

Warren Garst

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Senator Dolliver, none better than Mr. Harvey Ingham. Of Senator Young, none better than Governor Carroll.

First, then, Mr. Williams will speak.

WARREN GARST

BY ORA WILLIAMS

Warren Garst was fairly representative of the wholesome good that abounds in Iowa. His life was affirmative of the truth that right thinking and right living are worth while.

He was born in Dayton, Ohio, December 4, 1850, and died in Des Moines October 5, 1924. He was of a family of rugged and forceful characters. His father was a physician whose descendants rose to high positions in professional, commercial and public life. He came with his family first to Champaign, Illinois, then to Boone, Iowa. The father and the eldest of the sons fought for preservation of the Union side by side. Warren was a sturdy boy of sixteen when he arrived in Iowa to take up his great adventure among strangers. The larger part of his life was as a merchant at Coon Rapids. He was married in 1889 to Clara Clark. Upon his retirement from business he removed to the capital city of his state.

His official life is easily recounted. Commencing with the Twenty-fifth General Assembly, to which he was elected in 1893, he labored in eight successive Senate sessions, including the notable Code revision extra session of 1897, sitting for the district composed of Carroll, Sac and Greene counties. During five of the sessions he was chairman of the Senate Committee on Appropriations. Upon his election in 1906 as lieutenant governor he presided over the Senate of the Thirty-second General Assembly in regular and special session. In November, 1908, he was inaugurated governor to succeed Governor Cummins who had been elected to the United States Senate. In January, 1909, he delivered to the joint session of the Thirty-third General Assembly the biennial message on state affairs. A year later he was called for invaluable service to make a survey of the educational needs of the state. In July, 1913, he took charge of the newly created office of state industrial commissioner, from which he retired January 1, 1916. For a full third of a century he gave of himself for the public good.

Senator Garst was a good legislator. That is a worth while compliment. He came into the arena at a time when men of his sterling worth were needed. He earnestly applied himself to the task of remodeling and rearranging the machinery of government. There was no place in the workshop for men of faint heart. Few things good come to men or to states without a struggle. It was a time when the equipment for progress was wrought on the iron forge of factionalism. There were those who deplored the sharp divisions and protested against the clash of honest opinions. Timid ones shrank from the contentions and the controversies. It was no place for men with ignoble motives

and unpatriotic purposes. But what else could happen when men of firm convictions meet in the halls of legislation?

It was an interesting segment of Iowa history. Warren Garst had a favorable position in the Iowa Senate. The sparks of wit and sarcasm flew from one side to the other. Many were the thrusts and quick parries, the vigorous arguments and the earnest pleadings. Those of the left and those of the right were earnest, untiring, with fine aspirations—these colleagues and coworkers in the Twenty-fifth and succeeding assemblies. They did not all think alike, of course not. With traditional partisanship all but eliminated, there was nothing left but to find new lines of division; but that cleavage was concerned with vital things. Out of it came splendid results. When the history of that period is written it will contain few apologies for what was said and done by the leaders of either side.

His legislative service culminated in the Thirty-third General Assembly when he read to that body a formal biennial message as chief executive, wherein he presented a review of the reconstruction era and a call to duty in completing the work. For this task he was qualified by familiarity with every detail. His advice came from a ripe experience overlaid with a fine imagination. He placed on record his political creed.

"The nation," he said, "is passing through an era of change leading onward and upward to higher ideals in law and the administration of government, and to a better and sounder basis for the conduct of business. There has been an awakening to a sense of personal responsibility such as to sanction that which seems to some persons to be almost revolutionary; but that the people applaud the steps taken and a great majority have recently approved a program of further development of the best ideals, indicates they are sincere, earnest and firm in their demands that all the activities of our private and public life shall be made to harmonize with the eternal principles of right and justice."

He tried to live up to that ideal. It was to him a reality. He added truthfully:

"An unbiased survey of the history of our beloved state shows that within the scope of our rights and the limits of our authority we have been meeting this demand of the people for the better things."

The immediate task, he pointed out, was that of "making secure and permanent the advance which has been gained." Specifically he mentioned the "regeneration of political methods" as a work well started but not yet finished, and the honest effort to improve all the laws especially those which touch the business and industrial life. He commended the "modifying and strengthening" of laws affecting almost every field of activity. His long service on the Senate Appropriations Committee is recalled by his pardonable boast that the state had invested in equipment for its institutions in twelve years fifty percent more than in the first fifty years of statehood.

It was with something more than a passing fancy that he then and there envisaged the enlargement of the Capitol grounds and pleaded for construction of a new and much needed office building. "It seems to me," he said, "that there is an obligation upon this generation that we make the surroundings and approach to this great structure comport with its dignity and architectural beauty. We ought to make the whole an object of pride to all our people, something that will be an inspiration to better citizenship and that will give Iowa higher standing in the family of states."

He urged purchase of additional land for the use of the State University. He was looking far ahead. He advised enlargement of the equipment of the State College and expansion of its activities. He suggested extension of the field of operations for the Teachers' College. He commended the work of the State Historical Department and urged that counsel be taken as to "the best method of placing this educational work upon a sound and enduring basis." He asked for funds for "the acquisition of works of art that would be of influence in shaping the thought of our people."

It was characteristic of his courageous approach to all public questions that he joined with the attorney general in advocacy of strengthening the state's power for the enforcement of laws in general. He very earnestly recommended that which has since been established as the commerce counsel. He presented splendid arguments for a state highway commission with well defined power to "deal more broadly with highway construction, waterways, forestry and the conservation of all our natural resources." He demanded that in some way there should be funds provided to be "used in the construction of permanent highways." He added, "This is an entirely new departure in road construction for our state, but it is in line, as I believe, with the best systems that are in use elsewhere." He held to no narrow view that all the problems had been solved—he was ever looking forward.

He was right, though ahead of his time, in demanding a regrouping of departmental activities in the state and a consolidation of offices. Again, as often before, he adverted to the never to be disposed of problem of taxation and revenues. He sponsored the law for an annual report and fee from all corporations. His suggestion for a direct inheritance tax has since been acted upon. He urged better pay for public service. He suggested modification and betterment of the parole system.

"You must remember," he said in conclusion, "that it is not sufficient that our state should have had a glorious past, or that the present is serene. The future must be faced courageously and your plans must ever be, not for today alone, but for a tomorrow stretching out into an endless future. Duty to ourselves must ever be tempered with duty to posterity."

In that message Governor Garst epitomized his own public career

and summarized the achievements of his generation. It came from the depths of a strong heart. It is a state paper that challenges comparison with the host of other notable documents that are a part of the official history of our state.

The epoch thus practically brought to a close is remote enough for fair judgment as to its results. We now will all agree that there was much real work awaiting the laborers. The state itself had failed to keep step with the tremendous strides of the people. A large accumulation of archaic vestiges of the days of formative experiments was cut out of the Code, not all at once, but with several major operations. Real evils were attacked and strong remedies were provided. It is not necessary to go into too much detail. The story is in the books. Only an unworthy beneficiary would today be unwilling to admit that in almost everything that makes for good government there has been substantial advance in our times. We no longer argue about it. We know.

Now of course this tireless laborer in the great fields, whose portrait so charmingly created on this canvas by his daughter, Louise, is to remain the property of the state, did not do all these good things. But he and others like him did the job. He was a helper. He was a finisher. He didn't write bills and clutter up the calendar; but his handiwork can be found in hundreds of places not connected with his name. He was a good counselor. He was useful, immensely useful, and he had the courage to drive forward heedless of the clamors of the self-seeking adventurers who always beset the halls of legislation. He maintained a fine sense of duty. He believed that men in public service are in a position of trust.

This was the era of much forward stepping in the direction of making Iowa a better habitation for those who chose to live here. The first, and possibly the greatest, Code revision task drew into the legislature many of outstanding ability. Their work well done opened the way for the almost revolutionary State Board of Control. In natural sequence came the State Board of Education. Revision of the entire school code was inevitable. The drainage and highway advances came in this period. Drastic changes in the political methods, involving startling experiments, all entered upon with a fine sense of the individual responsibility, are a part of the history.

Whether in committees, on the floor of the Senate or wielding the gavel as presiding officer, Warren Garst faced the north wind boldly.

For one I say let us be thankful for the so-called factionalism of my time and yours. Warren Garst was naturally a statesman of the center group. He sat upon the left, as they would tell us in the old world; but he was never out of touch with the right. It was results, not applause, that he sought. He wrote seldom, but he used words that could not be misunderstood. He did not resort to the arts of oratory. He would not have done so if he could. He carried convic-

tion without fine phrases. His arguments oft sounded like hammer blows. He worked with all who were ready to help in needful things. There is credit enough to go around and have some left over.

From his retirement Governor Garst was called to an unofficial service of first importance. The Iowa teachers drafted him to head the Iowa Better Schools Commission for a comprehensive survey of the whole educational system and to lay the foundation for a more permanent and more efficient school administration here. It was a great work well done. As chairman of the legislative committee appointed by the State Teachers Association he aided in the big program of advanced legislation which followed.

Iowa had the good fortune to have his services in administration of the workmen's compensation law, in the formative period of that system. He engaged in this work with enthusiasm as in full accord with his idea of the "eternal principles of right and justice."

In his retirement Governor Garst never lost interest in state and nation. Rather did he advance to higher levels. He recognized the change which the World War wrought in world relations; but he felt that what was good for Coon Rapids was good for Iowa, and what was good for Iowa was good for the nation, and that American ideals are good all round the world. He was for every reasonable movement to bring about and to preserve for all time an international good will. He accepted his share of responsibility and was ready to join with all peace loving men and women in a forward looking world program.

To every generation its own years are ponderous with mighty deeds. The times we have known have been fruitful. Our journey along the pathway has not been impeded. The universal law prevails. The America we love is throbbing with the divine urge. The sequence of events, the effects we see and the remote cause, the unchanging order of the universe all the way from the electron to the nebulae, is a part of our daily experience. The men and the women of Iowa have not wasted their heritage.

Iowa is well placed in the great laboratory. The rivers of its borders continue to run toward an indissoluble union. Its soil and its mines produce abundantly. Iowa yields best of all that is good. The fusing for the coming race goes on quietly. There is tolerance, there is optimism, there is the joy of life. Farthest removed of any commonwealth from the troubled waters of the seven seas, Iowa is an admirable testing field for the things that promise good.

As we know well, government by the people will ever be in the making over process. The only completed system is an autocracy. Republics are in constant need of repairs or betterments. The methods of self-governing will always be undergoing change to meet changing conditions and new needs. These fundamental truths have not been better understood, nor more courageously acted upon, than in the Iowa of the last half century. And Iowa's contribution is not all bound in

buckram — its best part is the presence of a fine moral sentiment that is the driving force back of every step taken for better government.

Never at any time did Warren Garst shirk his part of the responsibility for the unescapable duty of the age.

It is a great joy to me to place in the record this my tribute to one who was my friend. All too readily we drop a flower on the grave and turn away with forgetfulness. I could say much more of the man and his work; but I have been brief and perhaps have omitted the best. Let us retrace and go hastily over the pathway again. There was a reason why Warren Garst came to the tasks of his life well equipped. It is no accident that some men leave their imprint on their times. The universal law is not suspended for the race of supermen. Neither in the fields of Iowa nor in the star dust of the galaxy do things just happen. Warren Garst came to the strength of his manhood by forward stepping along familiar pathways.

Yet the environment was favorable. Quite logically he dedicated all that was in him to the welfare of his fellow men. His journey led that way. Let us follow it, remembering there are both flowers and thorns by the roadside. The hurly-burly of our busy lives does not crowd out all romance.

We catch our first glimpse of Warren Garst with his face toward the West. That is typical of youth, in America. In his boyhood time the West meant opportunity, and Iowa was of the West.

He came out of that rich territory that was saved by General George Rogers Clark for the overflow from the old colonies. He crossed the great river on which Marquette looked with admiration. He surveyed the villages where the Iowa band and the Wesleyan circuit riders ran up their rival spires. He trod with the joy of conquest the wide prairies, with their flower carpets, that Chief Keokuk loved. He paused in the very heart of the empire that Jefferson bought for a song. He linked his fortunes with the people who had given generously of their young manhood to uphold the hands of Lincoln.

Ah, if a youthful soul has within it any spark of the divine it must come to flower and fruition in such an environment.

It may also be noted that there is no better vantage point from which to make survey of an unfolding landscape than the lookout of a railroad train, and Warren Garst hardened his muscles as a brakeman atop long caravans of freight. It was honest toil that did not cramp the intellect. Transportation was at its beginnings. The Northwestern Railroad wound out of Boonesboro not far from the cottage where the present secretary of the navy thrust his bare toes into the sand, thence on down Honey Creek and over the Kate Shelley bridge with its tragic story of heroism, then toiled painfully up the long Moingona hill on its way to the land of promise. He passed that way often.

The Iowa that is a land of glory was then young and fair. The spring time stars of blue and white dotted the prairies, the woodland

fringe that marked the waterways was green or gold, there were lakes that glistened in the moonlight, there was music in the flutter of the grouse, the chatter of the squirrel, the welcome of the meadowlark. The corn grew very tall then as now. Small wonder that Warren Garst marked the course of the Milwaukee Railroad as it blazed a new trail, and joined his elder brother in trade at Coon Rapids.

Now a country store is not a college; but it is far from being a hermitage for one who has a warm heart and an understanding mind. No Iowan need apologize for Main Street, it is cleaner than the White Way. Swapping ribbons for eggs is a part of the surge and the rush of modern business life. The men and the women of the Carroll County farms and towns were and are typical of the variegated units that are of the very substance of our social and economic life. The people of such a community, like a thousand others in Iowa, express individuality in all the things that they do and in all the thoughts that they think. To know them is to understand America.

This is the school in which Warren Garst prepared himself for a useful career. He was one of the people. He was of the small town and the big farm. He interested himself in all the activities of the community. His neighborhood was an ever widening circle. He counseled his associates as members of one family. He rejoiced over their successes, he suffered their sorrows, he shared their fears and hopes and aspirations. The little world in which he lived and learned and loved expanded with his years until it was bounded by the West and the East and included all the world between.

The attitude of Governor Garst toward the work he had in hand was like that of the workman on a church. An inquirer paused to ask a stone mason what he was doing.

"I am working for ten dollars a day," was the reply.

He asked another and received for reply:

"I am carving this piece of marble to make a fine column."

He asked a third workman, who said:

"I am building a beautiful cathedral."

So it was with Governor Garst. He was always building an enduring edifice to which future generations may point with pride.

Happily he had the qualities that kept him ever his own man. He traveled the pathway on his own feet. It is well to recount and record his labor and his achievements for the lessons they afford. The storehouse of his wisdom was filled with the substance of his own rugged experience. He was larger than any community, he was broader than any class; his domestic and social life was of the quality that makes America great; in business he was a model of fairness and honorable dealing; as legislator and as executive he upheld a lofty conception of that brotherhood that is the sure foundation of all society, the idea of the unity of all peoples, the thought that we are of one interest, a sovereign state, a united nation.

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