

The **P**ALIMPSEST

NOVEMBER 1947

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSEST

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY RUTH A. GALLAHER

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The Corn Gospel Trains

The word "gospel" is an inheritance from the Anglo-Saxons and today it means, as it did to them, "good tidings". So it was not surprising that the men who planned to disseminate knowledge concerning the value of testing seed corn thought of the project as spreading the gospel — the good news — that a man could know whether or not the corn he planted would germinate.

And so it was that in the spring of 1904 the first seed-corn special train moved out of Des Moines on the Rock Island Railroad headed north. The engine puffed along, pulling the two private cars and the passenger coach equipped as a lecture room. In one of the private cars Professor Perry G. Holden, Professor of Agronomy at the Iowa State College of Agriculture, organized his notes and demonstration equipment, for twenty-minute stops would give little enough time to preach the gospel of good seed corn. There will be time, however, before the train reaches Gowrie, its first

stop, for us to take a brief survey of the beginnings of this project.

Richard P. Clarkson, editor of the *Iowa State Register*, was one of the early preachers of the gospel of seed-corn testing in Iowa. Year after year as the snows of winter melted away, Clarkson filled column after column with well-chosen words of sound advice to the farmers, urging them to make careful tests of their seed corn before planting it. He argued that "if a very ordinary crop could be harvested by planting a haphazard lot of seed corn, a marvelous crop could be secured if seed corn was planted, every kernel of which was known to be capable of germination". Moreover such testing was insurance against the additional labor involved in replanting, if the first seed did not produce even a poor "stand" of corn.

In the meantime, "Uncle Henry" Wallace, founder and editor of *Wallace's Farmer*, had be-thought himself of a scheme to improve dairying in Iowa. His plan was to send a train across the State carrying experts in dairying who would give lectures to the farmers at the railroad stations. He approached railroad officials on this matter and a "dairy special" was provided in 1893, but the trip was a short one and for some reason the interest was not great.

The immediate impetus which produced

"The Corn Gospel Train" was the early frost in northwestern Iowa in the fall of 1903. According to an account written by Perry G. Holden, the officers of the Grain Dealers' Association of Iowa were worried about seed corn for 1904 and appealed to Mr. Holden for advice. He suggested that they ask each grain dealer to select three farmers and request each of them to send ten of his best ears of corn to Ames. A test of 1,256 sample ears indicated that less than sixty per cent of the kernels would grow in the germination box; even fewer would be likely to grow in the soil.

While Mr. Holden was still busy with this testing a representative of the grain dealers at Des Moines called him and asked him to attend a banquet to be held at Hotel Savery on April 9, 1904. The invitation was accepted, with the proviso that no speech would be required. Just to be safe, however, Mr. Holden took his germination box with him.

After the eating was over and the first speaker had entertained the company, the toastmaster called on Mr. Holden, who responded, "I had no time to prepare a speech so I brought one already prepared." With that he went to the door, picked up the germination box, and laid it on the table before him.

"When I opened up that box", relates Mr.

Holden, "and showed them that not half of the ears from which those kernels were taken were fit to plant and told them that I had tested over 1,200 samples, I simply stampeded the bunch — they rushed up to see the corn in the box. Not another speaker was called on that evening. I finally had to call them to order and apologize to the President who had promised he wouldn't call on me. There seemed to be no disposition to go on with the program. With almost one voice at least with one mind came the question, 'what can we do about it?' " Mr. Holden replied that he intended to drive from town to town and show the farmers just how to make the germination test. In as many cases as possible he and his assistants would leave a germination box with corn in it in each community.

The idea of sending out instructors on seed-corn testing soon took root. Someone suggested that a train would reach a lot of farmers and a proposal that the railroads assist in the project was presented to W. H. Given, superintendent of the Des Moines Valley Division of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. The argument for the coöperation of the railroads was simple; the more corn the farmers could produce, the more freight there would be for the railroads to carry. Given doubted if hard-headed, practical farmers

who had farmed all their lives would leave their spring work to attend a lecture on seed corn by a college professor who raised corn in a "hot-house", but he agreed to try the plan.

On April 15, 1904, the *Iowa State Register* announced that the Rock Island Railroad would send a special seed-corn train over its northern Iowa line the following week. It was to start at Des Moines and make its first official stop at Gowrie in Webster County. Thence it would proceed northward, stopping at towns along the line, including Rolfe, Mallard, Ayrshire, and Ruthven. It would then continue northward to Sibley in Osceola County, and return southward by another route, stopping on the second day at Melvin, Hartley, Royal, Rossie, Pocahontas, and other stations. On the third day the train would continue on southward through Palmer, Manson, Perry, Dallas Center, and Waukee to Des Moines. The train consisted of an engine, two private cars to accommodate the party and the press correspondents, and a passenger coach with seating capacity for seventy persons.

Professor Holden had enthusiastically accepted the responsibility of presenting the lectures and demonstrating the germination boxes and to him belongs the credit of making the seed-corn trains a complete success. At Gowrie, the platform was

loaded with farmers waiting for the corn special. "Fur coats, top boots, waving scarfs and broad hats showed that they were of the industrious class, who would listen and then tell their neighbors. The railway officials were satisfied and doubted no more. For twenty minutes the farmers sat in that long car and listened in open-mouthed wonder when the mild-mannered college professor explained to them things so simple in the raising of corn they wondered why they had not thought of them before." They discovered that instead of being instructed by a college professor they were being "talked to" by a man who had had charge of a farm of 25,000 acres, with 8,000 acres planted to corn each year.

On April 22nd the *Iowa State Register* reported that Professor Holden's "Special Corn Lecture Tour" was an outstanding success and devoted a half page to a story entitled "Thousands of Iowa Farmers Receive Timely Advice on Corn Growing". According to this report the seed-corn special had traveled 450 miles and stopped at 50 stations. A total of 18 hours had been spent in delivering 60 lectures to 2,000 farmers in 15 counties, and the territory covered included 3,000,000 acres of Iowa land, 25 per cent of which would be planted to corn. There is no report on publicity, but local newspapers doubtless carried notices of

the time the special train would arrive. Railroads advertised the trains by posters and grain dealers were expected to notify farmers in their areas.

Professor Holden, the "corn evangelist", emphasized especially the necessity of exercising the utmost care in selecting seed corn. Take six kernels of corn from each ear of seed corn, he said, two from the butt, two from the tip, and two from the middle. Make a test of these to ascertain which of them come from good ears and then plant accordingly. The germination test was simple. The farmer was instructed to put a layer of moist sand, dirt, or sawdust in the bottom of a box and cover it with a layer of cloth marked into one and a half inch squares, each with a number. The six kernels of corn from the ear numbered one were placed on the square numbered one and so on down the list. When all the squares were filled, the corn was to be covered with another piece of cloth larger than the box and on this was placed about two inches of moist sand, dirt, or sawdust. The box was then kept in a warm place — the sitting room was suggested. From four to six days later the top cloth was to be removed and the kernels examined. If any of the kernels in a square had failed to germinate properly, the corresponding ear was to be discarded.

The lecturer called attention to the fact that the

average yield of corn in Iowa was thirty-three bushels per acre, and with this average Iowa produced more corn than any other State in the Union. He believed that with the exercise of due care in planting, the average yield could be materially increased and Iowa could produce more corn than any other two States. This, he said, was not merely a matter of local concern; it was of world-wide interest, for the nations of the world looked to Iowa for leadership in the production of corn.

During 1904 the corn special went into various parts of the State, a number of railway companies participating without charge. It was reported that these tours covered thirty-seven counties of the State and that enthusiastic crowds gathered at every station. The lectures given on these tours centered chiefly upon three points:

1st — where to secure the best seed corn.

2nd — the most convenient way of testing it.

3rd — the best method of securing a full stand of three stalks to the hill.

Because Professor Holden presented the view that the farmer should obtain his seed corn from his own fields or from fields near by, he met with some opposition from commercial seed companies and now and again a newspaper editor criticized him. On the whole, however, his message was

well received by the press and by the farmers who heard him. One newspaper referred to him as a "spellbinder" and said that he beat William Jennings Bryan "because he has a better subject to talk about".

Early in 1905 plans were made for a continuation and enlargement of the work of the seed-corn special. On February 22nd, the Cedar Rapids *Gazette* announced that the "Gospel of Good Seed Corn" would continue to be taught by Professor Holden, and that on the previous day the "Seed-Corn Special" had gone west from Marion over the main line of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul. The train supplied for this tour consisted of "a baggage car, two fine day coaches and two elegant private cars". George A. Wells, secretary of the Iowa Grain Dealers' Association, was in charge of the tour. Several railroad officials were on the train which was staffed by an engineer, a veteran conductor, and a "chief chef". In addition to Professor Holden, lecturers included J. W. Jones, M. L. Moser, and M. L. Wilson, all from the Iowa State College at Ames, and A. D. Schamel of the United States Department of Agriculture, a former assistant of Mr. Holden's at the University of Illinois.

The previous week a tour had been made in northeastern Iowa from Waucoma southward

through Fayette, Strawberry Point, Delhi, Hopkinton, Wyoming, and Eldridge. The train had stopped at fourteen stations, and at only three stations were there less than 100 farmers in attendance. At Hopkinton 170 heard the lectures and at Wyoming there were 200. The total attending the fourteen stations was 1,986. Wherever it was necessary, two lectures were given simultaneously. The itinerary for the week ending February 25th included towns from Keystone to Perry, Perry to Herndon, Herndon to Storm Lake, Storm Lake to Spirit Lake, and thence to Rockwell City, and from Rockwell City via Herndon and Madrid to Des Moines.

The time employed in selecting and testing seed corn, speakers on the Corn Gospel Train said, would be well repaid in yield. Suppose the farmer spent part of his time for four weeks at this work. Because of that one month's work, he might make a gain of from fifteen to thirty-five bushels of corn per acre. At the prices then current that would mean from \$500 to \$2,000 increase in return from a hundred-acre field. When someone asked, "Is not 95 per cent of good kernels a satisfactory showing?", Mr. Holden replied: "Why should you be satisfied to allow five acres out of every hundred to grow nothing, when by a little care you can have good seed for all?" Four weeks of

seed-corn testing at the proper time would do more for Iowa than Congress, the Commerce Commission, and the tariff would do "in the next twenty years".

On February 28th, the Burlington *Hawkeye* announced an itinerary over the Burlington road and its branch lines, extending almost across the State, with stops at Indianola, Shenandoah, Villisca, Creston, Bedford, Chariton, Batavia, and Fort Madison. On March 4th, it reported that 750 farmers met the "corn special" at Bloomfield. A crowd of "about five hundred men" attended the meeting at Birmingham. A "very large crowd" of people from Henry and Lee counties came to hear the lectures at Mount Pleasant, while at West Point the train was met "by the West Point brass band and a large and appreciative delegation."

Thus up and down, and back and forth across the State, the Corn Gospel Train proceeded, with enthusiastic crowds attending all along the way. Participating in this ambitious advertising and freight-promoting project were the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy, 1,139 miles, the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul, 1,488 miles, the Chicago and Northwestern, 1,958 miles, the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific, 1,862 miles, the Des Moines, Iowa Falls and Northern, 76 miles, and

the Illinois Central, 1,332 miles. The total attendance reported for 1905 was 127,763 at the 670 stops made.

As a result of these meetings more than 200,000 copies of *Experiment Station Bulletin*, No. 77, dealing with "Selecting and Preparing Seed Corn", had been distributed to the farmers of Iowa. It was estimated that enough interest had been stimulated so that within five years the Iowa farmers would be producing as much corn on 6,000,000 acres as they had previously produced on 9,000,000 acres.

The idea of a special train to promote agricultural interests was taken up by the growers of other crops. Interested parties came from the South to study the plan, so that they might apply it to the cotton belt area. If the importance of good seed corn could be brought to the attention of the people "by a whirlwind tour", why not bring the gospel of good cotton, good dairying, good roads, and good soil in the same manner.

In 1906 the Corn Gospel Train made additional tours. Railway officials continued to coöperate with grain dealers, college professors, and farmers for the mutual benefit of all. In a little book — *The ABC of Corn Culture* — by Professor Holden, there is a spot map showing the Iowa towns which were visited by the seed-corn special in a

period of sixty-seven days in 1904, 1905, and 1906. This reveals that the train had covered 11,000 miles in these tours and made 789 stops. A total of 1,265 lectures were given to 145,700 people.

After 1906 the seed-corn special trains were discontinued in Iowa, although they were used in other States in 1907 and 1908. The "gospel" had been carried to almost every town in Iowa and most of the intelligent and progressive farmers had visited the train and tried out the testing process. The lecturers had insisted that a very substantial increase in corn yield could be produced. Statistics proved that this was actually accomplished. The total corn yield for Iowa in 1903 was about 230,500,000 bushels, an average of thirty-one bushels per acre. By 1906 this had been increased to 388,836,000 bushels — an average of forty-one bushels per acre. The Corn Gospel Train had been a success, and today, as a State and as a Nation, we are richer because men of vision were willing to coöperate for the promotion of their ideas and ideals and for the common good.

JACOB A. SWISHER

An Iowa Bluestocking

Much has been written about the pioneer woman and her endurance amid difficulties — how she worked for twenty years to buy wallpaper for the “front” room, how she cooked for threshers, worked in the field, bore children without anesthesia, sweated over a cumbersome cookstove and an inquisitional heating iron, mended clothing until late at night, canned gallons of gardenstuff, and still had time to take fancy-work to the county fair and to help her neighbors. This is the story of a pioneer woman of a different sort, an intellectual and an artist, who bore her share of children and trouble, and still had the energy to break the sod of crude agrarian society with the sharp edge of her wit.

Nettie Adams, a descendant of John Quincy Adams, came to Iowa in 1876 by way of Wisconsin, Chicago, and New York. She was born in Portage, Wisconsin, but her father, Nathan Adams, an excellent violinist, died before she was born and when she was four years old her mother, Rachel Vandenburg Adams, married Judge Prentiss of LaCrosse and there she spent most of her early life. Pretty, diminutive, and dark, with

curly hair and remarkable blue eyes, she was a popular local belle. She loved to dance and to play cards and she went on midnight cruises on the Mississippi River where she was fascinated by the singing of the Negro stevedores as they loaded the cargo. She also found time to take lessons on the piano, to teach music, and to acquire an interest in the Greek and Latin classics, probably with the encouragement of the judge.

She attended Milwaukee-Downer College in Milwaukee and acquired an interest in literature and politics which she retained all her life. She became an advocate of the rights of Negroes, a suffragette, and a prohibitionist. Her pet aversions were Democrats and corsets. While other girls talked about beaux, Nettie Adams talked about the tariff; when other girls found fault with a man's dress, she criticized his diction. In spite of this she attracted many beaux.

After graduating from college, Nettie Adams spent some time studying piano at the Chicago Musical College, where her teacher was Florenz Ziegfield, the father of the musical director Florenz Ziegfield, then a small boy in knee pants. This seems to have been the only time in her life when she was in the milieu for which she was intended. From Chicago she went to New York City where she studied voice and piano and sang in opera

choruses and in the elder Damrosch's production of the "Messiah".

All this suggests glamour but it does not explain why this charming, talented girl came out to Iowa. The explanation lies in her family relations. Her mother died while she was in New York and she returned to LaCrosse where she remained until her stepfather remarried. That left Nettie without economic security and she decided to teach music. In some way she heard that the little towns of Toledo and Tama City had no music teacher and she made the trip to Iowa.

At first she got a room in the Harmon House, the only hotel in Tama City. She knew no one in the prairie town and she was lonely and frightened, more lonely and frightened than she had ever been in the big cities. She cried herself to sleep every night. But the arrival of the pretty, young music teacher from the East did not go unnoticed in the two still frontier towns. When Judge George R. Struble of Toledo learned that a young woman was staying at the Tama City hotel, he took the matter up with his wife. "That is no place for a girl", he said. The Strubles agreed to offer Nettie Adams a home. In return she gave music lessons to the Struble children. From the Struble home she walked to the houses of her other pupils in all kinds of weather.

A tortuous and precarious plug railroad, with a train consisting of a dinky engine and a caboose, at that time connected Toledo and Tama City and on this she commuted to give music lessons at Tama City. One day while making this trip she met a young Civil War veteran, James L. Bracken, lately come to Tama City from Illinois. They argued politics. Other trips followed. One day the gruff, sandy-haired young man asked her to go to a reception with him. That was their first date.

Some time later, they planned to go to a dance. Mr. Bracken, having acquired an interest in the local bank and a grain elevator, was busy. At the appointed time, a strange man appeared at the Struble home with a horse and buggy and presented Miss Adams with a note from Mr. Bracken, asking that she get in the buggy and meet him at the bank. Miss Adams retorted, "You may tell Mr. Bracken that I am not a sack of grain". Then she slammed the door, and began playing the piano with such unusual vigor as to startle Judge Struble. A short time later, when the crestfallen young banker appeared at the door, the judge had to act as mediator.

Because she was from New York, Miss Adams became the court of appeal in all cases of social propriety and correct taste. At one time when she

was playing for a wedding, she had to settle the order of procedure.

Of course she married the young banker. Later on he built a house which was one of the show places of central Iowa and on his weekly trips to Chicago he would bring back beautiful pieces of china, cut glass, and wedgewood. James Bracken was always hospitable. He often brought someone along for supper — a stray Senator, or a businessman, or a preacher. It mattered not to him if all the maid had prepared was cornmeal mush and preserved peaches. Once he received an invitation to the White House and Nettie bought a new outfit for the event, but they didn't go — Mr. Bracken was too busy.

Those were the heydays of Chautauqua, and the Brackens were always hosts to the traveling lecturers and artists. Mrs. Bracken stayed up until all hours, listening to her husband and Southern army officers re-fight the Civil War; and she played the piano while Carrie Jacobs Bond sang.

Having two children, a son and a daughter, wasn't enough to bog Nettie Adams Bracken down in the dull details of housekeeping. She directed and sang in home-talent productions of the "Mikado" and "Pinafore". This was the era when minstrel shows were all the rage, and she directed the first ladies' minstrel show in Tama

County. The Scotch families at Traer had annual festivals at which she always sang Scotch ballads. She played for the Presbyterian Church for thirty years without a cent of pay. When she found there was no music teacher in the public schools, she directed all the musical entertainments they had.

Dissatisfied with the instruction given in the public schools, she taught her own two children at home for several years, and did it so thoroughly that her daughter was the youngest student enrolled at Rockford College. She taught her maid, who had come from Czechoslovakia, to read and write English. She learned shorthand by studying secretly and taught it to a young girl who needed to earn a living. One day she surprised her husband by asking him to dictate a letter to her. She must have done well, because her husband hired her as his secretary. Commenting once upon his wife's versatility, he said, "She's done everything but take the veil."

She took such an interest in livening up the prairie community that she started five "improvement" clubs for women — the Octagon Club, the Clover Club, the Tuesday Study Club, the Political Equality Club, and the Woman's Club, a literary group which was the first club in Tama County to join the State Federation of Women's

Clubs. This group was responsible for Tama's first library. Mr. Bracken donated a musty room above the bank, and the women collected books which no one wanted. Then Mrs. Bracken got the idea of providing a better library. Of her own accord she wrote to Andrew Carnegie for a grant of money and got it. Tama's present Public Library is the result.

Beginning a half-dozen societies wasn't enough. She belonged to the Musical Club, the Dramatic Club, the P. E. O., and was president of the W. C. T. U. for several years. In addition, she was the first Worthy Matron of the Eastern Star, and she used to forget her sparkling dignity when the guard, who spoke broken English, referred to her as the "Wordy Matron". She was a much better toastmaster than any lawyer or preacher in town. As a result, when she wasn't introducing some speaker, she was being introduced herself.

All of this sounds as though she might have been the typical intellectual woman of her time; frustrated, repressed, compensating for a barren emotional life by a passionate interest in current events and art. Nothing could be more misleading. She was first and primarily a physically beautiful woman living a genuine emotional life. Her vivacious poise came from an inner life, as rich in love as it was in interests. For the clue to

her personality was that she had a tremendous capacity both to absorb and to give life. Her interest in ideas never flagged. She was never niggardly in spirit; she gave to everyone who knew her the force of her sympathetic insight. She was always an Adams in her hatred of the vulgar, in her independence of mind and integrity of motive, but vanity was alien to her.

The essential sweetness of her being was never curdled by the bacilli in the air of her time which soured so many idealists. She lived through financial reverses and personal tragedies and endured the constant pain of rheumatism which attacked her while she was in middle life, but she never became bitter. People who did not see deep into her nature were always impressed with her sense of humor. They never realized that the quality of mind which gave her a sharp sense of the ridiculous, also gave her a keener sense of the tragic.

After her husband's death in March, 1923, she began writing poetry to divert her mind from her loss. It was not great poetry, like that which she loved to quote for her children and grandchildren, but it was another evidence of the force of her mind, which was always casting about. When she became too old to sing, and her hands were too crippled to play the piano, she would recite her poems to music.

In her old age she gave the most characteristic evidence of her nature. The bank her husband had owned failed during the crash of 1929. Although she was under no legal compulsion to do so she voluntarily gave up her beautiful home and her life-insurance policy. From then on, she was poor and without a home of her own. She gave her china and her cut glass, her walnut furniture and her books, her recordings of classical music and her piano, to her friends and family, keeping nothing for herself. It was the revelation of her nature. She never thought of it as a sacrifice. Instead, she sat in her daughter's kitchen, peeling potatoes and singing, "My Blue Ridge Mountain Home".

She lived until her mid-eighties but her old age was not happy and dying was long and difficult. She felt increasingly the loss of her closest friends; she felt she had never accomplished anything. Even so, when her vital force was not strong enough to hide the "pain that was native to her nature", when she was dying and her grandchildren came, she roused from her delirium and sang with them.

BARBARA BRICE FAY

College Oratory in the Nineties

Probably the most spectacular and exciting activity of the college campus today is football, with packed stadiums, marching bands, acrobatic cheer leaders, and the array of players, coaches, trainers, and water boys. But football has not always been king. Time was when the most popular activity was not based upon brawn but upon oral ability. The campus hero of 1890 (which incidentally was the school year when the Iowa intercollegiate athletic association was organized) was the lad who represented his college in the annual oratorical contest sponsored by the Iowa Collegiate Oratorical Association.

Much time and effort were devoted in the various colleges to the discovery of an orator most likely to bring home victory. The eager student frequently launched his oratorical career as a freshman and, undaunted by defeat, continued competing during his three remaining years for the much-heralded honor of being the school's foremost orator. Many a would-be speaker, defeated in one contest, started immediately preparing for the following year. Usually in the fall the campus literary societies held elimination contests

to discover their most eligible candidates for campus-wide competition.

As February approached, oratory received an increasing amount of attention. Once the local representative was selected, the campus forgot local differences and united in enthusiastic support of the chosen orator. The coach worked diligently with his charge, even prescribing in some cases training rules. The local town editor, the "alums", and even the townspeople added their encouragement and advice. No doubt a few bets were placed concerning the chances of the local Demosthenes against the neighboring Aeschines. When the time came for the State contest, large numbers of enthusiastic fans followed their representative to the place of meeting. On some occasions special trains were scheduled to take care of this following.

What types of subjects did these orators choose? In contrast to the modern college forensic speaker who delights in discussing personal, social, and political problems, the orator of the nineties preferred the more abstract and philosophical questions. Eulogies were not uncommon. Religious topics were also popular, especially with those from the church schools. Emphasis was placed more on an essay style than on oral style, for only the eight best orations, selected

on "the merits of thought and composition", were permitted to enter the State finals.

The 1890 contest of the Iowa Collegiate Oratorical Association, the sixteenth meeting of the organization, was held at Iowa Wesleyan College (then Iowa Wesleyan University) at Mount Pleasant, on February 26th and 27th. Ten days before the contest, as prescribed by the constitution, George D. Perkins, editor of the *Sioux City Journal*, Spencer Smith, lawyer and publisher of Council Bluffs, and J. H. Wilkerson of Mount Ayr, ranked the orations on "thought and composition". On this basis the eight finalists were determined.

Not among the eight was C. S. Rogers, the Iowa Wesleyan representative, who placed tenth. The local fans were bitterly disappointed, for they had been confident that Rogers could win the State contest. In fact, according to the *Iowa Wesleyan*, the college magazine, the Wesleyan orator in anticipation of the State meet had been "sent" to Chicago for ten days of "elocutionary" training. In spite of the disappointment, the local community prepared to make the representatives of the other Iowa colleges welcome.

The president of the Association arrived on Tuesday, February 25th, to make preliminary plans. All member schools were represented at

the annual business meeting the following day. Delegations were sent by Western, Tabor, Iowa, the Agricultural College at Ames, Upper Iowa, Drake, the State University, Coe, Cornell, Parsons, Lenox, Simpson, Des Moines, Central, and Penn. The business meeting became most exciting when the eligibility of the Coe orator was challenged because his oration exceeded the 2,000 word limit set by the constitution. The Coe delegates attempted to explain this oversight by saying that they had not received a copy of the constitution and therefore were unaware of this requirement.

The delegates failed to sustain their argument, however, and the Coe speaker was scratched from the list of finalists. This decision caused great rejoicing at neighboring Fairfield for the Parsons contestant, who had been ranked ninth on composition, now became eligible.

On the night before the contest, the visitors were honored at a banquet, arranged by the entertaining school. The banqueters were entertained until 1:00 A. M. by a program which included toasts upon "I. W. U. at Home", "Are Contests Beneficial", "The Successful Orator", "The Unsuccessful Orator", "Our Orations", "What If We Should Win", and "Orators of the Past". Although the evidence is not available it is prob-

ably safe to assume that the coaches, under pressure, relaxed training rules to permit their charges to remain for this program.

The much anticipated contest was held the following evening, February 27, 1890, in Saunders Hall, the local "opera house". The *Iowa Wesleyan* reports that "long before eight o'clock every seat had been taken and by the time the curtain rose there was not even standing room left." The program was as follows:

Music	
Invocation	Dr. T. J. McFarland, President of Iowa Wesleyan University
Music	Iowa Wesleyan Band
"Individualism in Society"	M. H. Lyon, State University
"A Moral Crisis"	C. H. Bandy, Parsons College
Vocal Solo	Mrs. H. M. Irwin, Fairfield
"An Unsolved Problem"	J. A. Shelton, Iowa Agri- cultural College
"Sacrifice as Necessary Factor of Progress"	W. J. Barrett, Iowa College
Violin Solo	Hans Albert, Mount Pleasant
"The Sovereignty of Public Opinion"	J. H. Bloodgood, Upper Iowa University

"The Philosophy of Jewish History"	J. W. Hays, Cornell College
Vocal Solo	Clara McFarland, Mount Pleasant
"Knox the Reformer"	E. J. Burkett, Tabor College
"The Emancipating Spirit of the Present"	A. N. McKay, Des Moines College
Music	Parsons College Quartette

At the conclusion of the program the judges of delivery — Professor F. T. Wild of Nevada, Hon. Charles Beardsley of Burlington, and Professor F. A. Jackson of Mount Pleasant — withdrew to make their decisions. Their ratings, plus those of the three who had judged on "thought and content", would determine the winner. The Mount Pleasant *Journal* reports that while waiting, the college students gave college yells with "all sorts of frills and flourishes." No doubt the Parsons group, estimated by the *Journal* at one hundred and fifty, was responsible for much of the excitement.

The judges declared M. H. Lyon of the State University the winner, with W. J. Barrett of Iowa College, second, and A. N. McKay of Des Moines College, third. In the words of the Association's constitution the "first prize" was "the honor of representing the State as her orator and

her delegate to the Inter-State Convention", the organization responsible for the famous Inter-State Oratorical Contest, in which many State winners competed. In addition the Association appropriated fifty dollars to the winner to be used "in training for the Inter-State Contest". The "second prize" was "the honor of representing the State as chairman of the delegation". The "third prize" was the "honor of representing the State as the third delegate". Of course the Association paid the expenses of all the delegates.

The *Iowa Wesleyan* thought that Simpson College was also a victor because the Association decided to meet in Indianola the following year. Tabor College, however, got the president and Upper Iowa University the secretary and treasurer. The State University, however, really celebrated. Some 400 students — out of the total of about 700 — met the Burlington train at noon on February 28th, with a band, horns, and whistles. The orator and the other delegates were placed in a sleigh and escorted to Lyon's home in triumph.

WALDO W. BRADEN

Comment by the Editor

SCIENCE VERSUS CHANCE

Maize, Indian corn, or just plain corn has been grown on the American continents for centuries. And for these hundreds of years men (and women) have planted the precious kernels and waited hopefully and fearfully for the tiny green shoots to appear. Primitive people generally assumed that the fertility of seed could be determined before planting only by means of magic spells and incantations. Banquo, speaking to the witches in *Macbeth*, based his metaphor on this idea when he said:

If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grains will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favours nor your hate.

It was not that food crops were unimportant; starvation has always presented a constant threat to large numbers of the people of the world. But, in spite of this, agricultural problems were, for centuries, given little thought. Jonathan Swift represented the king of Brobdingnan as disdainful of books on statecraft, adding: "And he gave it

for his opinion, that whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country than the whole race of politicians put together." But, Swift commented ironically, the "learning of this people is very defective".

It is an interesting sidelight on the working of men's minds on every-day problems, that this passive attitude changed very little until the close of the twentieth century. To be sure, the Iowa farmer did not believe in evil spirits, nor did he feel that the failure of his seed corn to grow was a punishment for his sins; it was fate, bad luck, or bad handling of the ears intended for seed.

Experience taught him that seed corn should mature well and be stored in a cool but not too cold place. During the long winters many a spare room was decorated with rows of ears of corn, to provide seed for the spring sowing. But farmers still ran the chance of planting poor seed.

After long years, experience was supplemented by science in action on the home front. The wonder is that procedure so simple did not occur to farmers long before 1900. Why did not some farmer, laboriously following the rows to replant missing hills of corn, or taking time sadly needed

for other work to replant an entire field, say to himself, "Next year, I shall find out beforehand whether the seed corn is any good".

Perhaps some farmers did have this idea; perhaps some devised methods of testing their seed corn. Farming, in the old days, was, however, a very isolated way of life and knowledge was not always passed on. It took three seasons of a seed-corn special train visiting Iowa towns to popularize the idea that the farmer could know and not merely hope that his corn would grow, to substitute science for chance.

R. A. G.

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