

THE EARLY SCHOOLS OF INDIANA.

FROM THE PAPERS OF D. D. BANTA—SECOND INSTALMENT.

The Pioneer School Children—Winter Schools and Hardships of the Little Folks—Early Teachers—Their Character and Inefficiency—Their Status with the People—Their Pay—Queer Characters and Customs.

From the Indianapolis News of February 3, 1892.

BEFORE advancing upon the "masters," the books, the methods, the manners and the customs of the pioneer schools, something ought to be said of the pioneer children who made these schools a necessity.

Let me recall the reader's attention to the long paths that oftentimes stretched their serpentine ways between the cabin homes and the cabin schoolhouses—two, three and even four miles long, they sometimes were. In general it was a fall or winter school that was kept—most generally a winter, for every child big enough to work was required at home to aid in the support of the family. We of to-day, with our farms all made and with a superabundance of farm machinery, can scarcely conceive of the extremities to which the pioneer farmers were often driven to secure the planting, tilling and harvesting of the crops. And so the children, in the beginning, could be spared best in the winter seasons, and in consequence the country schools were in general, winter schools.

Happy were those children who had a fall school to attend! The long and winding school-paths threaded a region of delights. What schoolboy or schoolgirl of those far-off days can ever forget the autumnal wood with its many-hued foliage, its fragrant and nutty odors, its red, ripe haws, and its clusters of wild grapes; its chinquapins [acorns of the 'pin oak] and its hickory nuts? And think of the wild life that was part of it all! Gray squirrels barked and chattered from tree to tree, while the voices of glad birds were heard amid the branches from sun to sun. And the school-paths themselves! Were there ever such paths as those winding over hill and through hollow, and filled,

as they were, with dainty, rustling leaves that were as cool and soft to schoolboy foot as silken carpet?

But how different the winter school! When the snow came, blockading the paths, how it tried the temper of the young folk who were limited to one pair of shoes per winter. And how infinitely worse was it when the winter rains came. The whole face of the Indiana earth, whether along the country roads, in the cleared fields or in the woods, was filled with water like a sponge, and the most careful of school children seldom failed to reach school or home with feet soaking wet. Fifty years ago it was not the fashion for boys to wear boots. For that matter there were few men in the country places that wore them, while boot or bootee for girl or woman was not even to be thought of. Riding astride or making a speech would have been no more shocking, and so boots were seldom or never seen in the school-room, but it was the custom of both boys and girls, on occasion, to draw over the ankle and the top of the shoe a sock or stocking leg, or a piece of cloth, which, being well tied to shoe and ankle, kept the dry snow out of the shoe fairly well.

I have known boys and girls to attend school in the fall long after the hard frosts came, and even after the ice began to form, with their feet encased in old socks or stockings so badly worn at the toe and heel as to be fit for no other purpose than wearing in this manner, and so common an occurrence was it that no one thought it worthy of special attention. Sanford Cox, in his "Wabash Valley," draws a graphic word picture of the town of Lafayette, as it appeared to him about 1825, in which he tells us that he had "often" seen the Lafayette juveniles skating upon the ice, "some with skates, some with shoes, and some barefooted." It would seem that if the boys of Lafayette were of such hardy nature we might expect to find in some other places satisfactory evidence that the winter weather did not deter the barefooted from attending school. I have, accordingly, carefully looked through such records as have fallen in my way, and candor compels me to say that I have found only one other instance. This is related by the author of the "History of Monroe County," who says:

"It was then the custom to go to school, winter and summer, barefoot. That seems unreasonable, but it was done, and how?

The barefooted child, to begin with, had gone thus so long that his feet were hardened and calloused to resist the cold by several extra layers of epidermis. He could stand a degree of cold which would apparently chill him to the bone, and could walk for some time in the snow and frost without suffering more than he could bear with reasonable fortitude. When he had to do extra duty in the snow and cold, however, he would take a small piece of board, say a foot wide and two feet long, which had been seasoned and partially scorched by the fire, and after heating it till it was on the point of burning, he would start on the run toward the schoolhouse, with the hot board in his hand, and when his feet became too cold to bear any longer, he would place the board upon the ground and stand upon it till the numbness and cold had been partly overcome, when he would again take his 'stove' in his hand and make another dash for the schoolhouse. * * * Sometimes a flat, light piece of rock was substituted for the board and was much better, as it retained heat longer."

While we may feel assured that there never was a time when it was the fashion in Indiana generally for the children to attend school in the winter-time barefoot, nevertheless I have no doubt that during the territorial and early State periods it so frequently occurred as to occasion little or no remark.

I find but one reference as to the buckskin clothing worn by school children during the earlier periods mentioned. In the early schools of Vanderburg county the local historian tells us that the boys wore buckskin breeches and the girls wore buckskin aprons. Though this is the only statement found by me, yet there was a time when buckskin clothing must have been as common with school children, especially boys, as it was with their fathers.

From the News of February 10.

One of the greatest drawbacks to the efficiency of the pioneer schools was the want of competent teachers. This want was felt from the very beginning and continued on down for many years. "The pioneer teachers were generally adventurers from the East, or from England, Scotland or Ireland, who sought temporary employment during winter, while waiting for an opening for business," said Barnabas C. Hobbs on one occasion.

The Southern States furnished their quota, and western Pennsylvania was not behind any section of equal area in the number sent forth to become educators of the youth of the land. Of course there were many of the old-time teachers who were admirably equipped for their work, and who did it so well that they found a place in the lasting remembrance of their pupils; but while this is true, it is, on the other hand, equally true that the admirably equipped teachers were the exception. So loud were the complaints of the inefficiency of the school teachers throughout the State that they reached the ears of the Governor. In his annual message to the legislature, in 1833, Governor Noble thus calls attention to the subject:

"The want of competent teachers to instruct in the township schools is a cause of complaint in many sections of the State, and it is to be regretted that in employing transient persons from other States, containing but little qualification or moral character, the profession is not in that repute it should be. Teachers permanently interested in the institutions of the country, possessing a knowledge of the manners and customs of our extended population, and mingling with it, would be more calculated to render essential service and be better received than those who come in search of employment." And he proposes as a remedy for the evil the establishment of a seminary for the special training of our native teachers, or the incorporation of the manual labor system with the preparatory department of the Indiana College at Bloomington.

In the beginning of our State's history and for many years thereafter the people held in slight esteem the vocation of the pedagogue. Not because he was a pedagogue, but because he did not labor with his hands. Lawyers and ministers and even doctors who did not show their mettle now and then by acts of manual labor were very apt to receive less favor at the hands of the people than otherwise. An Indiana Secretary of State once, while in office, kept a jack for breeding purposes, and he caused the announcement to be made through the newspapers that he gave to the business his personal attention. It was considered a very proper thing for a Secretary of State to do. This one was an invincible politician before the people. It is related of an early Posey county teacher, one Henry W. Hunt, that when

he first applied for a school the people looked upon him as a "lazy, trifling, good-for-nothing fellow who wanted to make his living without work." What was true in Posey in pedagogue Hunt's case was generally true in every pedagogue's case throughout the State.

Teachers quite often in those days went on the hunt for their schools. They were a kind of tramp—homeless fellows, who went from place to place hunting for a job. When the prospect seemed good the candidate would write an "article of agreement," wherein he would propose to teach a quarter's school at so much per scholar. With that in hand he tramped the neighborhood over, soliciting subscribers, and, if a stranger, usually meeting with more scorn than good-will. He was too often esteemed a good-for-nothing who was too lazy to work. "The teachers were, as a rule," says the historian of Miami county, "illiterate and incompetent, and selected not because of any special qualifications, but because they had no other business." The only requirements were that the teachers should be able to teach reading, writing and ciphering. The teacher who could cipher all the sums in Pike's arithmetic, up to and including the rule of three, was considered a mathematician of no mean ability.

The wages paid the ordinary teacher were not usually such as to give respect to the profession. One of the curious chapters of the times is the low wages paid for all manner of intellectual labor. The Governor received only \$1000 per year, and a judge of the Circuit Court but \$700. Teachers were by no means an exception to the rule. Rev. Baynard R. Hall, the first principal of the State Seminary, at Bloomington, came all the way from Philadelphia to accept of the place at a salary of \$250 a year, and John M. Harney, who subsequently made such a figure as editor of the *Louisville Democrat*, walked all the way from Oxford, O., to apply for the chair of mathematics at a like salary, also, of \$250 per annum. Jesse Titus, an early schoomaster in Johnson county, taught a school during the winter of 1826-'07 at \$1 per scholar, which yielded him \$6 per month, out of which he paid his board of \$1 per month. The first school taught on the present site of Moore's Hill was by Sanford Rhodes, in 1820, at seventy-five cents per quarter for each pupil, which was paid mostly in trade. In 1830 John Martin taught in Cass county at

\$8 per month. Seventy-five cents per quarter was a price quite commonly met with as late as 1825, or even later, but the price varied. In some sections \$1 per scholar seems to have been the ruling price, in others \$1.50, while in a very few instances \$2 was paid. In many cases, probably a majority, the teacher was obliged to take part of his pay in produce. I find wheat, corn, bacon, venison hams, dried pumpkin, flour, buckwheat flour, labor, whisky, leather, coon skins and other articles mentioned as things given in exchange for teaching. "At the expiration of the three-months' term," says one writer, "the teacher would collect the tuition in wheat, corn, pork or furs, and take a wagon-load to the nearest market and exchange it for such articles as he needed. Very little tuition was paid in cash." One schoolmaster of the time contracted to receive his entire pay in corn, which, when delivered, he sent in a flat-boat to the New Orleans market. Another, an Orange county schoolmaster, of a somewhat later period, contracted to teach a three-months' term for \$36.50, to be paid as follows: \$25 in State scrip, \$2 in Illinois money, and \$9.50 in currency." This was as late as 1842, and there were seventy school children in his district.

A large per cent. of the unmarried teachers "boarded around," and thus took part of their pay in board. The custom in such cases was for the teachers to ascertain by computation the time he was entitled to board from each scholar, and usually he selected his own time for quartering himself upon the family. In most instances, it is believed, the teacher's presence in the family was very acceptable. The late A. B. Hunter, of Franklin, once taught a school under an agreement to board around, but one of his best patrons was so delighted with his society that he invited him to make his house his home during the term, which invitation the young man gratefully accepted. It was not the practice for the married teachers to board around. If not permanent residents of the neighborhood, they either found quarters in the "master's house," or in an abandoned cabin of the neighborhood. Quite common was it to find a "schoolmaster's house," which had been erected by the district, hard by the schoolhouse, for the use of the married masters.

The school terms were usually called "quarters." There were two kinds of quarters known in some localities—the "long quar-

ter" and the "short quarter." The long quarter consisted of thirteen weeks, and the short quarter of twelve weeks.

Notwithstanding the people were inclined to look upon the pioneer schoolmasters as a lazy class, yet they were looked up to perhaps as much if not more, than in these days. I have already said that the presence of the schoolmaster as a boarder in the family of his patron was welcome, for he was generally a man of some reading, and his conversation was eagerly listened to by all. Books and newspapers were scarce in those days, and so conversation was esteemed more than it is now.

A few years ago I had occasion to look into the standing and qualifications of the early teachers of my own county, and on looking over my notes I find this statement: "All sorts of teachers were employed in Johnson county. There was the 'one-eyed teacher,' the 'one-legged teacher,' the 'lame teacher,' the 'teacher who had fits,' the 'teacher who had been educated for the ministry but, owing to his habits of hard drink, had turned pedagogue,' and 'the teacher who got drunk on Saturday and whipped the entire school on Monday.'" A paragraph something like this might be truthfully written of every county south of the National road, and doubtless of every one north of it, but as to that I speak with less certainty, for want of knowledge. The lesson the paragraph points to is that whenever a man was rendered unfit for making his living any other way, he took to teaching. Mr. Hobbs, I believe, states that one of his first teachers was an ex-liquor dealer who, having grown too fat to successfully conduct that business any longer, turned schoolmaster. It is related of the first teacher of the first school in Clay township, in Morgan county, that he was afflicted with phthisic to such a degree that he was unable to perform manual labor; but he was a fairly good teacher, save when he felt an attack of his malady coming on. "That was the signal for an indiscriminate whipping." The first schoolmaster of Vanderburg county lived the life of a hermit, and is described as a "rude, eccentric individual, who lived alone and gained a subsistence by hunting, trapping and trading." John Malone, a Jackson county schoolmaster, was given to tippling to such excess that he could not restrain himself from drinking ardent spirits during school hours. He carried his bottle with him to school but he

seems to have had regard enough for the proprieties not to take it into the schoolhouse, but hid it out. Once a certain Jacob Brown and a playmate stole the bottle and drank till they came to grief. The master was, of course, properly indignant, and "for setting such an example," the record quaintly says, "the boys were soundly whipped." Wesley Hopkins, a Warrick county teacher, carried his whisky to school in a jug. Owen Davis, a Spencer county teacher, took to the fiddle. He taught what was known as a "loud school," and while his scholars roared at the top of their voices the gentle pedagogue drew forth his trusty fiddle and played "Old Zip Coon," "The Devil's Dream," and other inspiring profane airs with all the might and main that was in him. Thomas Ayres, a Revolutionary veteran, who taught in Switzerland county, regularly took his afternoon nap during school hours, "while his pupils," says the historian, "were supposed to be preparing their lessons, but in reality were amusing themselves by catching flies and tossing them into his open mouth." One of Orange county's early schoolmasters was an old sailor who had wandered out to the Indiana woods. Under his encouragement his pupils, it is said, "spent a large part of their time roasting potatoes." About the same time William Grimes, a teacher still further southwest, "employed his time between recitations by cracking hickorynuts on one of the puncheon benches with a bench leg."

[*To be continued.*]