

Religion in Early Iowa

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EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

RELIGION IN EARLY IOWA

"If . . . we turn to other religions less highly developed than Buddhism, we find that, in all, the existence of the individual as well as of the God of the community is assumed; that the interests of the community are the will of the community's God; that the interests of the community are higher than the interests of the individual . . . that the man who prefers the interests of the community to his own is regarded as the higher type of man. In fine, the individual, from this point of view, acts voluntarily as the means whereby the end of the society may be realized. . . .

"The history of religion is the history of man's search for God. That search depends for its success, in part, upon Man's will. Christianity cannot be stationary: the extent to which we push our missionary outposts forward gives us the measure of our vitality. . . ."

—Jevons

From the article on religion in early Iowa by Rev. Harvey, to which is given much of the space of this issue, one can see, in the light of the above quotation, that our early Iowa settlers were quite largely made up of "the higher type of man," for, generally speaking, they preferred the interests of the community which they were creating to their own interests as individuals. The quickness and the ease with which the gospel and the churches spread throughout the territory is in part testimony of that attitude, and an evidence of the vitality of our early churches and settlers as well.

If we believe that the "end of religion, viz., communion with God, is an end at which we ought to aim," then the rapid growth of church organizations of various denominations in the early Iowa field shows that most of the communities were religious from that point of view. In a large measure the influence of this spirit, as Rev. Harvey points out, helped to keep Iowa relatively free from crimes and troubles that beset other pioneer communities, since it led to the building of churches, the organization of schools, the observance of the authority of the law, and the stability of homes. Consequently this spirit attracted settlers to the territory not only

as to a land of great fertility, but as an excellent place in which to make their homes; and minimized the inevitable presence of speculators and gamblers in the new settlements.

Rev. Harvey's article carries the survey of church development down to the establishment of Iowa Territory in July, 1838. To pursue such a survey on the same scale after this date would be an overwhelming task and would be beyond the scope of the Annals. The conscientious and readable survey of the five years prior to 1838 here given should suggest the course of development in the succeeding territorial years when the population at its close was five times the 22,500 enumerated in 1838.

DEPARTMENT NOTES

IN KEEPING with its regular policy, during the past quarter the department offered special exhibits on Lincoln's birthday and on Washington's birthday of letters and other historical material possessed by the department pertaining to these two men. A special exhibit of native Iowa birds was also held in observance of Wild Life Conservation Week, March 19-26. In addition the department assisted in a larger wild life conservation exhibit in the state house by contributing some of its mounted specimens.

THE DEPARTMENT acknowledges a gift from the Pennsylvania Historical Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, of a splendid scale model of Independence Hall. The model is three feet long over all, and two feet high. For protection and for making it available for public display, it has been placed in a suitable glass case where it attracts the attention of practically all visitors to the department.

Labels in the case explain the high lights of the building and give points of historical information, as:

“East side room, first floor, is Declaration Chamber, in this room Washington was appointed Commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, June 16, 1775

The Declaration of Independence was signed

The Articles of Confederation were signed, July 9, 1778

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