

Schoolday Memories

It was about the time of the great Chicago fire that Ned Connor and Kate Darrow were married. I appeared on the scene the following year and soon began to take personal note of Iowa's educational institutions, especially its homes and schools and churches.

I had been sipping perhaps five years at the Pierian spring of home instruction when I crossed the threshold of my first school, a Sunday School. Arrayed in what my Grandma Darrow called our best "Sunday-go-to-meeting" dresses, Fannie Potter and I were sent across the street to Maple Hall above Mr. Donahue's Dry Goods and Grocery Store. There North Hill's Christ Church had established a branch Sunday School for little South Hill children.

I see, now, how consistent it was for me to be getting acquainted with things spiritual by way of the Episcopalian formula, for, when my parents were married in a Methodist Church by a Congregational minister — good Dr. Salter — it was according to the Episcopalian ritual. They had met at a Methodist Church sociable where Kate was singing "When You and I Were Young, Maggie," her head thrown back, no doubt, in the

proud, laughing way she had. A homesick young Canadian, Ned Connor, with a sister named "Maggie" at home, capitulated at once to the charms of the singer. It was easy to understand how Dr. Salter, the Congregational minister, came into their wedding ceremony, for people of every denomination called upon Dr. Salter to christen, marry, or bury them. I can account for the Methodist Church and the Congregational clergyman but I cannot account for the Episcopalian formula, unless it was that Kate was disposed to have a stylish wedding. Born, therefore, under a triple aegis, as it were, I might seem to have been entitled, logically, to some personal choice in the matter of Sunday School. With fine impartiality, I tried them all in time.

I was early subjected to the more formal processes of secular education. A lady was imported from the distant East to try out new theories of pedagogy on a favored few of us in a Burlington kindergarten, probably one of the first west of the Mississippi. The experience was brief and characterized by an atmosphere of mystery. It began with a disappointment. I thought I was going to play in a garden. Instead, I found myself seated with other squirming youngsters on a broad veranda overlooking a sweep of lawn, clumsily crooking my fat fingers to the plaiting of paper mats. I never did find out, at least in those early

years, what the mat-making, the marching, and the singing were all about, but I regarded with special interest the boy who lived in the house where the kindergarten was held. He had a funny name — Werner Boecklin. He wore a jaunty plaid sash around his middle, which was nice in itself but queer, seeing that his mama had slight regard for sashes, or even for skirts. Fascinated, I had stared at her that first day as she came toward us across the lawn. "The lady that wears pants" was the label that she bore among us. Her costume consisted of long pantaloons of shepherd's plaid topped by a full-skirted cutaway. She was a challenging figure in the Victorian world of the seventies.

In time I learned that Werner's papa was a brother of the famous Arnold Boecklin whose "Island of the Dead" and other eerie paintings I was to admire in the famous galleries of the world. But, though of Germanic stock, the Boecklins were Swiss. I see now how fitting it was that, when the philosophy of Pestalozzi and Froebel was first given expression in the rural Iowa regions beyond the Mississippi, it should find hospitable shelter in a home of Swiss origin. I see, too, how the Old World was reaching in to touch all that developing area.

"I remember," Anna Lalor once told me, "that Mrs. Boecklin was always hospitable to new ideas.

I used to hear her discuss the habitability of Mars. I met Annie Besant at her house one time." Mrs. Boecklin wrote a pamphlet called "Milk for Babes" in which she advocated better care of cows, this at a time when Burlington cows were following their own sweet will all over the landscape.

Sometimes the kindergarten met in the parlors of the Lalor children's home. Their papa, John Edward Lalor, was chief engineer of "The Burlington" and was nearly always "out West," extending its lines in Nebraska and Colorado. On his staff were three notable young men of distinguished name interested in the development of "The Burlington" — Will Irving, a nephew of Washington Irving; Horace Sumner, a nephew of Charles Sumner; and C. M. Higginson, a nephew of Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Mr. Lalor — "J. E." as he was usually called — was of Irish background like my father and from the same Canadian town. By reason of his physical and mental endowments, he was highly regarded at our house. "Knows Gaelic," I used to hear my father say, and I caught the note of respect in his comment long before Anna had helped to establish the Lalor Foundation for Scientific Research, long before, as an eminent educator in our federal government, she visited Ireland, to find the present Irish government, Eire, reviving Gaelic.

In the fall of 1878 I entered South Hill School. After that, Fannie Potter's playhouse was no longer the sole center of my social life. By right of her playhouse, Fannie queened it over the other little girls around Maple Hall. Like her father, she was masterful but generous. Indifferent to details, she got her way in the main things because she could always exclude us, if she would, from the playhouse. That delightful structure was a painted cottage with vines growing over it, with doors and windows and shutters just like grown folks' establishments. It had not always graced the Potter lawn. It had first been the office of the Burlington *Hawk-Eye*, but when that growing organ of Republicanism moved to larger quarters, Frank Hatton, then editor, let Tom Potter, Democrat though he was, have the little building for his children's use. Now my interest was to be divided between the playhouse and the schoolhouse. But I like to remember those early years around Maple Hall corner because they were happy years, full of excitement.

I thought of South Hill School as a venerable institution but it was only just entering on the second quarter-century of its existence. It was a dignified, two-storied, ten room structure surrounded by a picket fence and surmounted by a cupola in which swung a pealing bell for which everybody entertained the greatest respect. In

the northern yard was a clump of locust trees fragrantly overhanging a long wood pile. Sticks from the wood pile were conveyed by the red-bearded, pop-eyed, old janitor to the big stoves in every room. On the south, the school yard inclined, invitingly, to the sun. Beyond the school fence, the slope continued steeply down to a ravine, where a brook, a tunnel, and a spring made fascinating places to visit at recess. And the long hill with its exciting bump at the bottom was marvelous for coasting.

The classrooms were pleasant places. We had curtains at the windows, plants on the window sills, pictures on the walls, and a library collected by common effort. Thanks to the watchful eye of our principal, the meticulous William J. Sampson, the premises were spotless. I recall that he once made Hannah Casparson and me oil the big wooden staircase which we had daringly slid down one night, leaving in the soft wellow wood the marks of our ravaging heels.

In the next seven and a half years, under the tutelage of Miss Cox, Miss Crawford, Miss Troxel, Miss Young, Miss Brown, Miss Kaiser, Miss Littlefield, and Miss Todd, all directed by "Billy" Sampson and supervised by Robert G. Saunderson, I picked up some crumbs of learning. In the process I usually enjoyed myself, especially when "Saundy" was present.

We were always glad when "Saundy" visited our room. The teacher was glad too. I remember how Miss Brown laughed one day with the rest of us when she had set Peggy Nairn up before the class to eat the pickle she had been slyly consuming behind her geography and, just then, in came "Saundy." Catching the sudden twinkle in his eye, Peggy's tears turned to grins and she waved her pickle at him.

I find myself wondering what memories I have of our school superintendent to confirm the impression of his wide-spread popularity and effectiveness. I don't think he talked much; but I remember well how delightfully, how understandingly, he smiled at one out of his pale eyes. He was a tall, well-formed, big-nosed man with a handsome head thinly thatched with sandy hair. Born in Ireland, he had had some editorial experience on New York papers before he came west and entered the educational field. I can see him driving from school to school in his cool, speculative way — to North Hill and North Oak, South Hill and South Boundary, West Hill, Sunnyside, Germania, and Hibernia — one long leg dangling nonchalantly over the edge of his light sulky. He knew a good school when he saw it. Under his guidance we became fluent readers, correct spellers, easy penmen, ready reciters, capable calculators, and sometimes really eager students.

Lessons were only incidental at first; it was school life itself that furnished the big excitement. "Readin', 'Ritin' and 'Rithmetic" were tricks one had to learn in order to propitiate teachers and get a chance for recess companionships. Reading made me little trouble; in no time at all the printed page just suddenly came alive. But writing was for me a fairly difficult art, associated in my mind with the arrival in our town of the first celebrity I took note of — General Ulysses S. Grant. I wrote my Canadian grandpa of how I had shaken the General's hand, adding "This is the first letter I ever wrote with ink." It looked it. Soon I was not only inscribing my sentiments boldly on every surface, but also entering furiously into the circulation of my own and other children's autograph albums. I had one page in my autograph album that excelled in interest anything my friends had. It was the page on which our neighbor, Bob Burdette, the celebrated funny man of *The Hawk-Eye*, had written:

Oh, Che-die Connor!

On my word of honor,

I hope you will never forget

That the names at both ends

Are the names of two friends,

Your name and mine — R. J. Burdette.

I read the lines back to him after he had written them and I was proud, indeed, when he said:

"Why, Chedie Connor, to think you can read 'ritin' like that!"

It wasn't until I reached Miss Young's room, that the number lessons began to give me trouble. To add, to multiply, to subtract seemed to be in harmony with human inclination, but not so to divide. What entanglements — what toil and tears — in the business of dividing! In time, I came to see that even big folks were resistant to the point of fighting when division was proposed.

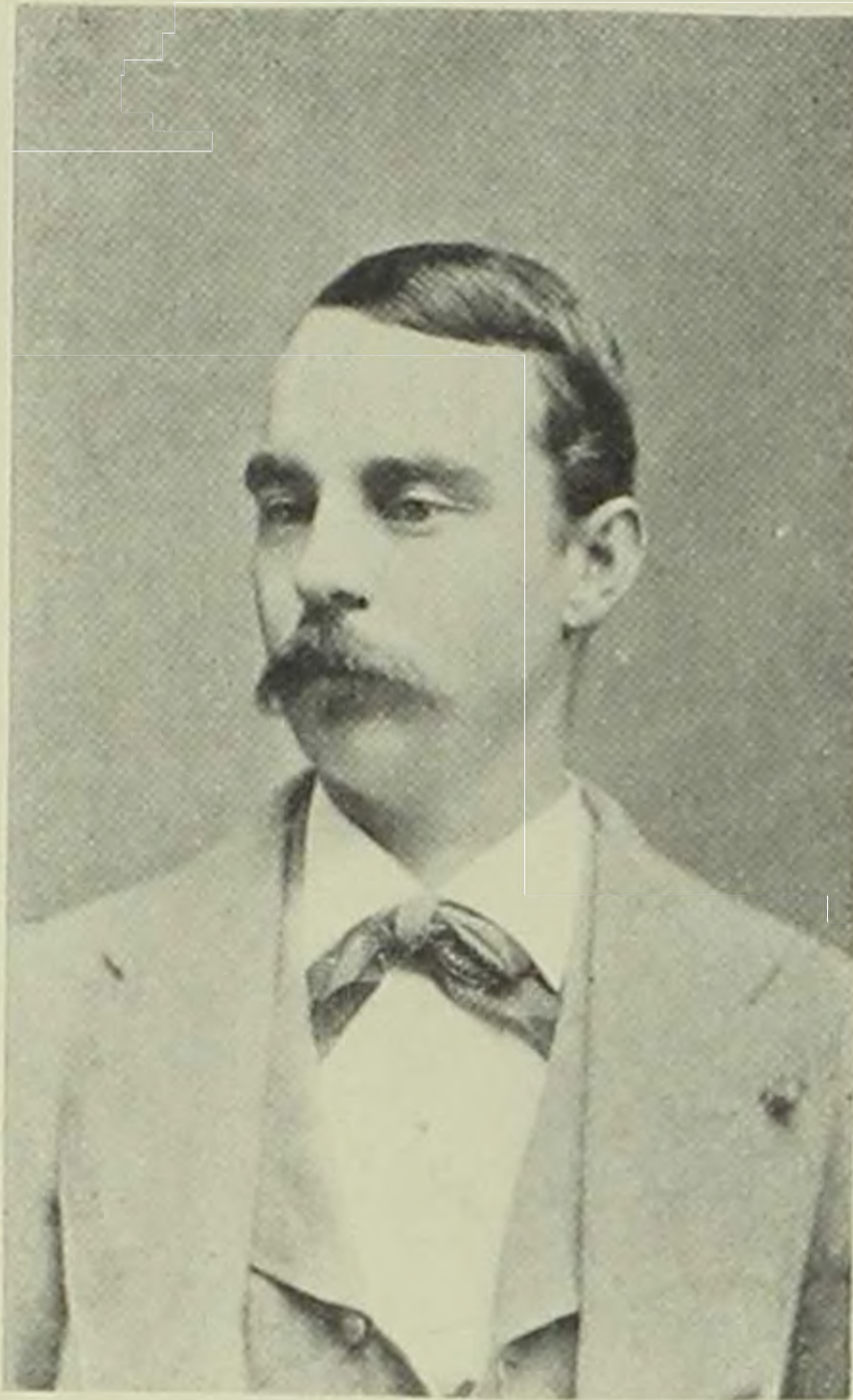
Spelling was an exciting memory game, but geography was a puzzling business in those days, a confusing jumble of hard names and meaningless statistics. Yet the study of "Our Country" opened up vast areas of enchantment for the inquiring child, vistas which the rich and roaring stories I used to hear at our fireside helped to populate. My father's friend, Tom Carter, used to come over from Prospect Hill with his old Irish father and his two pretty sisters, and Tom and Ned would amuse the company with accounts of what they had seen and done, while peddling "The Futprints of Time" — as Tom always facetiously called the great work of the Root Publishing House — "down South" and "out West." When Tom took his lawyer's shingle out to Montana, I missed his Sunday visits, recalling the genial pink and white look of him when I sat upon his knee, neither of us suspecting that some day I

would report his doing as a senator in charge of the Republican National Committee's programs.

Tied in with our school lessons were the more exciting extra-curricular activities of music and dancing, of singing and skating. And running through experiences of all kinds was the subtle indoctrination in manners, etiquette, and deportment — not to mention religion and ethics.

After a while, books got their clutch on me. Though the trick of reading came easily enough, the habit of it had waited on more pressing interests. My first literary enthusiasm came to me by way of a circus parade. Mr. George F. Parker, editor of the *Burlington Gazette*, bestowed on brother Frankie and me, together with a pass to "Forepaugh's Greatest Show on Earth," a copy of Otis' priceless book, *Toby Tyler or Ten Weeks with a Circus*. Never was there such a treasured volume. It made real the spectacle of the sawdust ring; it translated for us the meaning of the glittering parade that traversed our streets when the circus came to town. I spelled it out for myself and then I read it to brother Frankie and later to sister Katie and got Grandma to read it aloud to all of us, and I loved every word of it.

I used to wonder how Toby could bear to leave the enchanted world of the circus, after he had once gained access to it. What if Mr. Lord, the peanut man, were hard on him? There were all



KATE DARROW

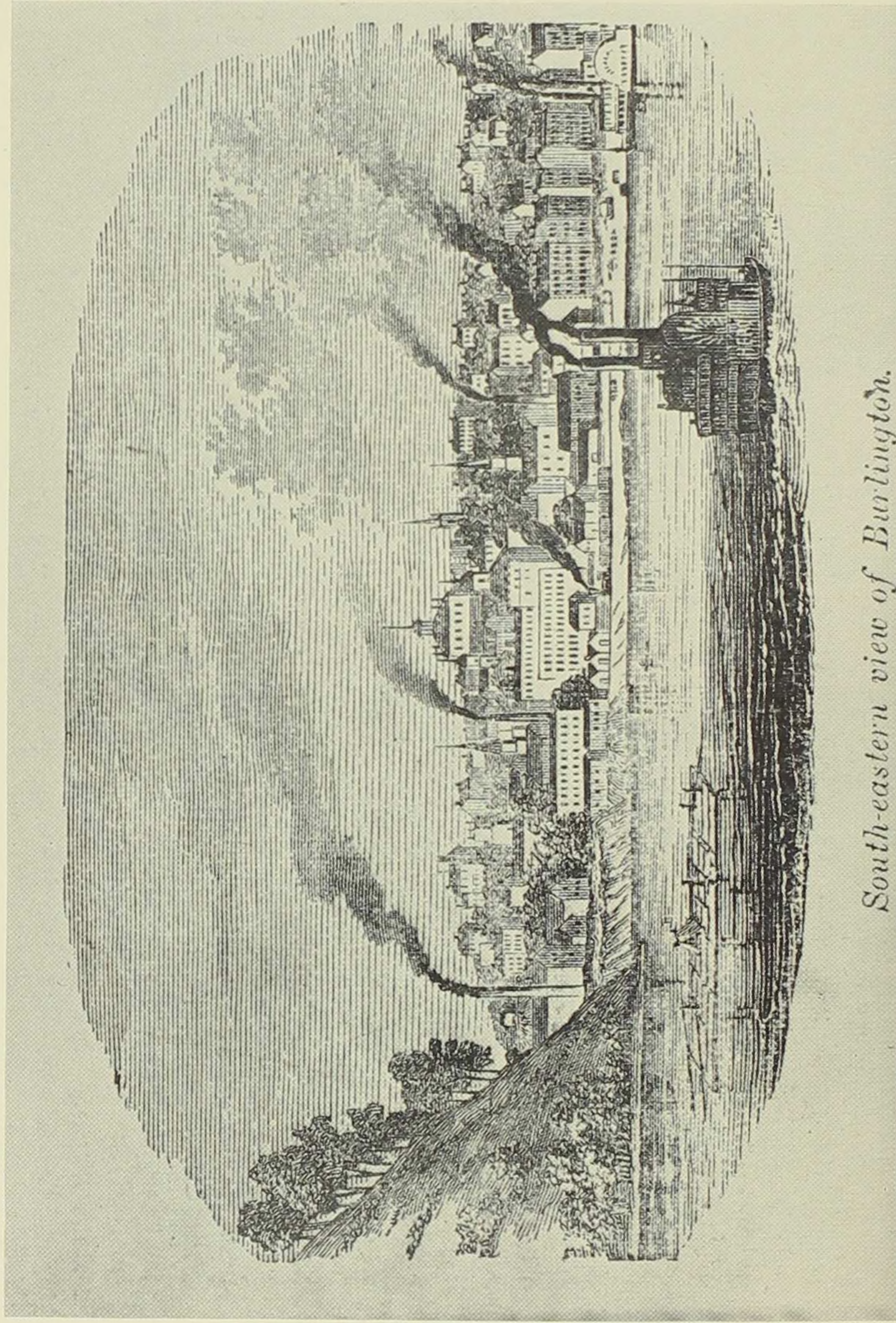
NED CONNOR

About the time of their marriage in 1871.



HARRIET "CHEDIE" CONNOR

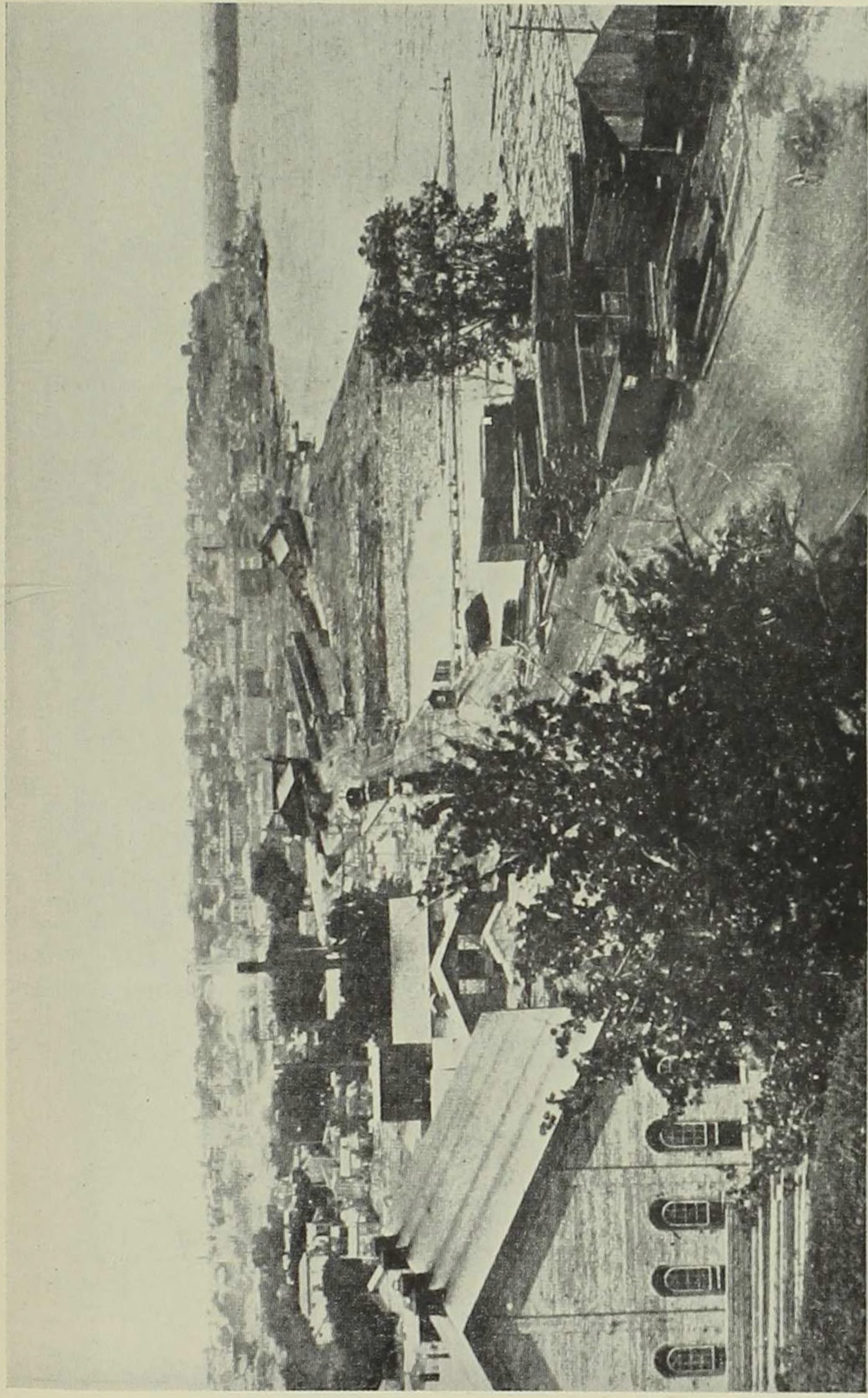
At age three and as a pupil at South Hill School.



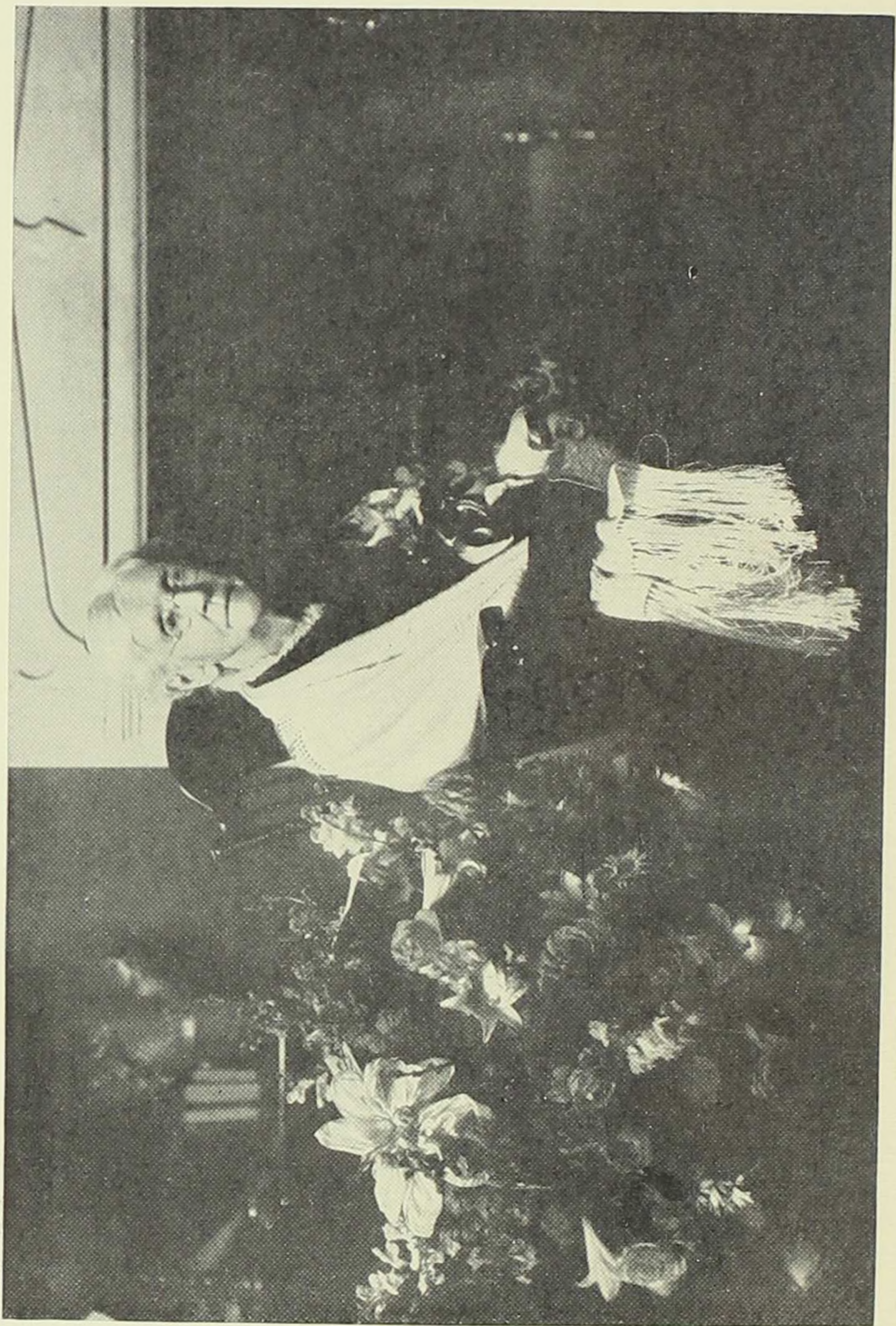
South-eastern view of Burlington.

The view shows the appearance of the city, about 1865, as seen from near the South Bluff: the eastern terminus of the Burlington and Missouri Railroad, the Court House, and other public buildings, on the elevated ground in the distance, appear in the central part; the North Bluff and Steamboat Landing on the right.

distance, appear in the central part; the North Bluff and Steamboat Landing on the right.



VIEW OF BURLINGTON, 1871



GRANDMOTHER BROWN ON HER ONE HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY

the other nice people that Toby knew, the Living Skeleton and the Fat Lady and the Albino Girl. And how he must have loved it, riding bareback in tinsel tights, after he once learned how! And just to think how he lost his monkey trying to get back home! I cried hard when "Mr. Stubbs" died, and thought it sweet of Toby to line his grave with violets.

Mr. Parker had come to Burlington to see what he could do to resuscitate the Democratic party in the Hawkeye State. Despite the undoubted ability of Iowa's first Democratic leaders — Robert Lucas, Charles Mason, David Rorer, Augustus Caesar Dodge, Jonathan C. Hall, and others—Whig-Republican standards soon supplanted Democratic banners in Iowa. This was due, largely, to the influence of James W. Grimes, and to Editor Edwards in his conduct of *The Hawk-Eye*.

But Iowa's Democratic leaders, though retired from active campaigning, were still effectively vocal. Judge Rorer, short, thick, intense, explosive little man, was about town a dozen years after I knew Burlington, talking excitedly, at times, on political themes. Judge Mason and General Dodge were in demand as speakers at the anniversary celebrations of Iowa's early days and they never lacked admirers and imitators among Burlington's younger generation, as Charles Mason Remey, the Judge's grandson, could attest.

As we gossiped together, in the nineties, about our friends and relatives in Burlington, Mason used to tell me how General Dodge would come with his grandson, young Henry, to call on Mason's grandfather, the Judge. "They used to set Henry up on the woodbox to make a Democratic speech," Mason narrated. "And how those two old men would throw back their heads and laugh and laugh to hear Henry pouring out all the Democratic slogans and catch words! And Henry would get excited when they laughed and wave his arms and shout some more and I would nearly burst with envy of Henry's oratorical powers."

Even during that period I was not quite without interest in political matters. The campaign of Garfield and Arthur versus Hancock and English in the fall of 1880 had impressed me. I remember watching from the fence corner the torchlight parade going past the house and noting that the torches were dripping and smoking, as well as flaring, and that the men who carried them wore oilcloth capes to protect their coats from the drips. What it was all about I did not know. I only knew that I was for Garfield and Arthur, of course, because my papa was. May Crawford in the next house was for Hancock and English, because her papa was. We waved our rival emblems defiantly at each other.

The tragic consequence of Garfield's success at

the polls registered at first only slightly with me. I had not yet formed the newspaper habit. While the nation watched anxiously for the bulletins issued from the bedside of the assassinated President, I pursued my own summer interests, coaxing my mother to let me go barefoot and then lingering in the shade of the ice wagon to catch the cooling drip of the melting ice on my hot feet. Or reluctantly I took long naps on torrid afternoons until it was cool enough to be dressed up in crisp summer clothes to be taken to an ice cream parlor. Or I went to a "show" with May Crawford in Jennie McCosh's barn, paying my entrance fee with green postage stamps which my mother had told me, to my bewilderment, were "just as good" as three pennies. But, when September came, the national distress reached me.

I wakened suddenly in the night, deeply shaken and alarmed. I remember crying out in fear and my mother coming to my bedside, kneeling there beside me, putting her arms around me, and saying: "The President has died. That is why all the bells are tolling."

And then, the next day, at last, the common sorrow reached me. There on our front stoop were piled yards and yards of black and white cotton cambric which my father and mother twined together into one strand and draped about our little porch and over our front door, and Frankie and

I were big enough to help. All because President Garfield was dead, shot by a man named Guiteau!

In the next years, other books followed *Toby Tyler* in quick succession. Curled up in "the dog chair," an easy chair in our living room, the arms of which terminated in dog heads, reading my head off, I entered the "Never-Never Land." Uncle Frank had given that chair to my parents as a wedding present. I know now that it was of ordinary dimensions, but there was a time when, sunk in its depths, with legs crossed under me, "the dog chair" seemed to envelop me and isolate me from the ordinary realities of life.

It was the time for fairy stories, for tales of the childhood of the race, of the mysterious half-world of demi-gods and genii that everybody knows have perished from the earth but must once have been, or else, why would there be so many stories about them? Grandma Darrow remembered a meadow in Ireland where "the little people," as they called the fairies over there, came out to dance in the moonlight on the green. And Anna Lalor told me that, on her father's farm in Ireland, there was a "holy" well. It was not a matter that a little girl would talk about in public, of course, but there *was* a time when I nursed a secret expectation that sometime, I, too, might meet a fairy. Gradually, a corroding doubt destroyed the expectation; perhaps I wasn't good enough; perhaps

the fairies wouldn't show themselves to a girl who had "tantrums"; perhaps they didn't come out at all here in America. Such early-morning speculations put me in a trance-like state that must have been trying for a busy mama, hurrying to get her brood breakfasted and off to school. "Here, Chedie, you've held that leg long enough. Suppose you put on the other stocking now," I would sometimes hear my mother say.

And then, with our first lessons in American history, I read thrilling tales of the early explorers, stories of kings and courts, of plots and counterplots, of mysterious lands mostly to the south of us, where fountains of youth and cities of human sacrifice might be found.

A sensation of pride went through our history class when the familiar name of our own great Mississippi came into the story. A Spaniard named Hernando de Soto had discovered it and had been buried in it, far to the south of us. But up here, close to where we lived, a French trader named Louis Joliet and a priest named Jacques Marquette had lingered six days, hunting, fishing, and feasting with the friendly Indians. The French chronicler reported that the Iowa air had been balmy and filled with the songs of birds; that the hills—our own "bluffs"—were heavily wooded; that the valleys—our "bottom lands"—were covered with grass as high as men's should-

ers; that the deep ravines — like our Fox Abraham's Glen in Burlington — were edged with flowers and foliage; that the plains back of the Great River were dotted with grazing herds of elk and deer and buffalo. It was obvious that to those visitors of long ago, as to us in South Hill School, Iowa had seemed "The Pleasant Land."

To myself, I seemed to live in a settled civilization in those days. Yet, as I read the exciting stories of the conquest of the great West, of Indians, highwaymen, cattle kings, and cowmen, I think there was still some tang of the wilderness in the Iowa of the eighties. Little girls were not supposed to read "dime novels," though big boys had entertaining literature like this tucked away between the pages of their geographies or stuffed in the tops of boots to read when teacher's back was turned. About the time I celebrated my tenth birthday I was disposed, like the boys, to regret that Indians and bandits no longer adorned the landscape. Nor was I above spending a summer afternoon up in a cherry tree gloating over the exploits of Sitting Bull and Geronimo, of Kit Carson and Jesse James.

Among my father's piles of paper-bound books, I found a story or two of Captain King's depicting army life on the plains where the only excitement that bored soldiers could hope for, to relieve monotony, was a raid of "the Redskins." And often,

when Mrs. Potter dropped in, I would hear her telling Mama about the ways of Indians she had observed when she and her Tom were stationed at an army post. On more recent travel across the plains behind the new Iron Horse, bandits were more likely to make trouble than were Indians. "We stopped at a watering tank out on the desert," she said; "I wondered what was up. The men were all running hither and yon. Why, there was a dead man in the tank! Murdered, yes, but by whom? Indians? Highwaymen? What worried us was fear of a hold-up by the same gang."

My interest in all these stories was stimulated by the pictures in Grandma Darrow's scrapbook of Sitting Bull and his braves. Sitting Bull belonged to current history, one might say, for the massacre by the Sioux of General George A. Custer and his men at the Little Big Horn River in Montana occurred in 1876; but Grandma's interest in Indians also covered the Sauk and Fox who belonged to what seemed to me like ancient history. She had a picture of Black Hawk with his shaven head, and one long lone tuft of hair on the crown. He had been dead nearly half a century although there were people living in Burlington who had actually seen him in the flesh. Dr. Salter was one. As a youth, back East, William Salter had "looked with wondering eyes," as he put it, upon Black Hawk and Keokuk on the occasion of their visit

to "the Great White Father" in Washington. It makes me realize how immature is our American civilization when I think that, although I, myself, never saw an Indian in my childhood except under a circus tent, there were residents of my home town who had known Iowa when only the so-called savages lived there.

HARRIET CONNOR BROWN