

## CHAPTER IX

### THEN AND NOW

IT is by no means proposed, in what follows, to give a connected history either of the Iowa Band or Iowa Missions for the last twenty-five years. We seek only to review a scene here and there, and put on record a few facts, which, while of interest to parties concerned, may stand to the credit of the great home missionary work. If but a glimpse of home missionary life can be presented, especially of its inner view, with its joys yet not without its sorrows, our young men preparing for or entering the ministry, we are sure, will be attracted rather than repelled by it. If we can hold up a few clusters gathered as the fruits of home missions in Iowa, it may encourage and stimulate all workers in this noble cause to push it onward with increasing vigor wherever there remaineth land yet to be possessed.

As preparatory to what is now proposed, nothing, perhaps, will serve better than to contrast the Iowa of twenty-five years ago with the Iowa of to-day. By this view of the "then and now," unfolding, as it must, the nature of the field occupied and the changes wrought, we can better appreciate the causes at work.

But going back twenty-five years brings us so near the beginning of all Iowa history, that a word or two of the prior period may not be amiss.

From 1843, we go back but ten years to find the first settlement of the state. This was June 1, 1833. Before that date, no white man had resided within its limits except the Indian traders and their dependents, and a few who crossed the Mississippi in defiance of all treaties.

Of those who have labored here in the gospel, probably the first Congregational minister whose privilege it was to look over into this promised land was the Rev. J. A. Reed. He saw it as early as May, 1833. His point of observation was a town site in Illinois, called Commerce, consisting then of one log cabin and a cornfield, since known as Nauvoo. His eye could just distinguish bluffs and prairie, with timber-skirted streams. Gazing on the prospect, his reflection was, that the land before him, all the way to the Pacific, was the abode only of savages. All seemed buried, as for ages, in the silence and sleep of savage life.

During the first ten years of Iowa history, between 1833 and 1843, the only portion of the state open for settlement was a strip of country about forty miles wide and two hundred miles long, on the western bank of the Mississippi. So far out was this on the frontier, on the very borders of the Indian country, and so much good land was there unoccupied

and easier of access between it and the older settlements of what was then the West, that its population at first increased but slowly. In 1838, five years after its settlement began, the population of the territory numbered but 22,859.

Prior to July 4, 1838, Iowa was included in the territorial government, first of Michigan and then of Wisconsin. At this date its own government was established, embracing in its limits the most of what is now Minnesota and Dakota. Its present boundaries were established when it was admitted into the Union as a state, in 1846. In 1840, its population had reached 42,500. In these first years the country was but little developed. Pioneer hardships and privations were the common experience of the people. These were times in which the brethren tell of letters lying in the post-office for want of money possessed, or to be borrowed, with which to pay postage.

The religious condition of the people near the close of this first ten years, as near as August, 1842, is indicated by the statements of a writer in "The Home Missionary" of that period. He puts down the number of ministers in the Territory, of all denominations, as 42, and the number of professing Christians as 2,133. "Suppose," he says, "that ten times this number, or 21,330, come under the stated or transient influence of the preached gospel, you have yet the astounding fact that there are 38,070 souls in the territory destitute of the means of grace, a large portion

of whom are under the withering blight of all sorts of pernicious error."

Among the errors alluded to was Mormonism. Its headquarters were at Nauvoo, Ill. The town site with its one log cabin of ten years ago had now become a city of Latter-day Saints, claiming from sixteen to eighteen thousand people. All the males were under military drill, the men in one division, and the boys in another, to the number, it was said, of three thousand. There was not a school in the place. About this time Mormonism was sanguine. Its apostles were everywhere, traversing the new settlements with a zeal and success at once astonishing and alarming.

Infidelity, too, was presenting a bold front under the leadership of Abner Kneeland, first known in Vermont as a Universalist minister, afterwards in Boston as an atheist. He had settled with a band of his followers, male and female, upon the banks of the Des Moines, to mould, if possible, the faith of the new settlers by "substituting," as one has said, "Paine's Age of Reason, for the family Bible, the dance for the prayer-meeting, and the holiday for the Sabbath." Of the ministers and Christians spoken of as in the Territory near the close of the first ten years, a very few only were of the Congregational order.

The first Congregational ministers that explored this field were the Rev. Asa Turner and the Rev.

William Kirby. This they did in May, 1836. They found, as the principal settlements, Fort Madison, Burlington, Farmington, Yellow Springs, Davenport and Pleasant Valley. Had they continued their tour northward far enough, they would have found Dubuque, with some other little settlements scattered here and there.

The first resident Congregational minister in the state was the Rev. W. A. Apthorp, who came in the fall of 1836. He preached for a year or two, mostly at Fort Madison and Denmark. At Denmark, the first Congregational church in Iowa was formed, May 5, 1838. The ministers present were Messrs. Turner, Reed and Apthorp. Denmark was then about two years old, with a few log cabins and a frame building, twenty by twenty-four, which served as a schoolhouse and meeting-house, partly finished. The church was organized with thirty-two members. Every New England state but one was represented in it. Immediately on the organization of the church, Mr. Turner was invited to take charge of it; and the invitation was, after a few weeks, accepted. Mr. Apthorp was soon called to Illinois, and Mr. Turner was left the only Congregational minister in the state. So intimately connected with the history of our churches in after years did the church at Denmark and its pastor become, that Denmark is regarded as the cradle of Congregationalism in Iowa; and to the revered pastor who so long labored there, the Iowa

ministry have given, by common consent, the appellation of "Father Turner."

He did not long stand alone. Others came to his help, but not enough to supply the wants of even the slowly developing country around them. In a few years, the population began to increase more rapidly. The openings for labor became more numerous, but the men to occupy the new fields came not. These were weary years, in which the few brethren here explored the field, reported its wants, and then labored on without reenforcement. This they did till hope deferred not only made the heart sick, but made them almost despair. But at last, as we have seen, help came.

Twenty-five years ago, what is now the state of Iowa was a territory, whose scattered settlements were mostly confined to the narrow strip of country before mentioned. The northern and western portions of it were still in the possession of the Indians. It was only a little farther west, about the center of the state, that the Indian title was extinguished in October, 1843. Now the state stretches from the Mississippi to the Missouri, taking in a belt of land measuring from north to south nearly three hundred miles. Traversing the eastern portion of it are five noble rivers, nearly equidistant from and parallel to each other, running in a south-easterly direction to the Mississippi; while on the western slope of the state are other rivers, with their tributaries, tending to the Missouri.

With this area of fifty-five thousand square miles, situated in the very heart of our country, embracing a variety of climate, bounded and intersected by the noblest rivers of the continent, Iowa is equal to any of her sister states in the richness of her soil, and more favored than some of them in the extent of her forests. Her water-courses abound with facilities for the manufacturer. Her mines of lead and coal and her quarries of marble are exhaustless sources of wealth. It is indeed a goodly land: so the thousands who have found a home on its soil have esteemed it.

The growth of its population, though slow at first, has in later years been truly wonderful. In 1843, there were but about seventy thousand people in the state; now there are over a million. In cities where then there were but a few hundreds, now there are thousands, and in some cases tens of thousands. Twenty-five years ago, a father in the ministry was calling with one of the Band on a family near the field of his labor. Wishing to impress both the family and the youthful minister with the grandeur of the Christian work in a new country, he remarked on this wise: "I have no doubt that the day will come, some time, that, within a region of ten miles around the place where we now stand, there will be as many as ten thousand people." The prophecy at the time seemed almost startling,<sup>10</sup> but that family is still living where they then were; and, within the region alluded

<sup>10</sup> Note 9.

to, the people now are numbered by more than three times ten thousand, while the two ministers are still living, the older and the younger beholding in wonder the advancing growth.

Meantime, as might be expected, the development of the state as a whole has been wonderful. The Iowa of to-day rivals many an older state in agricultural and mechanical productions; while her coal-beds and her quarries are proving sources of unexpected wealth, and her mines of lead show no signs of exhaustion. Her advance in all the arts and achievements of civilized life has been rapid. There is no better index, perhaps, of the development of a country than its facilities of travel, and, especially in these latter days, the number and location of its railroads. A glance shows how marked has been the progress in this respect.

Twenty-five years ago the nearest approach by rail from the East was the city of Buffalo. Travelers that would see the then Far West, just opening on this, the farther side of the Mississippi, were compelled for the most part to cross over in skiffs, flat-boats or horse-boats. At one point only was there a steam-ferry. The mode of travel then was mostly on foot or horseback, guided often by Indian trails or blazed trees. Bridgeless streams and sometimes bottomless sloughs were to be crossed.

Many are the incidents and adventures which the members of the Band and the older ministers have to

recount to their children and to one another of the days in one sense so recent, in another so long ago, as they speak of their early explorations in looking over their fields and hunting up the people. But these things have passed. Railroads have come. No less than five railroad-bridges across the Mississippi are, or are being, constructed, over which the iron horse comes to find here a fresh pasture-ground for his wide roaming. From these five points start five main roads, crossing the state from east to west. Like her five principal rivers, they are about equidistant from, and in the main parallel to, each other. Two of them already form the Iowa links in the great Pacific route, and others are pressing on. Meantime, from north to south, roads are projected, and parts of them completed; giving promise, at no distant day, of a railroad system at once complete and adequate. In the aggregate, about fourteen hundred miles of railroad are already in operation, — an extent nearly if not quite equal to all the railroads in the whole country twenty-five years ago. The whistle of the engine is fast becoming a familiar sound to the children of Iowa.

The rivers, of course, have been bridged, and carriage-roads have been made, as the necessities of the people have required. Twenty-five years ago the only public buildings of Iowa were a rickety penitentiary and a very ordinary State House: now, all over the state are scattered her public institutions of all

sorts, — homes for the orphan, asylums for the blind, the insane, and the deaf and dumb. Her present Capitol<sup>17</sup> stands in a city claiming a population of fifteen thousand, where, at the coming of the Band, there was but a fort, seldom reached, so far was it in the heart of the Indian country.

In addition to her State University, whose annual income exceeds twenty-five thousand dollars, her Agricultural College generously endowed, and a system of common schools magnificently provided for, there are, among her citizens, schools and colleges established by Christian enterprise, already standing high among the best institutions of the land.

Thus, as by magic, in a few years has the wilderness been peopled. That profound sleep in which, when the first Congregational minister gazed upon it, the whole region seemed wrapped, has been broken. Towns, villages, cities, have sprung up, where, but a little while ago, no trace of civilization was visible. With all this growth, giving life and vitality to it, have sprung up churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will not speak of these now; but, when in the proper place we do, we shall find that here the tens have given place to hundreds, and the hundreds to thousands.

Twenty-five years ago Iowa was almost unknown, and its character a blank; now its fame is at once world-wide and enviable. Then it was only a frontier

<sup>17</sup> Des Moines, whose population now is over 65,000.

territory, containing, in the eye of the nation, but a few scattered homes of wild adventurers: now it is a state, and a state, too, of no mean rank in the center of states. Welcoming to her soil, from the first, the principles of education, liberty and religion that have traveled westward from the land of the Pilgrims; sending them, in due time, to the opening plains of Kansas and Nebraska; saying to the dark spirit of the South, that was ever struggling to press its way northward, "Thus far and no farther;" joining hands, in the meantime, with her sister states of the North and the Northwest in a friendly rivalry to develop and protect every noble interest and true,—she stands forth with the proud inscription already on her brow, "The Massachusetts of the West,"—an inscription placed there, not as in self-glorifying, by her own sons, but by friends abroad, as they have seen the freedom of her people, her schools and her churches, watched the integrity and wisdom of her legislators, felt her power in the councils of the nation, and especially as they have marked her noble record in the hour of the nation's peril.

She was ever prompt with her full quota of men and means, and ever mindful of her soldiers in the field and their families at home. Of all her sister states, none were more lavish in these respects than she; and yet she was the only one of them all to come out at the close of the war with her liabilities canceled, and free of debt. Nor has she since been un-

true to the character then earned; she has made the path of freedom broad enough to include all her citizens; and, in every case in which these United States have been called to pronounce upon any of the issues of the times, she has stood shoulder to shoulder on the side of progress with the noblest of them all. Such is the Iowa of to-day. Looking at things as they now are, we can hardly believe that they are the outgrowth of the things few and feeble of twenty-five years ago. But so it is. There have been causes for this. Where and what are they?