The PALIMPSEST

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CONTENTS

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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
Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials 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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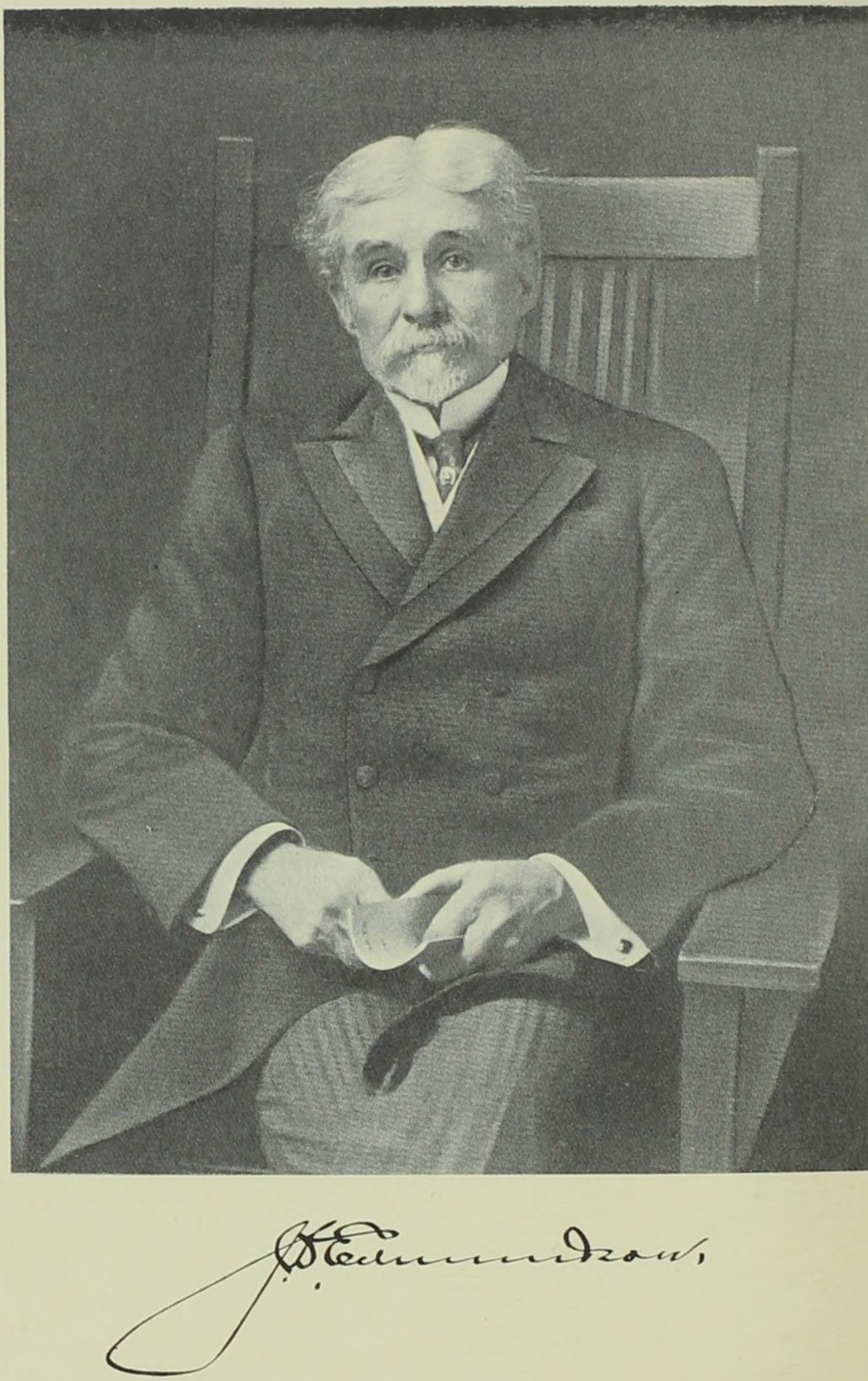

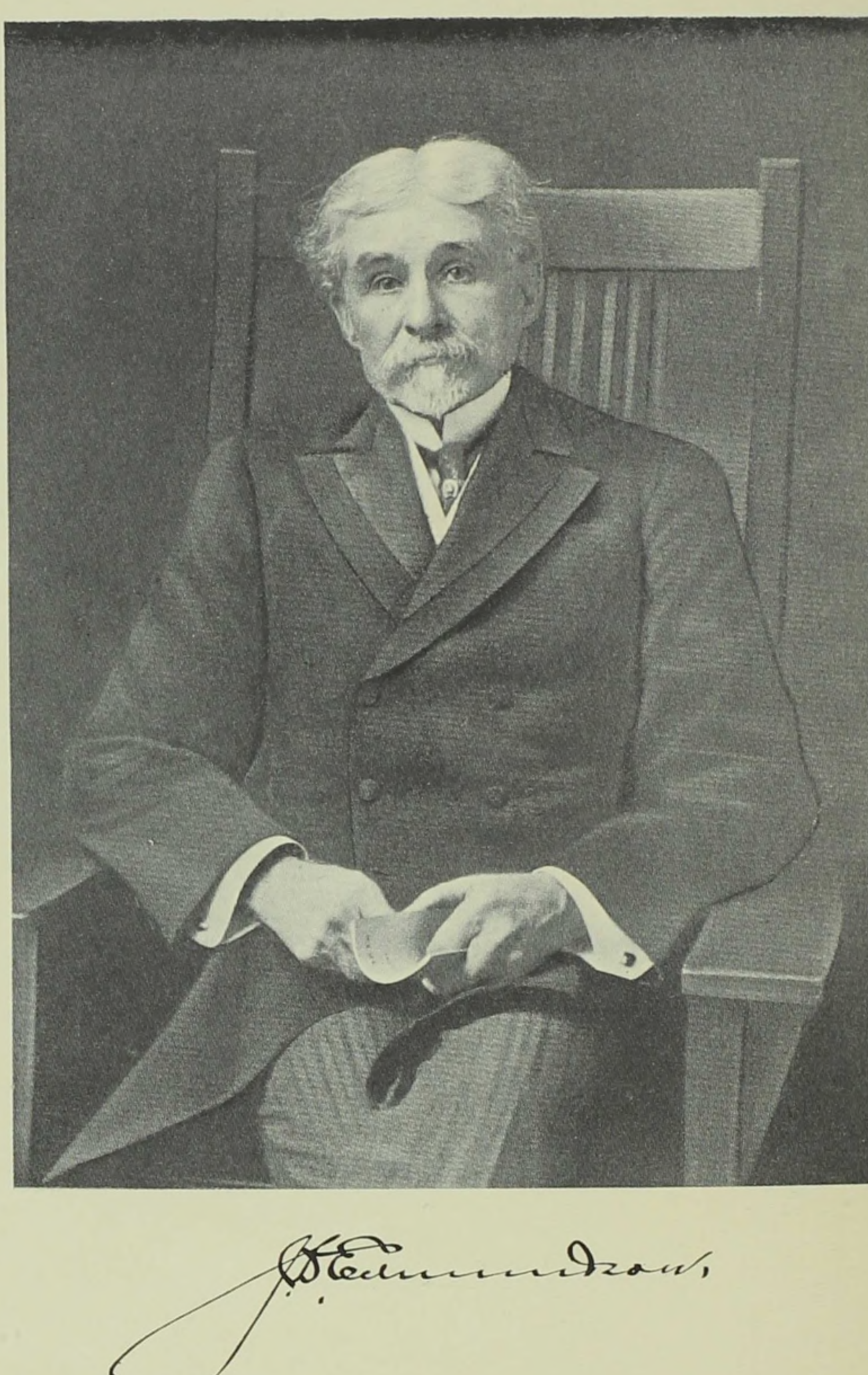

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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A Wise Time to be Born

With rare prescience did he choose the time to be born. For who would wish to come into this world when the very title to the soil which first met his eyes was drifting about in uncertain allegiance? That little farm six miles north of what is now Burlington in Des Moines County, with countless others, had been a veritable waif amidst the primeval wilderness of the Mississippi Valley. First a part of the domain of Louis XIV, then of Spain's Charles III, then back to France — to Bonaparte indeed, who to spite England sold it to the American republic for ready cash with which to buy new eagles for the Imperial Guard, soon to grow resplendent under the Star of Austerlitz.

But that was not the end. This little plot in the Louisiana Purchase was still to be the victim of change. Uncertain of its destiny, it was swiftly in turn a part of the Territories of Indiana, Louisi-

ana, Missouri, Michigan, Wisconsin, and finally, in 1838, of the Territory of Iowa — settled at last and forever, and a fit spot from which to greet a new and strange world.

And so, everything being ready, on the morning of November 23, 1838, James Depew Edmundson, long of name but short of stature, took his diminutive place in the family oaken cradle before the great fireplace in the double log cabin on the primitive farm.

There was another reason why the child might with special fitness be born on soil that traced its title back to France. The pioneer mother, Priscilla Depew, who gave him birth, born in Botetour County, Virginia, on October 4, 1807, was one of a line that ran straight back seven hundred years to Duke Raymond DePuy, first Grand Master of the Knights of Malta. The father, William, was born in Harrison County, Kentucky, on October 5, 1805, removing to what is now Des Moines County, Iowa, in 1836.

The grandfather under the name William Edmiston (later changed by him to Edmundson), was born in Virginia on October 17, 1750. Serving in the Revolutionary army at the battle of Guilford Court House, he was struck on the head by a mounted British officer, and escaped only by feigning death. In 1794 he married Mary Cook,

eighteen years younger than himself. Soon afterward he settled in Kentucky, and in 1820 moved to Greencastle, Indiana, where he died in 1828.

Not long after James Edmundson was born, the family moved from the farm to Burlington and thence to Fairfield, Iowa. In 1843 the father, leaving the family at Fairfield, went into the Sauk and Fox Reservation, which was opened for settlement on May 1, 1843. It is said he plowed the first furrow in what is now Mahaska County. In that same year, on May 31st, the pioneer mother, Priscilla Depew Edmundson, made the supreme sacrifice in childbirth, leaving her two little boys — James, aged four, and his brother, William Jr., born on May 4, 1841. The children were taken back to Burlington by a maiden aunt and widower uncle, but in 1845 again joined their father at Oskaloosa.

William Edmundson was designated by an act of the Legislative Assembly in 1844 to serve as sheriff of Mahaska County. Having been elected to that office when the county was formally organized, he was again commissioned in 1845 to perform the services of sheriff in the organization of Marion County. One of the best known and most respected of the early settlers, he was selected as a member of the House of Representatives from Mahaska County in the extra session

of the First General Assembly, held in 1848 in the Old Stone Capitol at Iowa City. During the gold rush he joined the migration to California, where he remained five years before returning to Mahaska County. His very interesting diary of his trip across the plains in 1850 has been printed in the *Annals of Iowa*.

The boyhood of James was lived amidst the stirring events that marked the coming of the pioneers. Oskaloosa was directly on the line of migration up the valley of the Des Moines River. The boy saw the prairie schooners, the ox teams, the hurrying throngs day after day, their eager faces turned to the West. As a child of nine, he watched William W. Chapman, Iowa's first Territorial Delegate in Congress and later one of the founders of *The Oregonian*, start from Oskaloosa for Oregon with an ox team. He saw the late arrivals moving off to their new claims, rude cabins springing up everywhere from which curled the blue smoke that marked a new fireside. In spring and autumn nights shone the glare of distant prairie fires, and off to the west were "the plains", with stories of Indians and buffalo to stir the imagination of frontier youth.

But a boy of fourteen, if he is "poor", must find work and if nothing better, then in a lath mill raking out the sawdust, wheeling it away, and

chopping up the slabs. The pay was meager, the boy delicate, but one must live. In the summer of '53 there was work in the saw and grist mill of Roop and Son, and in winter, school in the old courthouse, taught by G. W. Drake. The next summer, work at five dollars per month in the store of Dawson & Waggoner, and in winter, school and, most important of all, a new boy friend, Marshall Byers, destined to fame as Major S. H. M. Byers, a distinguished poet and soldier in the Civil War. The friendship thus begun, flourishing now for seventy-eight years, is still intimate, precious, keenly alive. It is still "Jim" and "Marsh", as in the old days.

In '55 there was work in the store of Cooper & Kinsman mornings and evenings and more schooling. One morning, Jim was sweeping the sidewalk in front of the store when along came a boy looking for a yard of muslin on which to paint. Jim sold him the muslin and then and there was added to the pals Jim and Marsh a third, by name John, later Iowa's noted statesman — John F. Lacey. These three, Jim, Marsh, and John, from that day were inseparable as chums and in ties of loving friendship.

Jim's younger brother, William, was included in the group of boyhood friends, though his connection was not as intimate as the relations of the

triumvirate. A man of great learning and culture, trained in the medical profession, he lived most of his life in Colorado. His son, born on an anniversary of John F. Lacey's birthday, was named William Lacey Edmundson in honor of the life-long attachment of the Edmundsons and Laceys. He, too, is a doctor, and served as a major in the United States army during the World War.

In 1856 Jim Edmundson found work in the office of the County Treasurer, and in the store of Lee & Howard. During the following year there was a trip afoot to Newton to visit Uncle David Edmundson, who offered to keep the boy and send him to school. The man of ninety-four remembers with keen gratitude the debt to Uncle David for the training of those two years, to April '59. In '58 he clerked in the drug store of Chambers & Brown at Newton for thirteen dollars per month. One day a youth came in wishing to buy a blacking brush. Edmundson sold him the brush and there began an intimate friendship with Frank T. Campbell, later Lieutenant Governor. The boys slept together in the old courthouse in Newton. But health gave way with the indoor work and two or three months were spent driving about in search of its restoration.

In 1859 the youth went back to Oskaloosa and began the study of the law in the office of Seevers,

Williams & Seevers. Byers did the same in the office of William Loughridge. The two pals roomed together in the old courthouse, where Mr. Edmundson admits many more hours were devoted to music and the poets than to the law. Byers had a guitar and Edmundson a flute. Thus did eternal youth invoke the muses in '59 and '60!

The winter of 1860 brought the session of the Eighth General Assembly and Jim got a place as page in the House at the unheard-of pay of two dollars a day. Charles Aldrich was Chief Clerk and Ed R. Clapp Sergeant-at-arms. The session was held in Des Moines in the Old Brick State House on Court Avenue — warmed by a stove and lit by candles. As the dignity of the House forbade lighting a candle twice, the partly burned candles were the much-prized perquisite of the janitor! Edmundson stopped at the Grout House, a hotel situated on Court Avenue where the International Harvester Building now stands. The rates were four dollars a week for room and board.

Among the members in that Assembly whom Edmundson remembers vividly were N. B. Baker, Henry Clay Caldwell, Rush Clark, Samuel Merrill, and Jonathan C. Hall. It was the custom at the end of the session to present each member with a set of Iowa *Reports*, of which there were then only a few volumes. On this occasion J. C. Hall

arose and moved that a set be given to "J. D. Edmundson, first messenger of this house", the "best employee we've had this winter" — and it was done. Mr. Edmundson's volumes of Blackstone, the Iowa *Reports*, and the volume of Morris *Reports* given to his father in the First General Assembly, marked by many marginal notes, have been given to the State Library.

In 1860 came admission to the bar. During the following winter, James taught school at Rose Hill. Early in the next summer, he made a trip of from four to five hundred miles on horseback across the prairies of southwestern Iowa in search of health and a location in which to begin his law practice. His story of that trip is rich in dramatic interest — the great sweep of the prairies, the wild flowers, the swaying blue-stem, the long distances without a house, the violent storms encountered, the wild game, and the white eggs of the prairie chickens spotting the hillsides where the prairie fires had run. On west as far as Glenwood, he rode, then north, stopping often of nights at some settler's cabin, once where Anita now stands, and on, unmindful of roads until, on the twelfth day, Des Moines was reached.

The trip was momentous, for in June, 1861, with his whole fortune of $115.15 in his pocket, mainly his savings as page, he went by stage to Glen-

wood and joined William Hale, an old schoolmate, in the law. Hale was later Governor of Wyoming. But clients were scarce and at the end of the first year he had but fifty-six dollars left and had spent two hundred and fifty. He knew to a penny all he had received and spent, and through a busy life rich in benefactions he has yet kept careful accounts, always strictly down to date. That winter, to recoup his fortune, he earned four hundred dollars keeping books in the store of Staude & Anderson, going back thereafter to the work of Hale & Edmundson.

One day while at Glenwood he was surprised, even alarmed, to receive by mail a large official envelope. He thought it must be meant for some other man. Not so. It contained a commission for him as Deputy Provost Marshal. He knew of no such office or why the commission was sent to him. But there it was, his appointment to the office, with a list of deserters whom he was to arrest. It was too good to be true. The salary was a hundred dollars per month! When he had recovered from his astonishment he busily set to work. Later he was made also Assistant Assessor and Deputy Collector of Internal Revenue. Everybody and everything were taxed. There was plenty to do. But he does not know to this day who suggested his appointment.

Through these years of young manhood, though in delicate health, he was not afraid of work, was methodical, careful in expenditure, scrupulously honest, inordinately shy, rich in human sympathy, jealous of a good name, determined to avoid debt, passionately fond of good books, a zealous champion of correct English, and always looking for wider opportunities. And he was responding to the stimulus of a thrilling era. The young State was a hive of industry — people scattering over the broad prairies, starting towns, building houses, breaking the sod, or moving across the Missouri, bound for the far reaches of the great Northwest. The horizon beckoning with the lure of the unknown, States to be built and officered, mines to be worked, millions of acres of mighty forests to be exploited, locomotives shrieking through lonely canyons, everything yet to be done — a free people with the blood of all the world in their veins, their tents struck, and on their way. Thus in 1866 the lot of James Depew Edmundson, aged twenty-eight, was cast in surroundings rich in possibility, full of challenge to the best that was in him. Amidst a thousand temptations, he had chosen a clean, fair path, certain to lead to a career of splendid service to his fellow men.

JAMES B. WEAVER

The Full Tide

The chance in a wider field came in 1866. Edmundson wrote to a lawyer in Council Bluffs, D. C. Bloomer, husband of Mrs. Bloomer of dress-reform fame, proposing a partnership. Bloomer answered that he had been thinking of the same thing. And so in April '66 Edmundson was off from Glenwood by lumber wagon for Council Bluffs, and the firm letterhead soon read "Bloomer & Edmundson, Attorneys at Law Real Estate and Insurance Agents". The junior partner, who had a passion for correct English, was disturbed by the wording of the letterhead, but he was highly pleased with his new associations.

Edmundson roomed with the Bloomers. Curiously enough, back in the little school in Oskaloosa in '55 or '56, James had impersonated the husband of Mrs. Bloomer in a school play and was made the subject of this doggerel:

> Mr. Bloomer says in his own language
> That he is henpecked to the soul
> Because he's been lately brought under
> Proud woman's domestic control.

Now, ten years later, by a curious turn of Fate the boy had become a partner of Bloomer and was

living in his home. For Mrs. Bloomer, who was a devoted follower and friend of Susan B. Anthony and Mrs. Elizabeth C. Stanton, he formed a high regard.

In 1866 Council Bluffs was thrilled by the prospect of the coming of the Iron Horse. What are now the North Western, the Rock Island, and the C. B. & Q. railroads were racing for the Big Muddy, with Council Bluffs to be the river terminal. In the heart of the nation, potentially the distributing point for the vast plains country, certain to be on the line of the first transcontinental road, Edmundson had wisely chosen his location. With little liking for the rough and tumble practice of the law which marked the period, he was by nature a financier. A keen student of men, careful as a dealer, a good judge of values, he was quickly busy not only with the law but as an investor.

The North Western Railway came in '67, the Q. and Rock Island in '68. The Union Pacific spanned the continent in '69. Land values were low but advancing. Edmundson's first purchase was a tract of one hundred and sixty acres for $250. Soon he sold one forty of it for $200. The rich lands of the Nishnabotna valleys were selling at five dollars and less. He and another bought a fine Mills County quarter section for three dollars

per acre, selling soon at ten dollars. Stirring times!

The steamers came puffing up the river and there was insurance to be written. This became an important line. In 1870, quitting the firm of Bloomer & Edmundson, he started a bank, but retained that connection only a few months. Completion of the first bridge over the Missouri at Council Bluffs in 1873 contributed to the importance of the city as an outfitting point for the great freight trains across the plains. Having purchased a list of non-resident owners of land in Pottawattamie County from the County Treasurer, Edmundson wrote letters to them all. At once he became busy selling, leasing, paying taxes, and acting as legal representative. He prepared maps with every owner's name indorsed across his land.

Those were active and profitable days. Many people found their way to his door. And no wonder. Here was a useful man, young, alert, honest, acquainted with values, reliable. In 1882 he was instrumental in organizing the Citizens State Bank of Council Bluffs and became its president. Occasionally there were trips to Des Moines, in behalf of his varied enterprises. His interests soon overstepped home county lines — on up into Harrison, Plymouth, Sioux, and Lyon and down

into Mills. And in the midst of all this activity, he found time to establish a household. It was in 1871 that he married Miss Jennie Way Hart.

Indicative of his keen sense of financial opportunity was an episode in 1881. Business had taken him to Duluth. Though he spent but one day in the city, he purchased two lots that day for $2100. Five or six years later he sold them for $37,000, including principal and interest.

The cruel blow of Mrs. Edmundson's death came in 1890. In her memory he became interested in the Women's Christian Association Hospital, the name of which was changed to the Jennie Edmundson Memorial Hospital, to which, a recent article in the press states, he has given about $265,000. It is near to his heart. Mrs. Emma Lucas Louie, who has served the hospital association for forty-seven years and is still its president, is a sister of the late Senator Shirley Gilliland. Years that have mounted to four score and eyes that can no longer catch the light of sunset or evening star — lit only by "the light that never was on land or sea" — have brought no lessening of either the skill or devotion of this remarkable woman in her precious task. Mrs. Louie, through the long years of her service, has kept the institution fully abreast of the demands of twentieth century hospital standards. Of this

fine hospital Dr. M. T. MacEachern, then President of the American Hospital Association, embracing all hospitals of the United States and Canada, and Associate Director of the American College of Surgeons for Canadian activities, gave high praise, in a letter to Mr. Edmundson on March 1, 1923.

"Some weeks ago, while attending the American College of Surgeons Sectional meeting in Council Bluffs, I had the extreme pleasure, through Col. Macrae's kindness, of making a thorough inspection of the Jennie Edmundson Memorial Hospital. It was indeed the greatest pleasure to me to know of the splendid work being done in this admirable institution, so well constructed, planned and efficiently equipped. All this, with excellent professional, nursing and business organization, demonstrated to us an example of what a hospital should be. I do not know any finer objective that you could have directed your interests to than a hospital of this type, an institution which will save many lives, not only from suffering and misery, but from death. I congratulate you most sincerely and tell you that all of us who are interested in hospital work and development thoroughly appreciate people like you who accomplish such wonderful things. When I went thru the institution I felt I would like to write

and give you my own personal opinion of your magnificent work, and let me say it was also the opinion of all the group who were associated with me in this meeting."

Mr. Edmundson's answer is characteristic of his innate self-effacement. I give it here.

"My dear Dr. MacEachern:

"I thank you most heartily for your letter of the 1st inst., and for the complimentary things you say about what I have done toward the erection and support of the Jennie Edmundson hospital at Council Bluffs.

"The success of the hospital, however, is due more to Mrs. Louie, President of the Association, than to any one else. She is a woman of great versatility of talent, and excels as an administrative and executive officer, besides having the faculty of making friends readily and winning the confidence of the community.

"Without claiming anything for what I have done, I feel that by giving support to hospitals and kindred institutions, one can do more for the benefit of suffering humanity than in any other way. I sometimes wonder that our men of great wealth do not do more in this line of work.

"Receipt of your letter would have been acknowledged sooner, had I not been detained from my office most of the time since its receipt with a

slight illness, from which I have, however, fully recovered.

"Again thanking you for your kind words of commendation, and wishing you all success in your great work, I remain

Sincerely yours,

James D. Edmundson"

Among Mr. Edmundson's contemporaries and associates in Council Bluffs may be mentioned General Grenville M. Dodge, the bankers Thomas Officer and W. H. M. Pusey, Caleb Baldwin, Horace Everett, and the Tinleys — Matt, Emmet, and Dr. Mary. General Matt Tinley is still often a visitor at the Edmundson home in Des Moines.

In 1894 Mr. Edmundson was married to Mrs. Laura Barclay Kirby of Council Bluffs, a lady of unusual culture and personal charm. After his second marriage Mr. and Mrs. Edmundson travelled extensively in America and abroad. The entire year of 1898 was spent in Europe. Meanwhile, in 1897, he purchased a controlling interest in the First National Bank of Council Bluffs and became its President. His Citizens State Bank went into voluntary liquidation, paying its liabilities in full.

In November, 1900, Mr. and Mrs. Edmundson removed to Des Moines, purchasing the fine

Bentley home at 3333 Grand Avenue, where he still lives. This home, in which Mrs. Edmundson died on November 16, 1908, is replete with mementos of their extensive travels together and reflects the passionate quest of lives rich in sympathy and helpfulness and in devotion to the finest cultural standards.

In what I have said here of a life filled to the brim with business activity and material success, I have given scarcely a hint of the master intellectual passion of a remarkable man. I have reserved that phase of the story for a place by itself, which it deserves as a tale of the major interests of a mind whose intellectual enthusiasms ninety-four years find to-day undimmed, passionate enthusiasms literally as keen now as in any year of a life journey that hastens to round out a century.

JAMES B. WEAVER

Medicine for the Soul

Over the entrance to the library in ancient Thebes was inscribed the legend used as the title for this story. Thus are we reminded that then, as now and forever, for men tossed amidst "the ups and downs of this unstable sphere", there is no haven that better ministers to the vexed spirit than the supreme art and accumulated wisdom held in solution in the best books of the world — the tale in verse and prose of humanity's reaction to the impact of Life.

The blood inheritance of James Depew Edmundson, flowing down on the father's side through many honored generations in Britain and on the mother's side for centuries through a distinguished line of the French nobility, was of no common quality. The privations and meager facilities of pioneer days seemed but to whet to an even keener edge the hunger of the boy for books and the acquisition of knowledge. His schooling was never more than that of the frontier country school of 1845–50. But to make up for scant facilities were certain contacts, notably Uncle David and his love of literature, and on the boy's part the kind of intellectual hunger that marked

Lincoln's boyhood. The boy was very shy, a quality that all the years have not diminished. Very poor and physically delicate, the necessity of training to meet life bore in upon his consciousness. A strong, fine spirit rallied to the task. His life and remarkable intellectual interests are a perfect illustration of how the tough, strong fiber of the spirit may find mastery in the battle of life and flower in superb culture.

From the first he was passionately devoted to the best literature and, as a specialty, the correct use of English. He tells yet with vivid zest how at school he revelled in the analysis of sentences by means of the old scheme of diagrams on the blackboard — like so many diminutive zeppelins. He still maintains there is no better plan to mark the relation of words. He came as youth and in early manhood to avoid incorrect English as a deep humiliation. Slovenly use of one's mother tongue was a real offense. Thus, that letterhead, not of his designing — "Bloomer & Edmundson, Attorneys at Law Real Estate and Insurance Agents" — jarred upon his sensibility. To make certain of his contention that the word "and" should have been inserted before the words "Real Estate", he wrote to Cyrus Northrup, then Professor of English at Yale, and later president of the University of Minnesota. Northrup agreed.

It is with a positive pang that he refers to the Iowa motto on the Washington Monument which reads: "Her affections, like the rivers of her borders flow to an inseparable union", whereas Enoch Eastman's utterance was: "The affections of her people, like the rivers of her borders, flow to an inseparable union". He is hurt to see sacrificed the perfect balance that marked the real utterance, and the mutilation of the author's lovely phrase.

In the fifties he acquired his first Webster's Dictionary, for which he paid $4.50. Only an insatiable hunger could explain so prodigious an expenditure in his circumstances. He has owned every edition that has since been issued. Through the years he has used and accumulated perhaps the most remarkable private library in the State of authorities on correct English and of anthologies of famous quotations.

Mr. Edmundson has long taken a great host of magazines. During a recent call I noted these on his study table: the *National Geographic, Atlantic, Popular Mechanics, Pathfinder, Forum, North American Review, Iowa Journal of History and Politics, Literary Digest, American,* and the *Times Book Review.* He has *Scribners, Harpers,* and the *Century* bound from the beginning until a few years ago. He has from the first the Chicago

Daily News Almanac, the *World Almanac*, except the first six or seven volumes, the *Tribune Almanac* from 1838 to its suspension of publication in recent years, the *Iowa Official Register* from the issue prepared by Frank D. Jackson in 1886, the *Annals of Iowa* (all three series), bound, from the first in 1863, the *Biographical Directory of the American Congress* including every member from 1774 to 1927. For years he has subscribed to the New York *Times Book Review*. Each week he turns eagerly to "Queries and Answers", where are set out the questions of those eager mortals asking where can be found the poem containing the lines " . . . ", and the answers that come from all about the rim of the globe. He has furnished many a clew and launched many a question.

A year or two ago, before he arose from his bed, there came marching into his consciousness at ninety-two years the words, "While Greece arose divinely free and dauntless as her own dark sea." Where did they come from? Who said it? For more than a year there was no rest for Edmundson — searching, searching everywhere. Everybody else searched too — librarians, *Times Book Review* editors, "sharks" who make such quests a specialty. No use. No clew. Could I have made them up? Absurd, no such luck! Thrilling

words, spurring the imagination! But at last, and here at home came the answer. Forrest B. Spaulding, Des Moines librarian, found the lines in Robert Montgomery's "Starlight on Marathon". So peace settled again at 3333 Grand.

The "Lexicographer's Column" in the *Literary Digest* is a perennial delight. With its famous editor, Frank H. Vizetelly, a lexicographer of world renown and editor of the *Standard Dictionary,* Mr. Edmundson has enjoyed a friendship of nearly forty years. They engaged in much interesting correspondence from time to time on the use and origin of words. The following extract from a letter to Mr. Vizetelly in 1919 gives Edmundson's attitude on the subject of the accurate use of the mother tongue.

"I have for a long time thought that a practical and accurate knowledge of the Mother Tongue of a people, should stand at the head not only of its essential branches, but also of the so-called accomplishments. I cannot help thinking that such a knowledge would be the greatest accomplishment that could be acquired by a student. It also seems to me that teachers in both our common schools and our colleges give too little attention to the study of their Mother Tongue. I have before me as I write, an advertisement of a prominent Western College, in which it speaks of the Rocke-

fellers, the Morgans, the Ames, the Goulds and others, the 'Ames' meaning the Ameses who were instrumental in the building of the Union Pacific Railroad. I really think such an error is inexcusable in the literature of such an institution."

Mr. Edmundson has two books, highly prized, given to him by Vizetelly, namely: *A Desk-Book of Twenty-five Thousand Words Frequently Mispronounced* and *Essentials of English Speech and Literature,* the latter inscribed by the author, "To my good friend and kindly critic." This friendship with a kindred spirit has been an unfailing joy. From New York on November 21, 1923, Mr. Vizetelly sent birthday greetings to his friend in Des Moines. "My dear Mr. Edmundson", he wrote. "On this, the Eighty-fifth Anniversary of your birth, I come as one who 'also serves' to offer you my warmest congratulations.

"We have corresponded with each other for many years — almost thirty, I think, — and, notwithstanding the fact that sometimes our views were at variance, not one line, nay, not even one word has passed between us that could mar that perfect amity born of mutual appreciation and friendly understanding that continues between us to this day.

"You who can look back to the times when railroads were unknown, when steam navigation was

in its infancy, when the telegraph and telephone were yet undreamed, when mankind had not conquered the air or mastered the sea, have been blessed by an All-Wise Providence with a fullness of years that commands the good will of mankind and the love of all people.

"As you look back, well may you remind us that our years are spent as a tale that is told, and that the tale varies between man and man, in youth and age, in grief and joy, in laughter and tears, from day to day until the days roll into years — and the years, how quickly they pass!

"May the future hold for you a promise for greater blessings than the past, and looking backward as you march toward the golden sunrise of a new dawn, may you find that Peace which passeth all understanding that brings comfort and contentment to all who have trod in the steps of the Master.

God bless you!

Very heartily yours,

Frank H. Vizetelly"

Mr. Edmundson has for years been in frequent correspondence with authorities on English all about the country on correct phrasing and the origin of various quotations and poems. In one case, relating to John Luckey McCreery, once a resident of Iowa and the author of the well-known

poem "There Is No Death", attributed by Burton S. Stevenson, in the first edition of his *Home Book of Verse*, to Bulwer-Lytton, Edmundson collected the proofs and secured credit in later editions for McCreery, the true author. It was a common error, against which McCreery had protested for many years with slight success. Stevenson has since told the story of the controversy in his book of *Famous Single Poems*.

In many cases Edmundson has taken the pains to furnish information on authenticity of verse or quotation eagerly sought in some far corner of the nation. His collection of data relating to such matters is voluminous. Inquiries come to him constantly and always arouse his keen interest and active coöperation. As recently as November, 1932, came a request from Alfred H. Holt, Instructor in English at Williams College, asking the pronunciation of the words "Iowa" and "Des Moines". As to the former, Edmundson referred him to Frank Luther Mott's fine article on the subject in the *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*. Such services give him the utmost delight, as does the perusal of Mr. Holt's *Wild Names I Have Met*, just obtained.

Mr. Edmundson commissioned the well-known American sculptor, Sherry Edmundson Fry, to fashion a statue of the famous Iowa Indian, Chief

Mahaska, for presentation to the city of his youth. Of the working model the great sculptor Frederick MacMonnies wrote to Mr. Edmundson on September 7, 1906, that it was "faithfully modelled and well designed, and in the subsequent elaboration of the final large model will not fail to bring fame to its author and add beauty to your city." The small model received honorable mention in the Paris Salon in 1906 and in the following year the completed statue was awarded the gold medal. Mainly on the strength of this work came to Mr. Fry the coveted National Prize to Rome in 1908. The statue was presented in 1909. It stands in the public square in Oskaloosa and is regarded as one of the finest Indian statues extant.

JAMES B. WEAVER

Mr. Edmundson's interest in literature, of course, stretches far beyond matters of technique. There are two rooms at 3333 Grand Avenue devoted especially to the student. The smaller is his study upstairs, given over to reading, correspondence, investigation, bulletins, periodicals, inquiries, quotations, casual delving into books of reference, and the like. The tables and shelves are well filled with books and pamphlets and current material, all without disorder, however, for in every activity he has found real delight in order and system.

To this room come first the notable books of the day which he reads with avidity — the Ludwig biographies of Bismarck, Napoleon, and the Kaiser, Snyder's new volume on Burns, Jeans's *The Universe Around Us* (which Edmundson pronounces "a devastating book"), Warshow's *Story of Wall Street,* Smith's *John Jacob Astor,* Van Loon's Rembrandt, and others. His interest, which is omnivorous, ranges from the classics to the publications strictly down to date. Fortunately his sight has been such that steady reading has been possible, a matter of immeasurable mo-

ment and especially to one largely dependent upon books to consume the lengthening years.

Downstairs is the fine library where is to be found a rich collection of the great books of the last eighty years or more. The room is large, thirty-two feet by sixteen, with cases of books on both sides and one end. At the other end is a large table with dictionaries. On the north side also is a very large fireplace, the fire-back of which is a charioteer and horses, from Ben Hur, in relief in metal, while above the mantel is a large plaster model showing a facade of the Coliseum. In those cases, with their glass fronts, is one of the finest and best selected private collections of books to be found in the State. Also, on the north wall near the fireplace is the reference desk with its high stool and shaded lamp, its cases on both sides filled with such works as the *Age of Chivalry* and *Age of Fable* by Bulfinch, Harper's *Encyclopedia of United States History,* Thomas's *Pronouncing Dictionary of Biography and Mythology,* Appleton's *Cyclopedia of American Biography,* the annual reports of the Adjutant General of the State of Iowa during the Civil War, the *Encyclopedia Americana,* Lippincott's *New Gazetteer of the World,* a multitude of other reference publications, and a number of fine atlases.

Mr. Edmundson has long been a passionate

student of Lincoln. He has read and owns among others the following authorities: Ward H. Lamon's Lincoln (he knew Lamon at Carlsbad years ago), Barton, Holland, Tarbell, Stevenson, Laughlin (*Death of Lincoln*), Herndon, Raymond, Cathey (*Genesis of Lincoln*), Dittenhoefer (*How We Elected Lincoln*), *In Lincoln's Chair, The Perfect Tribute,* Drinkwater's play, Sumner (*Lincoln as a Man Among Men*), *Abraham Lincoln A New Portrait* by Hertz, and, of course, the Debates. His volume of the latter is all underscored and full of marginal markings. He is of the opinion that the greatness of Lincoln's mind was never more powerfully portrayed than in the debates with Douglas.

The length of his life has given opportunity to gather notable books of popular writers in particular periods, such as Ik Marvel, Artemis Ward, Petroleum V. Nasby, Joe Miller's *Jest Book, Prue and I* by Curtis, Josh Billings, Josiah Allen's Wife, Sut Lovingood, Mrs. Partington, Widow Bedott, Fanny Fern, and, of course, all the old favorites — Hawthorne, Dickens, Scott.

Though an adherent of no formal creed or organization, he has a host of books on the religions of the world, their conflicts with science, and the growth of liberal thought. To show the breadth of his interest in this theme, a survey of his library

shelves reveals volumes on the history of Christianity, immortality, Mohammedism, spiritualism, supernatural phenomena, faith, comparative religion, and interpretations of the Bible. Philosophers as diverse as Paine and Nietzsche are represented. And of course there are Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, Spencer, Hegel, Draper, and others.

He is passionately devoted to the great poets and quotes at length from memory. A favorite study since youth is Poe, on which subject he is an authority. His library contains several editions of Poe's works, as well as the best which has been written about that literary genius. Many parts of "The Haunted Palace" are stamped on his memory, notably those lines rich in their initial imagery yet carrying their note of nostalgia as they close:

> Banners yellow, glorious, golden,
> On its roof did float and flow
> (This — all this — was in the olden
> Time long ago).

In "The Valley of Unrest" he regrets the fancy that led Poe to omit in publication these lines with which the poem began as first written:

> Far away — far away —
> Far away — as far at least
> Lies that valley as the day
> Down within the golden east —
> All things lovely — are not they
> Far away — far away?

Obviously the words "at least" are far from poetical but the haunting appeal of the remainder one would say might carry even that burden. For "Israfel", "Annabel Lee", "Dreams", "Lenore", "The Coliseum", "Ulalume", "The Raven", "For Annie", his ninety-four years have in no degree weakened their mystical charm. For three quarters of a century the brilliant genius and tragic career of Poe have held a fascination for Edmundson notwithstanding his frequent comment, "I wish he had been a more admirable character" — a kind of poignant regret such as a father might feel for the waywardness of a gifted son. A new book on Poe sets his blood to tingling.

He faces life and death with a superb spirit. Clear-eyed and unafraid, and aware of the mystery at every turn, he has found no time for cynicism or bitterness. Tolerant, notable to-day and always for his response to the obligation to share in the social service of his time, keenly alive to the major problems confronting the world and with definite convictions regarding their solution, his life has been ruled by the wise philosophy of a great soul. He sometimes quotes these words which, as I recollect it, are from the Chinese: "When we come into the world we cry while everyone laughs. Let us so live that when we die, everyone will cry, while we laugh."

He has a prodigious memory stored with passages that are immortal. It is with a smile that he quotes from Coleridge:

> When I was young? Ah, woful when!
> Ah for the change since now and then!

Or this:

> 'Tis the month before the month of May
> And Spring comes slowly up this way.

He draws from Keats many a thrilling passage, as that of the sea:

> It keeps eternal whisperings around
> Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell
> Gluts twice ten thousand caverns.

Or that line from the "Ode to a Grecian Urn":

> Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time.

Shelley is another favorite, to whom his memory returns again and again.

> How wonderful is death, death and his brother, sleep!

The verses "To a Skylark" he has made his own and his memory is haunted by the lines at Shelley's grave, from *The Tempest*:

> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange.

Looking about the world to-day he recalls with longing Shelley's lines in "Queen Mab":

And when reason's voice,
Loud as the voice of nature, shall have waked
The nations; and mankind perceive that vice
Is discord, war, and misery; that virtue
Is peace, and happiness and harmony.

One Sunday afternoon I sat in Mr. Edmundson's library with him and Major Byers — both then aged ninety-two years. I had received and read to them a letter from Constantinople. As I mentioned the place from which it came, Edmundson interrupted with Byron's lines:

Though I fly to Istambol,
Athens holds my heart and soul.

And Byers, the poet, not to be outdone, leaned back in his chair and, as if at ninety-two years to justify his Muse, repeated these wonderful lines by Austin Dobson:

All passes. Art alone
Enduring stays to us;
The Bust outlasts the throne, —
The Coin, Tiberius;
Even the Gods must go;
Only the lofty Rhyme
Not countless years o'erthrow, —
Not long array of time.

Long before his first trip abroad, certain lines from the German kept ringing in his ears, inscribed, it was said, on the wall of a chapel in the

Old World. The day came when he transcribed from the walls of the little chapel in the churchyard at St. Gilgen, Austrian Tyrol, these lines of unknown origin, translated by Longfellow:

Look not mournfully into the Past. It comes not back again. Wisely improve the Present. It is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy Future, without fear, and with a manly heart.

He sympathizes with Schiller's famous statement, "The Gods themselves are powerless against stupidity".

The sea is a theme to which he turns often as the one phase of nature untouched by time and which man can not render commonplace. On this he quotes Byron's lovely lines:

Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow
Such as creation's dawn beheld thou rollest now.

And the lines of the same poet, who so loved the sea:

I wantoned with thy breakers . . .
And trusted to thy billows far and near,
And laid my hand upon thy mane, — as I do here.

There is space here to give but a hint of the intensity of the appeal to his spirit made by the imperishable gems of literature that the world has come to revere. The commanding fact with respect to the subject of this sketch is the quality of

eternal youth that marks the mind and spirit. His intellectual enthusiasms are not one whit dulled or subdued by the gathering years. To a new book or poem, or even one line, instinct with the spark of genius, he responds literally with the eagerness of youth — touched at times with a joy so keen and poignant as to bring tears from fountains that almost a century has not made dry.

Physically he has always been delicate, but obviously there was in his inheritance a constitutional tenacity of life of unusual strength. At ninety-four, though of course not in active business now for over a quarter of a century, he has an office and a desk which in seasonable weather he visits regularly. If limbs refuse to hurry as in the past, or ears to catch the voice as easily as once, the gathering years have taken no toll of spirit or interest or grasp in his contact with the world of to-day — whether it be the world of literature or that of current problems and events. With great capacity as a business man has been from the beginning an equal sense of social obligation — a willingness, universally recognized, to do his full share in lifting the burden from lives less fortunate.

How rich a life, how full of lessons to us all, how truly American! The people of Iowa can not fail to feel a glowing pride in this splendid

native Iowan, in whose ninety-four years shine so resplendently honor, industry, human sympathy, material success, service to society, and a fervent response to the intellectual triumphs of the great minds of all time.

Of the famous trio mentioned in the earlier part of this sketch, "Jim, Marsh, and John", the last named has passed on. But Jim and Marsh remain, the latter reaching his ninety-fourth milestone exactly to a day four months before Jim reached his. I will close with the lines of Major Byers to his old pal on the occasion of the last anniversary of the birthday of Mr. Edmundson.

To Jim at Ninety-Four

Well Jim, across the desert
A health to you and me.
And health to all the old friends
Wherever they may be.

How well we two have weathered
The change of many a moon —
Not all was bleak December,
Not all was rosy June.

Life's but a game, we've played it
The best that we knew how;
Perhaps 'twas worth the candle,
I sometimes doubt it now.

Life's but a game, we've played it
  These four and ninety years,
Sometimes with fun and laughter,
  Sometimes with bitter tears.

So now upon the bleachers
  We sit and watch the game,
Whoever gains or loses
  To us 'tis much the same.

But midst the wild hurrahing
  And music of the band,
As in the days now vanished
  Again I take your hand.

Good luck, Jim, and good wishes
  Whate'er the fates may be —
One glass to those who love us,
  And one to you and me.

— Marsh

JAMES B. WEAVER

Comment by the Editor

GOOD FORTUNE

If a man's reach should exceed his grasp, then the course of life must be uphill. Aspiration looks aloft, not below. Supreme accomplishment is never effortless: the heights can not be scaled by coasting, nor the wilderness subdued by wishing.

As the youth, hopeful of achievement and distinction, hurries forward toward the goal of his ambition, he cultivates his talents, welcomes opportunity, and observes the mishaps of his predecessors. He seldom pauses for a backward glance. There is no time for retrospection: his eyes are fixed on the future and his place is on the frontier. He is conscious of many others on the way, striving as valiantly as he — contemporary pilgrims on the broad highway of human progress. Some tire or turn aside, many seek the easy grade that leads around the hill, others follow the deep-rutted path their fathers trod, and only a few unfaltering pioneers climb directly toward the pinnacle of their vision. He who is steadfast and bold deserves the rewards of wealth and honor.

Eventually, when the summit is attained, the erstwhile youth, grown philosophic in the years of

his maturity, may welcome leisure, which is the recompense of age. In that calm period of relaxation, he will contemplate the meaning of his long career. Instead of a financier, he may become, perchance, a connoisseur of words, or patronize the arts. From the vantage of purpose satisfied, he may review events and calculate the worth of men and things. Wars, panics, booms, and other fashions he sees in true perspective. Through his magnificent accumulation of experience, the panorama of the times may be interpreted. Distinguished people are within his own acquaintance. In the course of his activities, he has discovered boon companions whose friendship outlives life itself.

At the age of ninety-four, a man may be serene indeed, in the satisfaction of having seen and known and been esteemed.

J. E. B.

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