

## William Fletcher King

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WILLIAM FLETCHER KING.<sup>1</sup>

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When Charles II of England visited the Westminster school under the headship of the famous Richard Busby, the great Master did not take off his hat in the presence of his monarch, lest to remove it before his scholars might lower their opinion of the rank and dignity of the teacher's high calling. Whereupon the King frankly confessed that the teacher there out-ranked the King.

In the realm of Brain Power and Heart Power, the real King of the 17th century in English History was not Charles the Second, but Richard Busby. For the greatest masters in English Literature and the most illustrious men in Church and in State of that period, were trained in Westminster school under the remarkable tutelage of Richard Busby.

The class-room of the Teacher continues to be the commanding source of greatest power and of widest influence. It has well been said that institutions are but the lengthened shadows of the men who originate them. The visible and tangible results that have come from the consecrated life of him in whose honor we are assembled to-night, show how large a place he has made for himself in the educational history of the State of Iowa.

William Fletcher King came to Iowa in 1862, and began his educational work in that year in this State as the Professor of Ancient Languages in Cornell College. In 1863 he

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<sup>1</sup>An address delivered in the Art Gallery of the Historical Department of Iowa, on the installation of a portrait of Dr. King, by Ralph Clarkson, June 16, 1910.

was made the Acting President of the institution. And in the following year, 1864, he was elected to the Presidency of Cornell College, continuing in this office for a period of 44 years, until his resignation in 1908.

It is the present good fortune of the institution, of which he so long held the honored headship, to have him still connected with it as President Emeritus and as a member of the Board of Trustees, in which positions the college still continues to have the benefit of his wise planning and helpful counsel.

It was said of the beneficent reign of the Emperor Augustus, that he found Rome built of brick, but that he left it built of marble. Such figure of speech is suggestive of the transformation wrought in Cornell College during Dr. King's administration.

A half century ago Iowa's natural resources were largely undeveloped and yielded but little of the later remarkable richness of her varied products. Much of the best farming land of the State was still the undisturbed, virgin prairie soil. Its pioneer people had great wealth of heart but little wealth of purse. The schools of those days shared in the general poverty of the times. Sacrifices in christian giving were no doubt greater then than they are now. But even gifts that were fully commensurate with the ability of the donors, could accomplish but little in the way of establishing and maintaining schools and colleges.

All this in the local environment of the times shows some of the peculiar difficulties that faced this pioneer College President in Iowa. When we compare what Cornell College was in 1863 with what it was at the close of Dr. King's administration in 1908, we may learn something of the remarkable growth of the institution under his guiding hand. The College catalogue of 1863 shows a total enrollment of only 266, forty names appearing in the list of college students, while 53 were in the primary department, leaving 173 preparatory students.

The faculty consisted of the President, two professors, two lady teachers, one music teacher, and two teachers in the primary department, which was maintained for the benefit of the small children living in Mount Vernon.

In 1908 Cornell's student enrollment was as follows: Graduate students, 6; College, 402; Academy and special, 347; total, 755.

The faculty in 1908 numbered 39, of whom 22 were regular professors.

In 1863 there were two buildings. In 1908 there were seven. In the former year the campus was fifteen acres in extent. In the latter year it was sixty acres in extent.

In 1863 the assets of the College outside of buildings and grounds were less than \$50,000. In 1908 they were over \$500,000.

In 1863 there was a total in the Alumni of 21. In 1908 the quinquennial catalogue listed 1,244 graduates in the regular courses. Of all these graduates over 1,200 have their diplomas signed by President King. His name is also signed to many diplomas issued by the schools of music, art and oratory.

In 1863 there was but one in the graduating class. In 1908 there were 59.

But the mere comparison of statistics by no means reveals all the facts. Buildings were erected, and extensive additions were made to apparatus, museum and library. Methods of instruction were greatly improved and facilities to students were multiplied, while the expenses were kept at the same time within reasonable limits.

In raising the money for the erection of buildings, in deciding upon plans, in letting contracts, and in seeing that they were carried out, he has shown great business and executive ability. He has been unceasingly industrious and those who have known his unresting activity can fully appreciate that dictum of another great College President, Dr. Francis Wayland of Brown, that "nothing can stand against days' works." He has been a master of details, a good judge of human na-

ture, rarely making a mistake in deciding upon one's ability or aptitude for the performance of any duty or line of work.

He has shown through all the years of his administration a great talent for securing harmony and co-operation, and through the exercise of a sound judgment has avoided difficulties, which many other men would not have foreseen.

He has evinced the utmost devotion to the college, giving undivided attention to its interests. He has shown carefulness and great wisdom in the selection of teachers; prudence and caution in financial management; the faculty of commanding the support of successful and sagacious business men, who have done much for the college; a cultivated taste, which is indicated by the appearance of the buildings and grounds; a continual insistence upon high intellectual and moral standards, and a determination to make the school such that all coming within its influence would be earnest and enthusiastic in its support.

He has shown himself to be a master of style in literary composition. His Baccalaureate sermons and public addresses have been models of concise expression and luminous statement. It is to be hoped that these will eventually be gathered into a volume and published.

His early life was on a farm where he had a rigid training in habits of work and self-denial. Graduating from the Ohio Wesleyan University under the Presidency of Dr. Edward Thompson, afterward a Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, he often spoke of the great inspiration which that man's noble life and splendid example had been to him. He thus began his life's work with a strong body as well as with a well-trained mind.

Although Dr. King was thoroughly devoted to the continuous advancement of the institution which he served, he nevertheless found time for many other and varied interests and engagements. Throughout his long career as an Iowa educator, he was a recognized leader in the councils of the State Teachers' Association, and served as its President in

1885. He was for many years a member of the Educational Council of the National Educational Association. He was appointed by President Benjamin Harrison as one of the Iowa State Commissioners at the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893.

He served as delegate from the Upper Iowa Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church to the General Conferences of 1876, 1888, 1896, 1904 and 1908. In the General Conference of 1896, which met in Cleveland, Ohio, he was chosen as the chairman of the committee on Education, one of the most important committees in the greatest deliberative and legislative body of Methodism.

Dr. King has given not only the service of his life to the college, with which he has been so long associated, but he has given his means as well. He gave fifty thousand dollars to endow the Lucy King Professorship in memory of an only child of unusual beauty and promise, whose early translation filled many hearts with sorrow. At the Semi-Centennial celebration of the College in June, 1904, he gave, in memory of his sainted wife, one hundred thousand dollars to endow one hundred free scholarships in the College, one for every county in Iowa and two for Kossuth county, the largest county in the State.

The College has thus grown and prospered, because it has been nurtured by his prayers, and given the love and devotion of his heart.

This address would not be complete without reference to his religious life.

As a student under him in college and afterwards as his pastor, I came to know him well. A number of years ago when I was his pastor, he came home once from one of his long hard trips for the College not only completely exhausted, but ill. When I called upon him, he was in an unusually tender mood, and reminiscent. He said that he believed profoundly in that teaching of Horace Bushnell that every man's life is a plan of God; that Abraham was girded for a par-

ticular work and mission, in what was termed his call; that Joseph in Egypt distinguished the girding of God's hand; that Moses and Samuel were even called by name; that the humblest and commonest have a place and a work assigned them in the same manner; that God has a definite life-plan for every human person, girding him, visibly or invisibly, for some exact thing, which it will be the true significance and glory of his life to have accomplished.

He spoke of his love for the College, and his strong desire to see his cherished plans for it fulfilled, before he should be called away.

He continued: "I have been very near death several times in my life, and I have been so remarkably preserved in every instance, that I have made up my mind that I am not to be taken away until God's plan has been fulfilled in my life. When I was a very young child, my father was chopping down a large hickory tree near the cabin where we lived. As the tree began to fall, he saw me step out from behind another tree right into the path of the falling tree. He tried to rush in to get me out, but found that he could not except at the risk of his own life. After the tree had fallen he began to search for me, fully expecting to find me dead. He found me in the large fork of the tree pressed down to the ground under a lot of small branches and twigs, badly scratched, benumbed and unconscious, but not vitally injured.

"A few months afterward my father and mother, and I with them, were crossing the Potomac River, somewhere between Washington and Cumberland, in a carriage, in the twilight of the evening. Father thought he knew the ford. But since he had been there changes had occurred. The carriage got fast. The horse floundered there in the middle of the river for a long time. The water overflowed the carriage, mother holding on to me, with the expectation that we would all be drowned. After a long struggle the horse got his footing and pulled the carriage out. When father got to the other side he found at the hotel that he had gotten into some cribs of the

new bridge, that had just been started, and the wonder to everybody was that the horse ever got us through alive.

“One vacation when I was home from college, I was helping my father stack some hay. We saw a small cloud hanging over one of the hills of our farm. As I was handing him a forkful of hay I saw a flash of lightning come down from the cloud and divide into two forks, one fork going to a sugar-tree on a hill one-third of a mile away, and the other coming to us. I saw it playing on the tines of the pitch fork I was holding very perceptibly, which was the last thing of which I was conscious. It knocked us all down, father on the stack of hay, I on the wagon and the horses on the ground. When we regained consciousness and looked over to the sugar-tree on the hill, we saw that the tree was on fire.

“During another summer vacation I started out one evening to ride a colt, that was supposed to be gentle. Before I had ridden far, he became suddenly unmanageable. He threw me over his head, and then with one foot hanging in the stirrup he left the road and dragged me in an unconscious condition through the edge of a forest over logs and rocks and through the brush. After running for a quarter of a mile through the edge of the wood, he returned to the road, where in some way my foot was released from the stirrup. I was very severely injured, and confined to the house for six weeks. My parents and the neighbors all marveled at my escape from death.

“When coming home from California at one time and on a night train a band of highwaymen took out two rails of the road within a few rods of Cape Horn, one of the most dangerous precipices on the line. The train was derailed, but did not leave the ties. Thus awakened we found that the robbers were trying to get control of the engineer and fireman and rob the train. For some unaccountable reason they became frightened and ran off into the woods without accomplishing their purpose, and leaving behind them thirty-nine packages of giant powder and dynamite and other equipments.

"I was once ship-wrecked in the Mediterranean, the vessel being guided by a pilot and captain, who were unfamiliar with the coast. When within sight of Athens, and at about eight o'clock in the evening, we ran aground near the shore with such force that the vessel was almost wrenched in pieces. We were all taken on board another vessel and brought into the port of Piraeus. While standing on the Acropolis in Athens a week afterward I saw the wreck of the vessel from which we had been rescued.

"Do you wonder," he said in a subdued tone, "that I should feel that God has thus repeatedly delivered me from death, because he must have some plans in my life that have not yet been worked out for the good of the world?"

Dr. King has placed in the Library Building of Cornell College several beautiful gifts of statuary in bronze and in marble. These silent monitors will continue to speak of him who placed them there, and will teach their lessons in art through coming years. But far outlasting bronze and marble will be the lesson of his own consecrated and self-sacrificing life.

As Daniel Webster once said: "If we work upon marble, it will perish. If we work upon brass, time will efface it. If we rear temples, they will crumble into dust. But if we work upon immortal minds, if we imbue them with principles—with the just fear of God and our fellow men—we engrave on those tablets something which will brighten to all eternity."

The Historical Department of Iowa, in whose archives are preserved the permanent records of our State history, is one of the most important institutions in the commonwealth of Iowa. And it seems particularly appropriate that, as far as possible, these Iowa historical records should be illustrated by the portraits of her most distinguished citizens. Here have already been gathered the portraits of more than one hundred of Iowa's illustrious men and women: famous soldiers, conspicuous statesmen, eminent publicists, noted judges, well-known ministers, leading philanthropists, and celebrated educators.

It is eminently fitting that there should be added to this number the portrait of one who has been a citizen of prominence, and an educator in the forefront of his profession in this State now for a period of forty-eight years.

Walter Scott, in one of his greatest novels, has described Old Mortality as going through the cemeteries of Scotland and chiseling anew upon the tombstones those names, which the passage of time and the flight of the years had well-nigh obliterated. The good old man was asked to explain why he was so desirous of having these worthies of the past commemorated. He replied that he wished to see the heroes of yesterday march forward side by side with the youth of to-day.

So this gallery of portraits in this State Historical Building will ever keep green the many noble qualities of character possessed by those whom it calls to remembrance, and will ever teach and will perpetually illustrate the lessons of patriotism, devotion and self-sacrifice.

In the name of Cornell College, and in the name of the multitude of the warm personal friends of William Fletcher King to be found throughout the world, I present to the State of Iowa this portrait as a true and most excellent likeness of one of her noblest and worthiest men.

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