

## Comment by the Editor

### *IN A BIBLE COMMONWEALTH*

First came the Jesuit missionaries, not many but mighty in faith. Among the early Yankee settlers were Calvinistic disciples who believed in learning from books, but the zealous Methodists were in Iowa before them, building backfires of salvation to thwart the spreading flames of infidelity. Nevertheless, Abner Kneeland, avowed Pantheist, founded a village of his followers who were willing to make a holiday of the Sabbath. Men of every creed were welcome, for in Iowa freedom prevailed — freedom of worship commensurate with the depth of religious prejudice. Monasteries and communistic inspirationists, Mennonites and Mormons, fanatics and atheists, Catholics and Protestants, all found sanctuary on the prairies of Iowa.

The history of a Commonwealth, like a brilliant diamond, has many facets. Each event or institution displays a phase of life in some particular form, just as a polished surface may reflect a single ray of light. Viewed as a composite whole, the actions, thoughts, and feelings of a people constitute the perfect gem of history. Yet every flashing

element may be perceived in its separate reality, not disassociated but as an integral part. Religion is a tremendously important unit in the history of Iowa.

If the spiritual experience of the people of Iowa were conceived to be a process, the religious evolution of almost any locality might serve as a typical specimen. Take Council Bluffs. The superstitions of the Indians, the profanity of the traders, the devotion of Father De Smet, the evangelism of the Mormons, the faith of orthodox creeds, and even the delusions of a fanatic have all contributed to the spiritual growth of that community.

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