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Comment

John Ely Briggs

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Comment by the Editor

BY THEIR FRUITS

“For example, there was William Clark who played an important rôle in the early history of Iowa.”

“What an ambiguous statement. Perhaps you mean James Clarke, one of the Territorial Governors. Or could it be William Penn Clarke, a prominent Free Soiler and Supreme Court Reporter?”

“Neither. I refer to Clark the explorer of the Missouri River, a younger brother of General George Rogers Clark, and Governor of Missouri. Bear in mind, moreover, that William Penn Clarke usually signed himself W. Penn and spelled his surname with a final e.”

While distinctions in names are useful, people are really placed by what they have done: “He is the man who made a mouse-trap”, or “She is the girl who married a millionaire.” In distinguishing persons we almost invariably mention their doings. Peculiarities in appearance or manner are significant only as applied to folks we have seen — and even eccentricity is often expressed in action. People are more alike than unlike. As uniformities determine a species while the development of a new

variety depends upon variations, so the activities of people, being more diverse than their qualities of character or physical differences, constitute the natural test of identification.

THE EFFECT OF CAUSES

The greatness of men flows from the causes they espouse and the institutions they serve. Alexander Hamilton is famous, not as a successful lawyer, but because his passion for good government led him into a career of statesmanship. It was Sir William Osler's devotion to the science of medicine that made him the idol of physicians everywhere. Instances might be multiplied indefinitely, for there is scarcely a person in all history, ancient or modern, who is known for himself alone. Services performed in the interest of others are the index to fame. He who spends his span of three score years and ten simply in providing for himself and family may live well but, dying, he will join the great democracy of the forgotten; while he who labors in a cause lays claim to more than personal renown. The work of a woman among her neighbors (Jane Addams), the thought of a scholar on his treatise (Isaac Newton), the sacrifices of a patriot for his country (George Washington), the activities of a fanatic in the name of human freedom (John Brown), or the aid of a nurse in lessening some of the horrors of war (Florence Nightingale) are more important in the scheme of things, it seems, than

the one who performs the service. The deed overshadows the doer. Let egotistical individualists contemplate the fact that the path of glory leads away from home and self-indulgence.

While William Penn Clarke lived in Iowa he was devoted to causes. As a leader in the free-soil movement, agent of the underground railroad, organizer of the Republican party, and draftsman of a new State constitution, much of his energy went into issues of public concern. Not that he sought notoriety: his work was preëminently sincere. But by employing his talents for the furtherance of great enterprises and in behalf of worthy institutions he earned a place of prominence for himself. Though he lived long afterward, his name is honored most for the services he rendered to humanity and the Commonwealth of Iowa during the years before the Civil War.

J. E. B.