

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Very little family history is known by the generation of children to which I belong, although we often heard our grandparents discuss their experiences as slaves and as "freedmen" during the period of reconstruction.

My father was "free-born" and at a very early age was hired out to work for food and clothing. He managed to go to the public school long enough to complete work which, ^{NCA} approximately that of the Third Grade. After reaching maturity, he worked as a laborer. Even after marriage this was the type of work he had to depend upon to provide a modest living for the family.

Mother was also "free-born" and finished approximately the Fifth Grade. According to the custom, she was also hired out at a very early age and worked away from home until she married.

The immediate family consisted of my mother, father, three sisters, and seven brothers. Two of my brothers, who were twins, died at the age of eighteen months. Their deaths occurred one year before I was born. I was the eighth child.

When I was quite a small boy, I was playing in our yard with my brother when my grandmother appeared in the yard with a newborn baby in her arms. She told me that it was my new brother and emphasized the fact that I was no longer the baby. This disturbed me greatly, for I realized that I was no longer to receive special consideration from the other members of the family as I had become accustomed to receive. The other members of the family constantly reminded me of the fact that I had lost my place to the newcomer. I resented this to the point that I hated the baby.

I have been told that another experience affected me considerably during my early life. A small child in the neighborhood gave me a bite from an apple. Instead of chewing the piece of apple, I swallowed it whole. It lodged in my throat choking me into insensibility. Several neighbors, noticing my plight, came to my rescue. A very old lady seized me by my feet and held me with my head downward while another struck me in my back. This method of treatment dislodged the apple and I was soon breathing normally again. I was ill for a while after that experience and highly nervous.

At the age of eight, I started to the public school. For some reason, I know not why, school had been open for several weeks. Other children in my grade had become quite familiar with the teacher and school routine. It was necessary for me to make this adjustment. The very first day at school, the teacher, new, young and inexperienced, asked me to read from a book. I had not learned to read, therefore, I could not read a single line from the book. The teacher, very thoughtlessly, embarrassed me before the other children and "kept me in" after school. This made me fear her and hate school. Later I became adjusted and advanced along with the other children. When I reached the Fifth Grade, it was necessary for me to remain out of school on the doctors' advice because I was nervous and was "studying too hard."

Unfortunately, when I was ten years old, I was hurt very seriously. During recess the boys were playing baseball with a regular hard baseball. I, naturally, wanted to play with them. There was one boy in the group, older than the rest of us, who did not wish to have me play. The group, after much deliberation, decided to let me play. In order to "get even" with me this older boy threw a baseball to me with all his might. The ball struck me in the stomach and knocked me unconscious. It was several minutes before I was revived by the Principal of the school. Since that day I have been shy of playing baseball. Moreover, I have always hesitated to engage in any of the major sports. I am usually contented to watch such games from the sidelines.

At a very early age I secured a job as companion for another boy whose parents objected to the boy playing with other children. I felt proud of my work as I received weekly wages for suggesting games, playing them, and keeping him amused otherwise. Often just the two of us hiked, fished, camped, explored, skated, hunted, and enjoyed the great outdoors. At other times we read stories or played indoor games. While living in this boy's home, I had access to the very best literature available for children. The life out of doors, the opportunity to play a wide variety of indoor games, and the access to a splendid library, gave me an opportunity to develop both mentally and physically.

When I was twelve years old, I joined the church. This came about largely as the result of fear. My parents insisted that I attend a revival meeting with the purpose of being converted and saving my soul. I attended several meetings without success. I was told that in order to become converted one had to see "the Holy Ghost in the form of a light." The sinner was also to experience a feeling that his "sins had been washed away." Because of the constant singing, praying, and shouting over the "sinners," I became quite emotionally disturbed, but they could not get me to stand up and "profess" religion. The change in my life came as the result of a frightful dream one night after I went home from one of these stirring meetings. I dreamed that I was trespassing on forbidden property and was discovered by the owner of the property who shot me. Death was horrible! Wounded, bleeding, praying, gasping for breath-- knowing that I was "unsaved" - waiting every minute to be hurled into eternal "damnation, brimstone, and hell-fire"- I yielded to Death. The next night I was at the meeting early and without ceremony I was "converted."

I was not to enjoy my "grace" long, for I met my fellow students at school the next day. I told them how the Lord had "blessed my soul," how I had determined to live the life of a Christian and give up worldly pleasures. The other children teased me and called me a sissy. Before I realized what I had done, I "lost my grace" and was engaged in a big "free-for-all" fight.

There were few people whom I called my close friends when I was fifteen. However, I belonged to a few clubs with very restricted membership. I did not care for a large group of associates. Somehow, I had a feeling of inferiority.

It was at this age that I left home to go to boarding school. This school was more than two hundred miles away. I entered the high school department. This was the first time that I had ever been such a distance from home and I found it very difficult to make the necessary adjustment to more than six hundred fellow students in the same boarding school. My reaction to this

new environment was expressed through fits of temper, sulkiness, disagreeableness, impatience, nervousness, self-consciousness and bitter hatred for a few of the students who seemed to enjoy teasing me and embarrassing me before the others.

While in boarding school, I worried most of the time because of the lack of finance. Very often I was without sufficient funds to pay my expenses, hence it was very necessary for me to pick up jobs to "make ends meet." I engaged in a variety of work but managed to earn enough money to pay my expenses. It was necessary for me to give up much of the social life at school because I was usually at work during the social hours. My class work suffered also because of my heavy working schedule.

A job in the school cafeteria and book store was awaiting me on completion of high school by which I could earn my expenses through college. While in college I was faced with the same social handicaps because of my work in high school. By this time, I had made a large number of friends and was quite popular with the students.

One very important experience took place during the early part of my college career. Life was going well when I decided to write an essay on the "Modern Girl." At first it was written only as a composition for my class in English. In this essay I made the serious mistake of asserting that the modern man thinks of the modern girl merely as a toy to be found, fondled, fooled and forgot. The English class accepted my composition with applause as a well written article from the standpoint of form. The content was not so important to the class. At the request of the class, I consented to publish it in the school paper.

Before I agreed to publish the article, I discussed it with my girl friend so that she would not get offended and take the article when it appeared in print as a personal affront. This, my friend, assured me would not happen. With this assurance, I touched up the article with some very strong adjectives and it appeared in the school paper. To my utter surprise the form of the article was ignored, but the content was interpreted literally, personally, and seriously by a large majority of the girl students. They protested violently! At one time I thought the faculty would have to intervene. As for me, they humiliated me and ostracized me socially. Even my best girl friend (and this is the thing that hurt me most) when she was confronted with the responsibility of making a choice between me and joining a sorority, deserted me and joined the sorority. This ostracism lasted for several months. All that time I was miserable. More than once I started to withdraw from the institution. I was advised by several members of the faculty to remain and "live it down." Because of this advice, I remained and finished college. I have never lived that experience down for I still have bitter memories of that affair.

I never became reconciled with the girl friend which I mentioned above. Instead, a little later I met another young lady whom I was very fond of and hoped some day to marry. I did not realize this ambition for she decided that I was not the one for her to marry. These disappointments in love had lasting effects upon me for it caused me to withdraw from society as much as possible.

My college course was completed in June 1927. I had hoped to secure immediate employment upon the completion of school. I had made application for work to several superintendents and felt quite confident that I would have success. For weeks and weeks I waited without one reply from these people.

Gradually I became discouraged and despondent. I hated myself; I hated people; I hated life! One day I received the news that I had been appointed to the principalship of a small rural high school. This news saved me from my own wrath. I accepted the appointment and reported to work when the school opened in September.

The school was comparatively newly built. It was larger and better than I had anticipated. The community in which it was located had unusual possibilities. I was perfectly pleased with the opportunity to "make good." Very soon this little school was known as one of the best and most progressive rural schools in the State. I was as happy as I have ever been during the eight years that I remained at that school.

After serving in this school as principal for two years, I met a young lady whom I married. I was newly married and happy. Everything was hopeful. But as soon as we were married, my father became seriously ill with paralysis. He lingered between life and death for six months. During this time I worried terribly over his condition which we could not help. I also began to experience financial difficulties again. This was at the very beginning of the last "depression." Salaries were reduced; banks closed, thousands were out of work; breadlines were formed. All of these things stood as a nightmare before me. I feared the future. I feared that I would lose my job. I feared life itself. We somehow managed to live through it all, but I have never succeeded in ridding myself of that fear complex. My father died in the midst of the depression.

At the close of my eighth year as principal of the rural school, I accepted a position as Director of Academics at a much larger school. I held this position one year before I was appointed as a member of the staff of the State Department of Education. It is this position that I now hold. My new work is interesting and fascinating. It is now necessary for me to travel the whole width and breadth of my native State. I advise and assist pupils, teachers, and parents; I plan professional meetings; serve on various social committees; compile educational data; contribute articles to professional journals; or read and review numerous books on education.

This also means that I must continue to study so that I may compare favorably in a professional way with other members of the educational staff and keep ahead of my fellow teachers whom I am expected to assist.

I am delighted with this new work and I hope to be able to make a very definite contribution to the educational advancement of my group.