. She drilled Latin grammar and Latin construction into us so deeply that, from the time I went out of her classes to the present hour, my whole conception of sentence forming is in terms of Latin grammar. I know practically nothing of English grammar. It was completely superseded by Miss Stahl's pounding of Latin grammar into me.

As I look back on them, the professors in Simpson in those days were a very good group of teachers, some of them outstanding, although there were not many who held a Ph. D. degree. Such personages were not so common then as now. I remember that the first Ph. D. professor brought to Simpson proved to be one of the poorest teachers we had.

Charles Eldred Shelton came to Simpson as president from the superintendency of the city schools at Burlington in the fall of 1899, the same year I entered the undergraduate school as a Freshman. He was a man of excellent physique,

tall, well-carried, and well-groomed. He was a good mixer, but by no means a "back slapper." He was jovial, but dignified, and soon knew most of the students personally.

President Shelton was a rather strict disciplinarian, his discipline tempered with a very keen sense of humor and a sympathetic understanding of the fact that "boys must be boys." He had, let us say, a determined temper if his rulings were flagrantly violated. Some of the students thought that, once in a while, he jumped at conclusions and refused to back up regardless of any inconsistencies in his position.

I did not find him that way. For my part, I was very fond of him. When he came to Simpson to look the college over and to be looked over by the trustees, he and Mrs. Shelton were guests for several days in my parents' home, which gave me a favorable chance to become acquainted with him.

Perhaps the most colorful character on the Simpson faculty at the turn of the century was Wm. E. Hamilton, D.D.. He was the professor of English Bible and Philosophy. Opinions vary widely as to his teaching value. Some aver that he had not had any new ideas since he began to teach at Simpson in 1867. No one questioned his sincerity and his high idealism. He had that something about him that could make a young man or young woman want to be somebody. His classes

were intensely interesting to most of us. He was old-fashioned, to be sure, but in my travels over the United States I found that, whenever I met a former student who had been in one of Dr. Hamilton's classes, his first question was invariably: "How is Dr. Hamilton?" He inculcated in most of us a will to think, whether he taught us what to think or not; and he never told anybody that the Hamilton opinion was the only "right" opinion. He was president of the college for three or four years in the mid-eighties, although he did not care for administrative work. He retired in 1912, but responded to the urgent call to serve for a short time as acting president in 1915.

Another outstanding teacher from 1888 to 1920 was John L. Tilton, who attained his doctorate during this period. He came as a teacher of general sciences; but, as the science courses expanded, he restricted his own field to the earth sciences, geology and physiography. He wrote the geological reports of Warren and Madison counties for the Iowa Geological Survey. He tramped afoot over most of the two counties. He was physically vigorous and might be called the father of organized athletics for the college.

Tilton was a down east Yankee of the first water, left off his "r's" where they belonged and inserted them where they should not be. I was traveling with him in Colorado when we were approaching Durango. He inquired of a fellow

traveler as to the hotel there. He was told to go to the Strater House. Being full of geological terms himself he supposed the real name was the "Strata" House. Without any difficulty he pronounced it "Strater." When we arrived at the hotel we found it had been named for Col. Strater, a pioneer character. Thereafter he called it religiously the "Stratah House."

Professor Tilton was precise to the finest point, sometimes bookishly theoretical. But he was a thorough student, an excellent teacher and took a personal interest in every one of his pupils. Perhaps his greatest value was that, when a student came to him from a country neighborhood, believing the book of Genesis was literal history, Tilton could open to him the facts of science without shaking his fundamental Christian faith, because Tilton was a thorough Christian gentleman himself. He would point out that God Almighty was equally as much responsible for the stratification of the rocks, and for the striations on them, as He was for the book of Genesis, or even more so, because no human being had intervened in laying down the record.

Class parties in the vernacular of the college had been, from my earliest recollection, called "bums." Our Freshman class in the fall of 1899 had a bum, at which we became better acquainted with each other and found ourselves exceedingly congenial. I was curious to get a look at a girl

I had heard had come to study music, and who was touted to have an exceptional contralto voice. I was interested because she was the younger sister of my former violin teacher, Frank Sloan, and I thought Frank Sloan was quite a fellow.

Early in the evening I got a good look at her and she impressed me as being eminently worthy of being her brother's sister. But I was unable to wangle an introduction — and never did, from that day to this. For fifty-eight years the poor girl has been living with a stranger.

The literary societies were an important factor in college life in my time. I was a member of the Everetts, of which my father had been a charter member in the late 1860's, and of which my son was to be a member in the mid 1920's. These societies presented programs by their members every Friday evening, which were intended — and I think did — develop in their participants ease before an audience and provided the opportunity for presentation of original ideas or interpretation of the thoughts of others. I think their greatest value to their members was in the drill in parliamentary procedure. Sometimes the sorties in this field went to the extreme of horseplay. Nevertheless, the motions, amendments, substitutes, and previous questions were each followed through with a meticulous care, which has enabled many an alumnus to bring order out of chaos in later meetings of which he was a part.

In my Freshman year I was a member of a debating team representing the Freshman class of Simpson vs. a Freshman team from Iowa Wesleyan, our president's alma mater. We won this one. In my Senior year I was on the team debating Baker University. We were defeated.

By no stretch of the imagination could I have been called a campus leader, or "big shot." I was not on any athletic team, won no prizes or honors for scholarship, oratory, or in any field of extracurricular activity. I was not a recluse or bookworm. I mixed and took part in what was going on; but I had no following, headed no clique, nor acknowledged allegiance to any, other than my class.

Neither was I a ladies' man. I enjoyed the friendship of girls, especially those in my class, and was not embarrassed in their presence; but I had the feeling that a fellow was a kind of sissie who always had to have a girl hanging round him. I had been in school more than three years before I had more than an occasional date. I would have been embarrassed to tears to have any girl think that I even wanted to kiss her.

Probably I received more attention in the student body than I deserved because of being the college correspondent of the *Des Moines Register*, in which I was able to give the school more publicity than it had ever had in Des Moines papers before. My classmate, Loren C. Talbot (later

to become a distinguished reporter of the *Register and Leader*), was also giving the school good publicity through the *Leader*. Our rivalry was most friendly. We had much in common (eventually he was to become my associate in the *Indianola Record and Tribune* for twenty years). My ego was duly exalted to see my stories in print, although I received little monetary reward for my efforts and never the credit of a "by-line." In those days reporters and correspondents were distinguished by their anonymity.

The highest honor coming my way in college was election by the executive committee of the athletic association as football manager for 1901 and 1902. Simpson had had a paid football coach only one year. The manager was supposed to raise the money for the coach's salary from the proceeds of games. The manager was not the errand boy for the coach. He paid the coach and managed the business affairs of the team.

Fortunately for me, we had winning teams both years and raised the essential funds from gate receipts without passing the hat. The two seasons gave me some good experience in advertising and promotion. Those two teams had size and brains. I wish space would permit me to recount the later accomplishments of most of the players. Suffice it to say that we defeated the University of Missouri once, Drake University each year, and were defeated only by Missouri (the second year),

Iowa State, Grinnell, and Iowa State Teachers College.

In the winter and early spring of 1902, I had a series of pulmonary and stomach disorders, the hang-over from a bad case of typhoid five years earlier. I dropped out of school in the spring term and went to a farm, with the understanding that, if I could not do enough small chores to pay for my board, my father would pay the farmer. Father paid nothing. Farm life agreed with me. Within six weeks I was doing a full hand's work and drawing a full hand's pay. I returned to college in the fall 25-pounds heavier and hard as nails.

The Wadsworths, where I was working, were marvelous cooks. But I had always to watch my eating lest I bring on stomach cramps. I remember as well as yesterday the morning I defied the cramps. I had milked ten cows, fed 250 hogs and 125 cattle, cleaned and harnessed my team, and come in for breakfast. I was hungry. Within my own mind I delivered the following monologue: "Old stomach, I have got to have the strength and you have got to digest the food. Now, get busy!" With that I reached for another fried egg, another piece of home cured ham and another waffle. Believe it or not, from that day to this I have not had a stomach cramp.

In June of 1903 I graduated with my class, with Jonathan P. Dolliver commencement speaker.

DON L. BERRY