

Youth Serving and Being Served

Work for and by youth has occupied a conspicuous place in Congregational history from the first. The "Pilgrim Fathers" were young people. Pastor John Robinson died at fifty, in 1625, after illness and other reverses had prevented him from coming to America. And the Puritan clergy of New England were but youths when they fled to Boston and vicinity from the policies of Archbishop William Laud. As Eleazer Wheelock had responded to the Indians' need for a school in 1770 by planting Dartmouth College in the wilderness of New Hampshire, so others kept faith with a Christian commitment, and in time there came to be many colleges of Congregational origin and background, stretching like a chain from coast to coast and meeting the needs of the new settlers in the West.

One day in June, 1844, a group of Congregational and New School Presbyterian ministers, returning from a missionary convention at Cleveland on the steamer *Chesapeake*, were discussing western education. Before they reached Milwaukee, the men had completed their plans. Asa Turner of Denmark, Iowa Territory, had unfolded the design of the Iowa College Association, arrived

at months earlier, and all agreed to help. Thus, the Beloit, Rockford, and Iowa colleges came into existence at about the same time, all three having Congregational and Presbyterian backgrounds and sponsorship. In addition to private benefactions, assistance came from the American Education Society and the American Home Missionary Society. The Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West, formed in 1843 to assist the small western colleges struggling to their feet in the wake of the panic of 1837, helped later.

A board of trustees was chosen for Iowa College at Davenport in 1846. The constitution was adopted the next year, and the first building, measuring 36x55 feet, erected. Instruction, begun in 1848, was "on the level of a good academy." Iowa College in 1859 was removed to the new colony at the heart of the state, founded by the Rev. Josiah B. Grinnell who had begun a university.

At Iowa's western edge in 1857 Tabor College was established by Fremont County pioneers who brought the antislavery impulse from Congregational Oberlin College in Ohio. The Rev. William M. Brooks was Tabor's first president. For years, difficult tasks were well performed, but Congregationalism found its natural center at Grinnell, and Tabor was closed in 1927.

Legrand Christian Institute was organized in

1865 by the Rev. J. P. Watson of Marshalltown and the Rev. D. M. Lines of Legrand, two ministers of the Christian denomination. The Iowa Central Christian Conference approved their plans and provided the necessary funds for the opening of Legrand, eventually controlled by the Iowa State Christian Conference. However, one disaster after another impeded its way, then in 1885 the roof of the college building was carried off by a tornado. Finally in 1889 school reopened under the Rev. D. M. Helfenstein and his colleagues. Nine years later its continuance as Palmer College was made possible by a grant from Francis A. Palmer of New York City. Both preparatory and collegiate departments were maintained, but in 1912 the college was transferred to Albany, Missouri.

It has been at Grinnell College that Iowa Congregational Christians have felt the pulse-beat of the entire denominational life, although Grinnell's program is nonsectarian in character. Women were first admitted in 1860. The first college president was Rev. George F. Magoun, who held office from 1865 to 1884. His successors have been George A. Gates, Dan F. Bradley, John H. T. Main, John S. Nollen, and, since 1940, Samuel N. Stevens as Grinnell's sixth president. "Building has been the keynote of President Stevens' administration, both in physical resources and in academic achievements." College enrollment for

1949-50 was 1,113 students; the teaching faculty numbered 86. In addition to her notable program of instruction, counseling, and student activities, Grinnell has a dormitory system probably unique among institutions of her size.

In keeping with the design of her administration — to provide opportunities for expression of Christian ideals in service — Grinnell, since 1915, has maintained a vital interest in world movements through "Grinnell-in-China" — the embodiment of the idea of perpetuating "the missionary spirit of the Iowa Band." Until recently, two academies were maintained at Tehchow, Shantung, but the "exact future of the project" is rendered "uncertain" by present conditions in the Far East.

Iowa Congregationalists once dreamed of having four academies in operation, one at each corner of the state, but most of this dream was not realized. Thus, in the 1860's, there was the Bradford Academy in Chickasaw County, begun by the Rev. J. K. Nutting, pastor of the "Little Brown Church in the Vale," and kept by his nephew, William P. Bennett until 1877. At Hull, in Sioux County, similar efforts were made, after 1884, by the Rev. J. B. Chase, but his institution closed with the appearance of the high school. Likewise, the academy at Wilton Junction, operated by the Davenport Congregational Association, succeeded but a few years. In this instance, Nebraska German Congregationalists merged their work, re-

sulting in the German-English college at Wilton. In time the assets were transferred to Redfield, South Dakota, and still later to Yankton College. Of the four academies opened by Iowa Congregationalists, only Denmark was successful. The Rev. Henry K. Edson, after 1852, gave "a new era of expanding influence" to this academy, whose enrollment once reached 250 students. A township high school now replaces it.

Since the 1920's, youth work in the Congregational churches has been chiefly organized as the Pilgrim Fellowship, by conferences and by states, and, at the national level, as the National Pilgrim Fellowship. One of Iowa's own young people, Miss Betty Long, now Mrs. Myrvan A. Heinemann, was chosen national vice-president and, in 1947, attended the World Convention of the United Christian Youth Fellowship at Oslo, Norway. Prior to that event, however, during the summer of 1939, on the very eve of World War II, Iowa delegates Walter Staves and Thomas Keehn attended the "Christus Victor" conference of youth at Amsterdam.

Iowa Pilgrim Fellowship (IPF) has had excellent advisers in Dr. and Mrs. R. J. Montgomery and Dr. and Mrs. Virgil E. Foster. Each association has its own distinct organization, as does each local church; but everyone participates in electing a state-wide administration. Presidents of IPF since 1945 have been Don Yungclas of Webster

City, Scott Libbey of Fort Dodge, and Mart Bailey of Emmetsburg, while in 1951 Miss Norma Linka of Sioux City is President. Features of IPF are the "Christ's Work Day" and "Pilgrim Crusade," calling for fuller dedication of one's life and possessions. In 1948-49, IPF members gave more than \$10,000 to state and national work through sharing their income from farm, shop, office, factory, and other lucrative services. Summer camps and conferences are held at Camp Wapsie Y and elsewhere to plan the year's programs, and association rallies are held in the fall and spring. The *Iowa Pilgrim Log* is issued monthly. The United Student Fellowship, growing out of IPF, holds great possibilities of further development of youth activities.

At Iowa's three state institutions of higher learning, the Congregational Christian pastors in Ames, Cedar Falls, and Iowa City assist with the student programs. "Frisbie House" in Ames is Conference-owned. Student fellowship groups are also sponsored at Grinnell College, with the local Congregational church taking charge. This field is now receiving intensive study, and new developments will doubtless soon be forthcoming.