

Comment by the Editor

HARD WORK

The democracy of toil is a prominent characteristic of pioneer society. Everybody works, and the tasks are never done. It was so when the Israelites came out of Egypt, it was true of the Pilgrims who founded New England, and hard work was the common experience and expectation of the families who settled in Iowa. The early Iowans brought with them and established here a tradition of general employment without regard for age or birth or creed. Idleness was almost immoral.

Dealers in fine phrases have extolled the glory of work. "Heaven is blessed with perfect rest", they say, "but the blessing of earth is toil." Soft-handed orators have acclaimed the dignity of labor, and poets have sung of "the horny hands of toil". They speak of work as a delight like "a bird feels in flying, or a fish in darting through the water". Little they know of the work of the pioneers.

To the men and women who founded this State hard work meant long hours, utter fatigue, self-denial, steadfast purpose, fortitude, and courageous dreams — all put into action. Up before the stars went out, they hurried all day long; yet darkness came before their stint was done, and the days were all too few. In the scorching heat of a summer noon the settler, working alone in his harvest field, often

raised his "hot eyes to the angry sun" that would "go down too soon", while in the humble cabin his wife was busy from morning till night with her washing and mopping, knitting and mending, cooking and churning, and withal the care of the children. Weak — perhaps with malarial fever — and too weary to fully undress, they stumbled to bed at night and awoke at the first cock crow in the morning, stiff and sore and unrefreshed. Day after day and year after year, early and late, they continued the lonely, monotonous struggle. In time their souls were calloused by the terrible drudgery, but they never lost hope. Debt, pestilence, hunger, and crop failure served only to harden the lines in their faces, for they worked with their eyes on the future.

Wealth has come to the people of Iowa, yet the pioneer tradition of labor persists. Many have no need to work but they are not content to quit. Even the present generation, trained in the ways of their fathers, like Fremont McConkey, feel a sense of guilt when they move to town and sleep after daybreak or wear a white collar to work. Some have gone to live in Los Angeles, but of those who remain almost everyone works — or pretends to. John Hay was wont to "take a lot of historical notes" in his trunk when he went on a vacation journey in order "to escape the envy of the Gods" and to lower his spirits with the thought of neglected work. Apparently the people of Iowa are also ashamed to be care free. Perhaps their employment is often ostensible and

the tasks they create are really devised to prick their conscience with the thought of unperformed duties. Be that as it may, there seems to be scant time for leisure in Iowa. Here idleness is still considered a kind of misconduct.

J. E. B