

Record of a Carpetbagger of Decency

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ANNALS OF IOWA

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

RECORD OF A CARPETBAGGER OF DECENCY

As we finish the publication of the war portion of Lieutenant Pearson's diary in this issue of the ANNALS we give the following brief biography of this unique character.

Benjamin Franklin Pearson was born April 30, 1815, near Rising Sun, Cecil County, Maryland, and died at Keosauqua, Iowa, December 12, 1883. He came to Van Buren County, Iowa, in the early thirties, and soon thereafter filed on a quarter section of land about one and one half miles north of the village of Rising Sun, afterward and still called Pittsburg, or three miles northwest of Keosauqua, receiving his patent for it December 1, 1841. Besides being a land owner and farmer, he became a brick and stone mason and a contractor. He constructed the original Iowa Wesleyan College building at Mount Pleasant in 1853, the Appanoose County Court House in 1862, and the original three-story brick schoolhouse in Keosauqua in 1868. Mr. Pearson was a licensed local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal church. His military history is related on page 84 of this volume of the ANNALS.

The diary of Mr. Pearson, the original of which is almost continuous from January 1, 1858, to July 10, 1882, is the record of a simple life. That life began and ended, served and stood for the average American of Colonial stock. It spanned a not unusual length in time, but it reached across the vital years of expansion of society into Iowa. It reveals the soul of a humble citizen touched into an ardent glow by its longing for and achievement of a mechanic's trade, a citizen's full status, a soldier's valor, a Christian's "well done."

We have yet to see another such complete and candid record of a life that forms the bone and sinew of a state. Nowhere else under our observation has come so unaffected a record of motive; purely in effort to be a first class workman as a stone and brick

mason. The diary teems with ardor to do work completely, from acceptable materials in honest portions.

There are disclosed the causes and the reasons for a private citizen doing well the common service of taxpayer, school patron, church supporter, and factor in the census returns. There is the unadorned picture of faithful jury service, of exercise of the elective franchise, and of the religious and fraternal hewer of wood and carrier of water. Among his descendants are some individuals with far more than his power of intellect, many his equals, and none his inferior. We knew him and we know his descendants. As his standard was in accord with his light in his era, so stands theirs in the greater opportunity he and his type produced.

The finest of his contributions in the diary, 1862-1865, we have published in Numbers 1 to 7, Vol. XV, of the ANNALS. This section is unique in that it registers his uncommissioned and unpaid ministerial services in army camps, hospitals and religious congregations in the neighborhood of the camps of the Thirty-sixth Iowa. Like most northern Christian patriots, he had taken to heart the injustice of the then existing social and political status of the black man. He supposed adultery existed where mating was unsanctioned by a sovereign power, and unblessed by vows before a magistrate or minister. He knew compliance with these requisites was inadequate when unrecorded. He solemnized, and in his diary recorded, hundreds of Negro marriages. In some instances these were of matings which had already produced families and had no mark of voluntary incontinence upon them. Emancipation afforded the right, and, as Mr. Pearson believed, enjoined the duty of respectability in nuptial affairs. He preached compliance with all decrees of God and man. In nothing was he more insistent than that family life among the blacks immediately take on legal regularity. He was a veritable carpetbagger of decency in Arkansas.

METHODISM AND SLAVERY

Apropos of the closing in the current ANNALS of the war diary of B. F. Pearson, and especially of its record of a humble mind consecrated to the service of God and his country wholly within the embrace of the Methodist Episcopal church, is a recent pas-

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