

James Cleland Gilchrist

The blood that flowed in the veins of James Cleland Gilchrist was unadulterated Scotch. His parents, James Gilchrist and Grace McCleland Gilchrist, were born in Scotland. Soon after their marriage they emigrated to America and settled first in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, where their son James Cleland was born. A few years later they moved to a farm near Coitville, Mahoning County, Ohio, where James grew to manhood.

His youthful day-dreams of a life vocation early turned to teaching. To become a teacher of teachers was the acme of his ambition. Though not a child of poverty, his father's limited income would not allow his son the type of training he wanted. Thus thrown upon his own resources, he overcame the difficulties that lay between him and a higher education. In later life, when talking to his students in his reminiscent and inspirational moods, he was wont to relate an incident of his collegiate days, descriptive of his thrifty Scotch training. It ran thus: "Once I was to deliver a school oration. To clear my throat for the ordeal, I spent a penny for a stick of candy. For this extravagance, I suffered pangs of conscience for many days."

As a boy he followed the plow, plied the hoe, swung the scythe, and dreamed his dreams. About all that education can do for its patrons is to teach them to think, and there is no better place to acquire this important art than in treading the straight and narrow furrow between the handles of a plow. The plowboy can not whistle all the time: his mind must be active, he must think. James Cleland's formal education began in a country school. Later he attended an academy called Poland Seminary near his home.

By the practice of rigid economy, by accepting whatever of manual or mental toil came to his lot, he finally acquired sufficient means to allow him to enter college, and presently made his way to Antioch College at Yellow Springs, Ohio — a famous seminary presided over by the illustrious Horace Mann. In this great teacher, young Gilchrist found the inspiration of his own career. What Socrates was to Plato, what Plato was to Aristotle, what Aristotle was to Alexander, what Gamaliel was to Paul, so was Horace Mann to James Cleland Gilchrist. The disciple never forgot his master: whether he were in the social circle, in the round-table discussion, in the classroom, or on the lecture platform. His ready words of eulogy for the sage of Yellow Springs were often on his tongue. Perhaps there exists no

American school that has not been made more efficient because of the voice and pen of this Ohio teacher of teachers. It may certainly be said, "He being dead still speaks", and will speak forever in the traditions and attainments of the Iowa State Teachers College and through the impress of the personality of this admiring student. Of Professor Gilchrist's educational lectures, his masterpiece was entitled "Horace Mann" — a sincere and notable tribute of a faithful follower to a trusted guide.

After his graduation, James C. Gilchrist served for a time as principal of an academy at Hubbard, Ohio. There, in one of his pupils, he found a loved and devoted life-companion whom he designated as the "prettiest and brightest of the Hubbard girls." They reared a remarkable family.

The dreams of the boy came true when as a man he became principal of a State normal school in Pennsylvania. In this capacity he served for ten years. Next, he resigned to accept the principalship of a State normal school in West Virginia. Two years later the Civil War broke out and he found himself a loyalist in the midst of treason, driven by the exigencies of war to resign and return to the North. Having chosen Iowa for his future home and work, he first conducted a private normal school for one year in the city of

Cedar Rapids. Then followed a year as city superintendent of the public schools of Mason City. Finally, in 1876, he was selected as head of the newly created Iowa State Normal School.

As a citizen of the community of Cedar Falls he promptly identified himself with its literary and religious activities. He was an ordained minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Liberal in his attitude to those of other faiths, he was welcomed to the pulpits of his home and neighboring towns. His practical and impressive sermons were always welcome.

In early life he developed traits of speech that characterized him throughout life. From the time of his youth he manifested a predilection for polysyllabic expression. He always reveled in the use of such unusual terms as "elite", "flamboyant", "anomalous", "potentiality", "adaptation to environment". This fault, if it was a fault, he neither sought to palliate nor deny.

The Cedar Falls Parlor Reading Circle had been founded in 1875, and was entering upon its second year simultaneously with the founding of the Normal School. One of its first acts at the initial meeting that year was to elect the entire faculty of the school to membership. Principal Gilchrist's wide reading and his wise suggestions made him an authority in the discussions.

He enjoyed this social circle, and found open hospitality and a cheerful reception in the refined homes of the city. Not only was he an excellent conversationalist but a good listener. In his conversation he scorned gossip and frowned upon the trivial small talk of dilettante social groups. At times of companionable relaxation, he combined a philosophical bent of mind with a decorous sense of humor.

These traits sometimes involved him in amusing predicaments. Professor Gilchrist and I were once guests in the home of a garrulous and bombastic man who was the proud father of a daughter on whom he doted exceedingly. Our invitation to the home was due to the fact that this daughter was a graduate of the State Normal School. This young lady was an idle, unambitious, and superficial student, yet somehow she had managed to graduate. Duly certificated, she had taught three months in a country school. After we had partaken of an excellent chicken dinner, our host delivered a carefully prepared speech in which he enumerated his daughter's achievements and prophesied great things for her future. He ended his fulsome eulogy by placing in her hand a pretty little package which, when opened, revealed an elegant gold ring.

To Gilchrist, the performance was most amus-

ing. A derisive smile played upon his features, and at intervals he winked at me. The speech completed and the presentation made, the father continued, "I think it proper on all occasions like this to invoke the divine blessing. Brother Gilchrist, will you lead us in prayer?" Every dictate of courtesy compelled assent, and the derision on "Brother Gilchrist's" face gave place to dismay as he kneeled to comply. Whatever the effect of this devotional period upon others, at least one auditor was tremulous with laughter as he heard the prayer.

In the later seventies of the century past, the Iowa State Teachers Association was in session at the town of Independence. At the annual banquet Professor Gilchrist was on the program for a toast. The toastmaster was a practical joker, a master in the art of comic acting. At the proper time the master of ceremonies announced the speaker as "J. C. Gilchrist, Principal of the Iowa State *Reform* School." A ripple of laughter ran through the assembly at the evidently purposed blunder. With extravagant looks and acts of pretended dismay, he essayed a correction, while the ripple grew to uproarious and long-continued laughter. The toastmaster, seeing that he had made a hit, made the most of it. When at last quiet was restored, Principal Gilchrist was ready

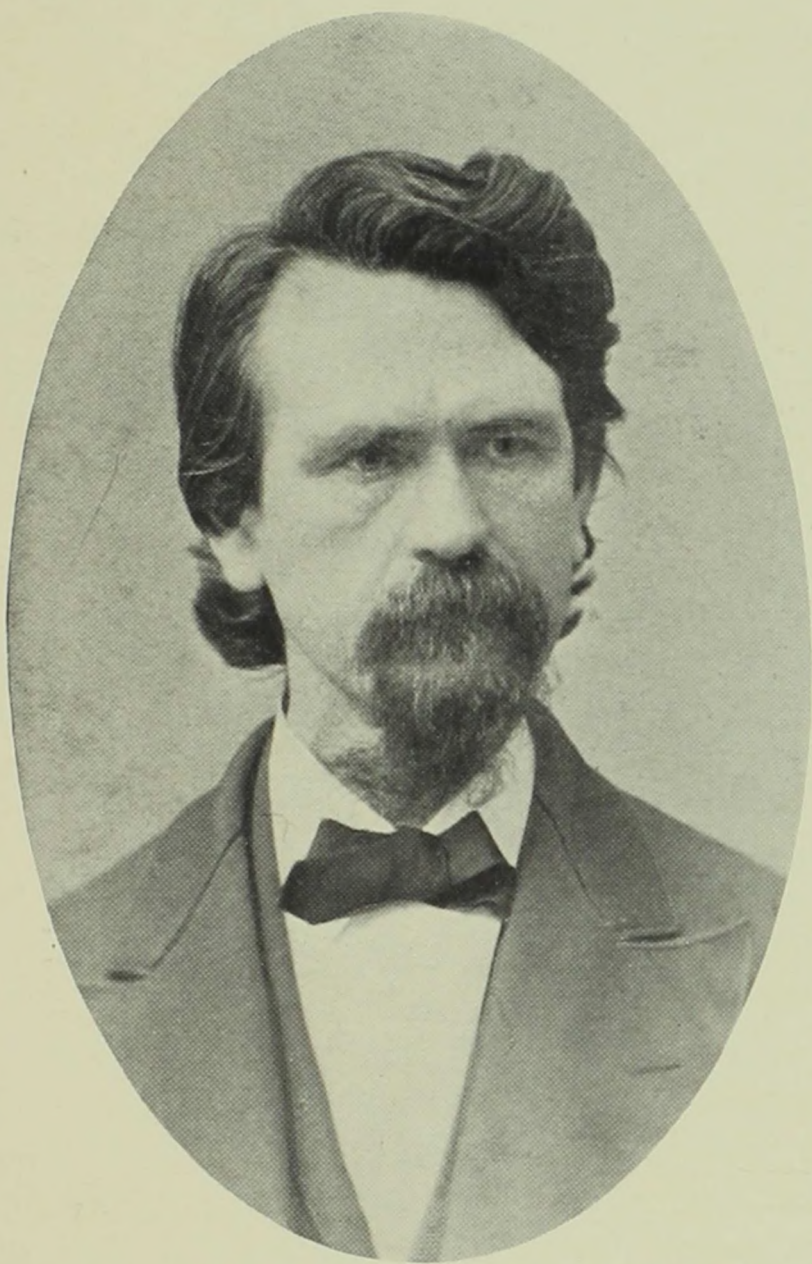
with an apt retort, "I must begin by thanking the toastmaster that he has solved a problem for me. I was just wondering what I could say to put the company in a good humor, but his pleasantry has happily solved it for me."

James C. Gilchrist was a man of strong convictions and boundless determination. Even his boyhood was characterized by remarkable singleness of purpose. Having devoted his attention to a problem, he invariably came to a positive decision. Vacillation was unknown to his temperament. A member of the board of trustees said of him, "He would turn neither to the right hand nor the left, but with an energy that approached the superhuman he would overcome the most serious obstacles."

In his teaching one of his many pedagogic mottoes was: "Make the lesson difficult for your pupils." A profound thinker himself, he recommended to the learner,

Think for thyself, one grand idea
If known to be thine own,
Is better than a thousand gleaned
From fields by others strown.

He would not condescend to simplify the abstract at the expense of the learner's own research. On one occasion, at the close of a lecture at a county



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institute, a hearer said to him, "Mr. Gilchrist, you over-shot your audience to-night." Whereupon he retorted characteristically, "They ought to understand it." He believed and taught and practiced that teaching another to think was the highest reach of pedagogic attainment. Men of action are rare, men of thought are rarer, and in few indeed are both qualities combined. To this small class Professor Gilchrist belonged.

He refused to supply a crutch to the dependent student who could walk without one. In his thought and practice there was no "easy road to geometry", or to any other science. Sometimes when he faced a class for the first time, in assigning them their initial lesson he bade them learn not the opening chapter of the text employed, but a chapter near the middle of the book instead. When asked his reason for this course, he was wont to reply, "In medias res". The learner must acquire his mastery of the text by working backward as well as forward to the goal. He was purposely making it hard for the beginner.

A most predominant trait in the life of Principal Gilchrist was his capacity for hard work, an industry that never acknowledged defeat. The two most diligent men that the writer has ever known were Principal Gilchrist and President Homer H. Seerley, his successor. At the outset

of the founder's work at Cedar Falls, in addition to his multifarious administrative duties, he invariably assigned to himself the same modicum of classes that he apportioned to his subordinates. According to Henry Sabin who was State Superintendent of Public Instruction, "toil was his pastime, and study was his favorite occupation. Difficulties but increased his zeal, and he searched for knowledge as for hidden treasures." He daily personified the principle which he taught and lived, that the way for a person to grow is found in the exercise of his powers to the limit of his strength. To his associates and to his students his example was a mighty and enduring influence to thoroughness in research, to self-restraint, to devotion to the work in hand, to the mastery of the problems of the school as a preparation for grappling with the greater problems later.

Principal Gilchrist appeared as the author of but one book — a *Physical Geography of Iowa*. Through the kindness of Miss Maude Gilchrist, the archives of the State Teachers College have been enriched by many manuscripts of his sermons, lectures, and other addresses. Among these valued papers is the manuscript of an unfinished book, doubtless intended to be his literary masterpiece, entitled "Theory and Practice of Teaching".

After leaving his work at Cedar Falls in 1886, James C. Gilchrist established a private normal school at Algona. From there he was called in 1893 to the deanship of Morningside College in Sioux City. But he was soon compelled by failing health to retire to his home in Pocahontas County, where he died at Laurens on August 13, 1897.

Into the Gilchrist home there came several children, six of whom attained to maturity and all of whom nobly blessed their parentage. The eldest daughter Maude was one of the most brilliant students ever registered in the State Normal School. She blended in her inheritance the intellectual endowment of her father and the fine womanly characteristics of her mother. Entering at the age of fifteen, she was brought into competition with men and women in their twenties, yet she became a recognized leader. After her graduation at Cedar Falls, she entered Wellesley College where, upon finishing her course, she was selected for a position in the Department of Botany in that institution. After seven years of service in that capacity, she was allowed a sabbatical year of study and travel in Europe. Returning to America, she served as Dean of Women in the State Agricultural College of Michigan, and later in a like capacity in Illinois Woman's College at Jacksonville. In 1912, she

was recalled to Iowa to care for her mother during her declining years.

The second daughter Grace became the wife of Joseph H. Allen, one of Iowa's most prominent public men, and the mother of Byron Gilchrist Allen, who has served in the State legislature. Another daughter, Norma, became the devoted wife and helpmate of Professor B. B. Roseboom of Lansing, Michigan. Two sons, Cleland and William, are prominent farmers and citizens of Pocahontas County, Iowa.

His third son, Fred Cramer Gilchrist, after completing his collegiate course, served for a term as superintendent of schools in Pocahontas County. Later, having graduated from the law school at the University of Iowa, he became a successful attorney with a strong predilection for politics. For ten years he represented his district, first in the House and then in the Senate of the Iowa General Assembly. In this capacity he made a favorable legislative record and commended himself to his constituents so thoroughly that he was elected in 1930 to represent the Tenth Congressional District in the national House of Representatives.

D. SANDS WRIGHT