

Moses Willard Bartlett

Moses Willard Bartlett was born at Bath, New Hampshire, on February 26, 1834. Impelled by the impulse and will to teach, he prepared himself for his life work in Dartmouth College. Immediately upon his graduation in 1857, he was offered a lucrative position in a mercantile firm in the East. To the disappointment of his would-be employers and of many of his friends, this proffer he rejected, and steadfastly sought his career in the less remunerative but, to him, more attractive engagements of the classroom and the college campus. For the privilege of guiding youth into the paths of wisdom and virtue, he gladly turned his back upon the common man's aspiration for wealth and its concomitants — a sacrifice for the good of his fellows, as noble as it is rare.

His first professorial position was in Western College, located at Western, Iowa. There he taught for ten years and, during an interim, served for one year as acting president of the college. While at Western, he was married to Miss Julia Abbott, an accomplished woman who courageously bore with him the hardships of pioneering. He served for six years as principal of Denmark Academy at Denmark, Iowa, and for

the five following years held a similar position in Scotland County Academy at Memphis, Missouri.

One of the first acts of the Board of Trustees of the Iowa State Normal School was the election of Professor Bartlett to the senior professorship of that institution. His culture and his reputation as an instructor in Iowa schools of higher learning made him the board's logical choice for this honor. Practically all his college work was dedicated to the State of his adoption. He brought the culture of New England to Iowa during the adolescent period of the State's development. Few people realize what a tremendous influence was exerted upon educational policies in Iowa by such men as Moses Willard Bartlett.

He was a gentleman of the old school. His accurate scholarship, his urbanity, his deference to his compeers, his freedom from ostentatious display, his familiarity with the man with the scepter and the man with the hoe marked him as one whose honor could be trusted always and whose friendship was a thing to be desired.

Though he chose to make his home and carve out his career in the West, still he was justly proud of his Yankee origin and he tenaciously adhered to many of the idioms and provincialisms that during his childhood infixed themselves by force of habit into the warp and woof of his per-

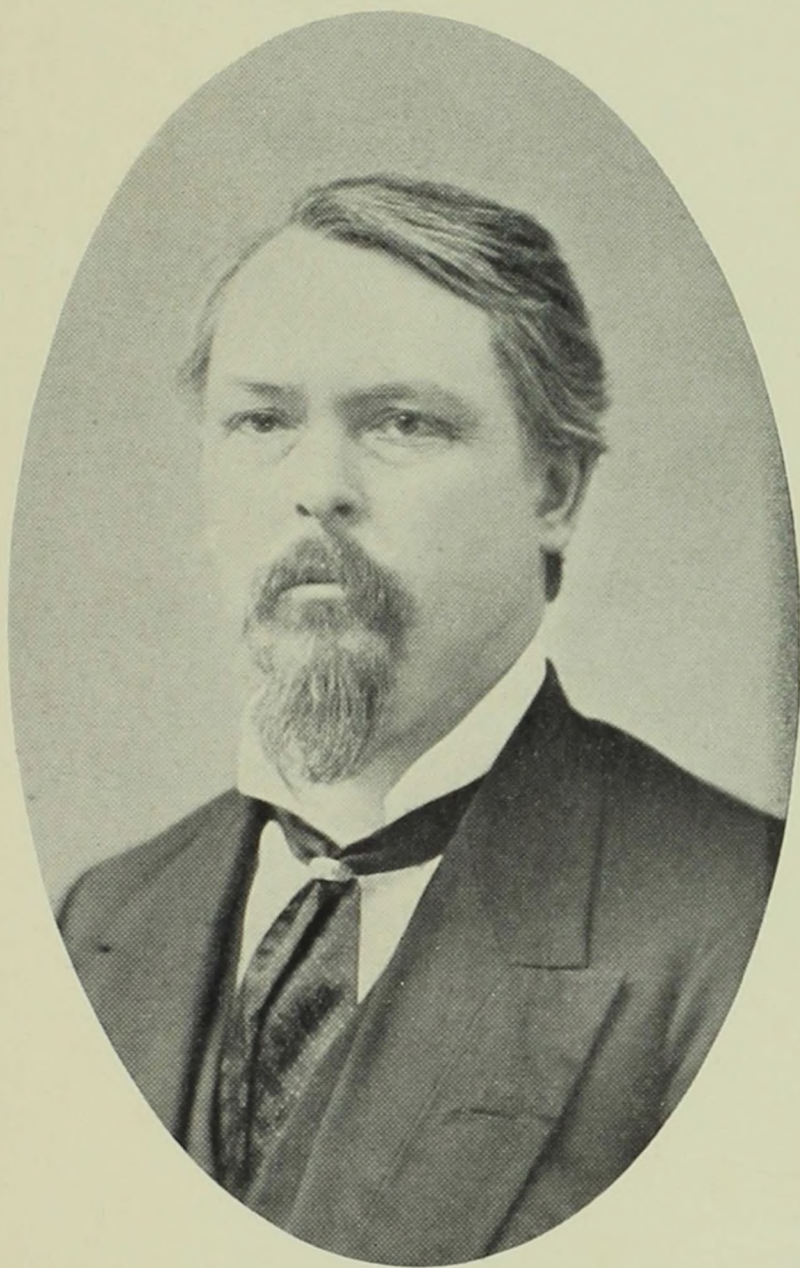
sonality. His pronunciation was not quite the "dollah" of the South, nor the "doller" of the Middle West, but was a medium between the two. His mountains were the "mountings" of Vermont. His tongue was free from slang, and he detested slang in others. His associates in the faculty often found themselves silently rebuked by the unconscious expression of his face when they inadvertently deviated from the approved forms of correct English. Yet he was never obtrusively critical nor sternly dogmatic as to the linguistic shortcomings of those about him.

Possessed of a fine sense of humor, he could employ his ready wit ever in a way that left no sting. Once in an audience he was speaking in a reminiscent way of his early experience as a teacher. He chanced to remark that he taught his first school at a salary of only twenty-five dollars per month. Henry Sabin, known in educational parlance as Iowa's "Grand Old Man", called out from the audience, "I can beat that story; my first salary was only twenty dollars a month." "Oh yes", retorted Bartlett, "I know that inferior teachers received less." In the laughing that followed none joined more heartily than Sabin.

Professor Bartlett was originally chosen by the Board of Trustees to head the Department of English Language and Literature, and as such he

was advertised in the first circular of the institution. The trustees proposed, but this time Principal Gilchrist disposed. In the first assignments to service by the principal, the mathematical subjects were entrusted to Professor Bartlett and the English courses to his associate, D. S. Wright. This arrangement prevailed during the first four years of the institution. At the beginning of the fifth year, the Board voted to return to their original plan, and transferred the senior professor to the chair of English Language and Literature. In this position he served for twenty-four additional years when, because of advancing years, he retired from educational work in June, 1904.

In the seventies, the parlor reading circle was a fad, ardently fostered in practically all the larger towns of the State. The Cedar Falls Parlor Reading Circle was instituted in 1875, antedating by one year the coming of the Normal School to that city. It met from time to time in the parlors of the well-to-do people who possessed literary taste or pretensions to the same. Duly officered with a president, a vice-president, a secretary, a treasurer, and an executive committee of three, it was regarded as one of the most important social and intellectual organizations in town. Studies were outlined in the lives and works of great writers, in the world's products, and in the manual



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arts. With the opening of the Normal School in the autumn of 1876, the new faculty was welcomed into the Circle. To the literary proficiency and taste of Professor Bartlett the atmosphere of the Circle was most congenial. Some men are born literary leaders, some achieve such leadership, and some have the distinction thrust upon them. To all three classes, Professor Bartlett belonged.

Admitted to membership in the Circle, he became immediately its lion. Ministers deferred to his literary judgment and the city superintendent, principal, and high school teachers revised their opinions when he delivered his dicta as to the supremacy of Butler's *Analogy* or the literary shortcomings of J. G. Holland and E. P. Roe. For many years he served as president of the Circle, and the impress of his personality is still felt in the city. While the reading circle fad has had its day and has passed its age of usefulness in most communities, the Cedar Falls Circle is still a flourishing organization. It has survived the storms of fifty-six Iowa winters and still shows no mark of decadence. Perhaps the impact of Professor Bartlett's personality is a partial explanation of the secret of its longevity.

After the "most straitest sect" he was a Christian, a communicant of the Congregational

Church. He believed and lived the religion that he professed. As a lay preacher, he occasionally occupied the pulpits of his own and other churches, and always to the edification of his congregation. His greatest sermon was the life he lived, for he was "a living epistle known and read of all men". In his school relations, he inspired his students to walk not only in the ways of the wisdom of books, but also in the paths of righteousness; and his students in turn loved, followed, and strove to reproduce his Christian character in the schools of the State.

Though his schoolroom work was first in his thought and effort, he was not forgetful of other calls to duty. He was a patriot, and a pioneer in the prohibition movement. A Republican in politics, he was always in the caucus of his party, and staunchly stood for whatever policies or candidates he approved. When the campaign was on, with voice and pen he sought to promote the glory of the land and flag he loved.

In December of 1885, the members of the Iowa State Teachers Association bestowed upon him the high honor of the presidency of that organization. The paragraph below, from his presidential address, is an index to his character and faith:

"No foreign power, by its armed soldiery, can injure this republic; our dangers are within, and

from ignorance and defective or wrong education. Experience shows that it is not enough that the laborer be *skillful in his work*, that his hand merely be trained to a deft handling of the spade, the chisel, or the steam engine; the laborer is still a man, with human wants and desires, to be qualified, endowed with reason, by which he *should* be controlled."

Professor Bartlett's classroom methods were distinctly Socratic — in the opinion of some excessively so. Woe unto the student in his class who erroneously answered one of his well-put questions. Upon receiving the answer he would look edified and proceed to ask other questions pertinent to the reply, until his unwary victim found himself entangled in a mass of absurdities from which there was no escape but in the acknowledgment of his mistake. The lesson was often severe, but one most thoroughly and indelibly learned.

The twenty-ninth of January, 1904, is a memorable date in the annals of the Iowa State Normal School. It marked the occasion of a double all-day celebration; first, the completion by Professor Bartlett of fifty years of service as a teacher; second, his approaching retirement from the State Normal School, after twenty-eight years of continuous work in its faculty. In the forenoon Dr. Thomas McClelland, president of Knox College,

who had received his own inspiration for a successful professional career from the man whom he had come to Cedar Falls to honor, delivered a speech on the theme of "Fifty Years of Service".

The afternoon was devoted to a series of platform addresses. First came "The Founding of the State Normal School", by Hon. H. C. Hemenway, who as State Senator from Black Hawk County had been most influential in securing the establishment of the school at Cedar Falls and who became the first chairman of the board of trustees. Then followed in chronological sequence, "The Early Days of the Normal School", by D. S. Wright. "The Normal School and the State" was the subject chosen by Hon. E. D. Chassell, an early graduate of the school and for three terms an active member of the General Assembly of the State. This was followed by "The Schoolmaster of Fifty Years Ago", by Henry Sabin. And at the close of the program came the valedictory address by Professor Bartlett.

"A poor Jew, it is said, prided himself on helping to build the temple at Jerusalem, because he was allowed to help, once or twice, in lifting a stone to its place in the foundation. My friends, I have been present, for a time, when the foundations were being laid of the lives of many hundreds of my fellow beings, and among them are

two who have honored us by their presence and good words today, and if I have been fortunate enough to help to place even one small stone of value in any one of such lives, I count it of more worth than if I had conceived and built entire the most beautiful material temple the world ever saw." That was the tenor of his whole speech.

In the course of the addresses on this occasion, a classical poetical quotation was given as appropriate to the personality of the man of the hour.

Genteel in personage,
Conduct, and equipage;
Noble by heritage,
Generous and free.

Brave, not romantic,
Learned, not pedantic,
Frolic, not frantic,
All this is he.

Honor maintaining,
Meanness disdaining,
Still entertaining,
Engaging and new.

Neat but not finical,
Sage but not cynical,
Never tyrannical,
But ever true.

In the college paper, which recorded the events of this great day, appeared another tribute.

"Three years ago", said Professor Colegrove to his class in school management, "I was teaching in the institute at Marengo, Iowa. One evening when I was sitting out in the yard at my boarding place, a man came up the street, just the other side of the fence. He stopped near me, leaned on the picket fence, and said, 'Are you Mr. Colegrove from Cedar Falls?'"

"I said, 'Yes, sir.'"

" 'And do you know Professor Bartlett?'"

" 'I do, very well,' I replied."

" 'Well, when you see him, will you give him my love.'"

" 'I shall be very glad to do so', I said. 'You know Professor Bartlett, then?'"

" 'Yes', said the gentleman, 'I do. Thirty years ago, he was my teacher, and all through these years, he has been to me the ideal of what a man ought to be. I can not tell you how much I owe to him, how completely he changed my life, and how thoroughly I respect him.'"

"After some further conversation, he turned to go away, when I said to him, 'You have not given me your name, and I do not have the pleasure of your acquaintance.'"

" 'My name is Rumble', he answered."

" 'Oh, you are the Congressman from this district', I said, as I recognized the name."

“ ‘Yes sir. Good evening’, he said and went away.”

Mr. Colegrove added, “Of course it was a great pleasure to me to give the Congressman’s message to Professor Bartlett when I returned to Cedar Falls; and I shall never forget how pleased and happy he looked as he said, “Well, it is worth while to be a teacher’.”

Professor Bartlett was in disposition one of the most retiring of men. He avoided the limelight. Though ready of speech, he sought no reputation as a platform speaker. He wielded a graceful pen, writing with faultless diction and with Addisonian precision. In press and pulpit he was a fearless champion of righteousness and temperance. To the State he brought a high cultural standard.

In June, 1904, he retired from the active service of the School and the State. The remaining eight years of his life he spent in the home of Austin Burt, envired by the assiduous care of his daughter, Mrs. Mary Bartlett Burt, happy in the love and laughter of his grandchildren and the companionship of the books he loved. He calmly met the messenger that comes to all; and on the thirtieth of November, 1912, he peacefully resigned his body to mother earth and his spirit unto God who gave it.

D. SANDS WRIGHT