

Comment by the Editor

TO WEIGH AND CONSIDER

If, as Francis Bacon remarked, "Reading maketh a Full Man", the pioneers of Iowa City must have been well supplied with information. Not that they had voluminous libraries. Books were scarce on the frontier. The Bible and a few well-worn spellers, readers, and arithmetics constituted the entire bibliothecal resources of most homes.

Rare indeed were volumes of fiction, poetry, science, history, and philosophy. Doctors and lawyers had a few professional books. As early as 1830 Berryman Jennings came to read Dr. Isaac Galland's medical books as compensation for teaching the first school in Iowa. It was said that David Rorer had the best law library in the State. A few natural bibliophiles, like T. S. Parvin, collected comprehensive private libraries. But these instances were exceptional.

Though the pioneers of Iowa had a passion for education, home facilities for reading the masterpieces of literature were meager. This condition no doubt contributed to the early establishment of schools and the formation of library associations.

Perhaps the lack of books is a partial explanation of the avidity of the people for newspapers and magazines. Thousands of daily, weekly, and monthly publications were received at the Iowa City postoffice in 1858; and that phenomenon was probably typical of other cities. Maybe the availability of all sorts of religious, cultural, agricultural, household, fashion, and pictorial magazines accounts for the variety of reading matter that was consumed.

The popularity of pictures is certainly not confined to the present vogue of graphic newspapers and photographic weeklies. And yet some of the better magazines had no subscribers in the former capital of the State. No one read the *Methodist National Magazine* to which the English traveler who visited Iowa City contributed the story of his experiences with the Mormons in 1858. It expired at the end of that year. But *Harper's* and the *Atlantic* monthlies were even then leading the list of "quality" magazines.

Periodical reading certainly provides a various intellectual diet. If, then, as Bacon surmised, different subjects have special educational merits, the early Iowans must have been wise, witty, grave, and able to contend, for they read history, poetry, moral homilies, and rhetorical essays.

J. E. B.

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