

Editor's Pages

TWO UNCERTAIN YEARS

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I finished high school in the spring of 1888.¹ In the fall of 1890, I began my teaching career. In the interval, which seems very long as I look back to it in retrospect, I worried a great deal about the future. Wandering on a barren plateau, with no signs to guide me, I was much disturbed at times. Long ago, however, I ceased to regret having passed through that discouraging period, having become certain that the experience was valuable. There was at least time to think. Before leaving high school, I had been led to consider the possibility of entering Wabash College. A woman who was interested in boys told me that she had talked to Dr. Tuttle² about me, which furnished something to dream about. There was a feeling in our home that I ought to go to college, if possible to provide a way.

Before any headway had been made to carry out any sort of plan, a prosperous relative came to our home for a brief visit. After his departure, I learned that he had convinced my parents that the surest road to success for me could be found through giving me a short course in a business college. In addition, he had volunteered to loan \$100 for the purpose, which he thought might be sufficient to pay tuition board and room-rent for three months. He had known, or heard of, some young persons who had learned enough about bookkeeping in about twelve weeks to obtain jobs.

A few college catalogues had been sent to me just before my high school commencement. There was one from Wabash College, one from Hanover College and one from the State Normal School at Terre Haute. Besides these three from schools of which I had heard, there was another, the annual catalogue of the American Normal College.³ It was the plan

¹ In the four issues of 1936, there appeared four installments of what was called "The Beginnings of a Possible Autobiography." In these, the story of my life, to the time of graduation from high school, was briefly told. In the four issues of 1937, the plan is to carry the autobiography through another period of years, possibly to the year 1908.—*Editor*.

² Joseph F. Tuttle, D.D., President of Wabash College from 1862 to 1892. The woman who took such a friendly interest in me was Miss Rachel Crawford, a teacher in the Delphi schools, and teacher of my Sunday School class.

³ I received no catalogue from Indiana University, Purdue University, or DePauw University. This seems a small matter, but there is a strong chance that I might have entered Indiana University in 1891 instead of the State Normal School, had I received a catalogue from the University in 1888 as I did from the Normal School.

at first that I should take a course in a commercial school in Lafayette, but, if so, I must wait until September. The American Normal College was open throughout the year, so the catalogue declared, and students could enter at any time. There was a teachers' course, a music course, and, what intrigued me at the moment, a business course. The regular terms were ten weeks each, but a short term of four weeks was to start in mid-summer. For this short term, the cost for room, board and tuition was to be \$25. At the end of this term, one could go on without a break into the next term. This seemed to be exactly the chance for which we were looking. As it would surely be possible to prepare for a career as an accountant and business man in fourteen weeks, the cost of my education would not run beyond the \$100 which was in sight.

The American Normal College was in Logansport which was but little farther from our farm in one direction than was Lafayette in the other. Preparations were soon completed, and I left Delphi for college on Monday morning, July 23, 1888. The distance was soon covered on a Wabash Railway train, and I was in the office of President Charles E. Kircher by the middle of the forenoon. I immediately learned that the last ten-weeks term of the year was just closing, and that the new short term would not begin till the following Monday. It did not seem best to return to my home for a week, so I decided to take the advice of the President and get used to the place while waiting for class work to begin. I was temporarily assigned to a room on the third floor, which I was to share with a young man who had been on the scene for some time. The dining-room was in the basement. In fact, everything was provided under one roof at this institution of learning. I mean rooms, meals, and instruction, for, to get water, one must go out of the building and part way down the hill.

My stay at the American Normal College was not extended. Though without experience, a few hours convinced me that the conditions at this temple of learning were not satisfactory, and I planned my departure. I made my get-away on Wednesday afternoon. A bit later in the summer, I read an item in one of the Delphi papers, which recorded the closing of the institution. This was before the end of the four weeks term, during which I was to have received the first portion of my business training.

I recall that the annual commencement exercises were

about to take place on Thursday or Friday, but I left a day or two too soon. It was because of this annual event that classes were not meeting that week. Students were not returning to their homes, though class-work was suspended and many of them were not planning to remain in school. The explanation is that having paid their bills in advance, they could remain to the end of the week without extra cost. Indeed they must remain to get all that was coming to them. There must have been from one hundred to one hundred fifty students. There were the two proverbial literary societies, and the members of each were extremely active and loyal. A near riot occurred in the early afternoon of my first day, over a prospective member that each society was determined to land. I am sure of this, as I was that prospective member and the innocent cause of the trouble.

The name of the man in charge of the college dining hall was Joe Roop, I believe. All of the students dined at the same time, morning, noon, and evening. I partook of Joe's fare seven times. The charge was not great—eighty-four cents, according to my memory. Possibly it was a little more or a little less. I can not recall the two breakfasts, but, at each of the other five meals, potatoes and chicken gravy, but no chicken, were served. At noon on my last day, I asked a young man who was dining with me (John Guthrie, whom I learned to know quite well in later years) how it was possible to have chicken gravy so often with no tangible basis for the dish. His answer was: "Oh, that's easy. Joe just hangs a rooster in the window and lets the shadow fall in the pot."

During the long afternoon of my first day, I passed through an hour of great mental anguish. I seemed to be slated for a considerable period at the American Normal College, and I felt that I could not go through with it. Seated alone on the hillside in my agony, it finally occurred to me to write to my father and ask his permission to return home. This done, I felt better and soon I was able to see the humor in the situation. My courage was greatly aided by the knowledge that I had not paid the \$25 fee covering all expenses for the four weeks term. This good fortune was due to no wisdom or foresight on my part. I was very anxious to pay over the amount when I first visited the President's office, and the school undoubtedly needed the cash. It was not time to collect fees for the new term, however, so I was not given an opportunity to

pay the term bill a week in advance.

By Wednesday morning, I was able to reflect that my letter might not be received at home for several days. All would depend on whether my father should happen to make a trip to Delphi, as there was no rural delivery then. It would be best to go home and make my explanations in person. I laid my plans carefully, as I did not want anything to interfere with my decision. I went to Joe Roop and paid my bills, and then packed my trunk, which Guthrie helped me to carry down to the street when no one was looking. I had gone down town and engaged a drayman to come at one o'clock. When I arrived in Delphi, I found my father there. He had come to town for some purpose, had received my letter, and had attempted to reach me by phone at the College to tell me that I should return forthwith to the parental roof. He was a bit puzzled that I could not be found, but encountered me in person soon after his failure to contact me by long distance, and soon learned that all was well with me.

I think that President Charles E. Kircher was a good man who was doing his best to operate a school on slender resources in competition with larger and more successful institutions of a similar kind at Valparaiso and Danville, Indiana. About thirteen years later, I met the Rev. Kircher again. He was then a Presbyterian pastor in charge of a church somewhere in Indiana, and was brought to Elkhart to preach a trial sermon before the congregation of the Presbyterian Church there. At the time, I was a member of that church, but I did not remind the "candidate", as one who preaches a trial sermon is generally called, that I had once met him, when a would-be student, in the President's Office of the American Normal College.⁴

It was on September 3, 1888, that I entered the Union Business College of Lafayette to take a commercial course. This "College" occupied a large hall on the second floor of a building on the north side of Columbia Street about three blocks east of the Monon Railway which runs through the city on Fifth Street. The head of the school was a gentleman from

⁴The building occupied by the American Normal College stood at the top of the bluff on the north side of the City. It was built from funds supplied by a number of people, but Joshua Smithson of Vevay, Indiana, was the first to contribute toward the founding of the school, which was to bear the name of "Smithson College." Smithson was an Englishman who migrated to the United States and made his home at Vevay, where he engaged in Business. After his death, his widow added a considerable amount to the Smithson College fund. The building was erected in 1872-3. It was destroyed by fire not long after 1890. The Smithsons were Universalists who desired to see a college where young people of that sect might be welcomed and educated.

the East, Principal C. M. Robinson. He was a handsome man, with considerable business acumen, who showed a good deal of culture. I liked him and believe that he developed quite a friendship for me, though I was called to his office several times on account of activities that I should not have engaged in.

The tuition for three months was \$27, but I remained through four months paying a pro-rata fee for the extra month. I found room and board with a family on North Fourth Street, about four blocks from the Courthouse. This cost me four dollars per week. Four other students from the Business College roomed and boarded at the same place. Two of these students were as young as I, another was about five years older, and the fifth was about ten years my senior.⁸ These colleagues were conscientious, working students, each of whom set me a good example. We became thoroughly acquainted and several strong friendships were formed. Not the least of our pleasant associations were our meetings around the dining-table. Mrs. Garrett provided fairly good meals, which we enjoyed, but we derived much pleasure as well from the conversation in which we indulged. A number of times later, I boarded with larger groups of college students who met three times a day about the same table. I am sure that there is, in these days of the college commons, and numerous small "eating joints" (where food is served at all hours), a loss of something of real value, that, in a former period, was always an accompaniment of the college boarding club.

There were about eighty students in the Union Business College when I was there and only two regular instructors. Principal Robinson directed the work in bookkeeping and taught penmanship. There were occasional recitations of the different groups who were learning to keep books, but most of the work was individual. There was a daily writing period in the large room and most of the students made real progress. The other instructor was a middle-aged school teacher who had been brought in from a country district to teach commercial arithmetic and spelling. He was well-meaning and kind, but his mind worked slowly and his methods were wooden. He could, of course, pronounce the words from the busi-

⁸ These students, who were all from nearby points in Indiana, were: Ira Frankenhof of Dayton; Robert L. Winks of Williamsport; Charles Wingard of Delphi (graduate of the Delphi High School, 1887); and Wilson B. Lucas of Battle Ground.

ness-speller and grade the papers by the lists of words in the book, but some of the problems in arithmetic he could not solve. After a few weeks, I dropped both the spelling and the arithmetic and gave more time to penmanship and bookkeeping. The teacher spoke to me about it, but I did not take them up again. The matter was mentioned to me no more. If brought to the attention of the Principal, he said nothing about it. I was only a boy of eighteen and I should have been more docile, but I am still certain that I was well in advance of Mr. O. in both arithmetic and spelling. Stenography and typewriting were also listed as optional subjects, but I believe that less than ten students were enrolled in these courses. They were taught by a part-time instructor who probably had a position with some business or professional firm.

The student body was made up of persons who ranged in age from about fourteen to thirty. Some were children who had lost interest or failed in the public schools. Others were country school teachers who had been led to believe that a business course would open the doors to success in the commercial world. Still others were high school graduates, who, like myself, believed that there were good jobs ahead as bookkeepers for those who would apply themselves and make the brief but necessary preparation.⁶

At the end of four months, I went back to the farm, where there was always work to be done and where board and lodging were free. For about a year, I continued to expect a job, but none came. I was disappointed and discouraged. I was out of touch with the business world. I had few contacts with anyone who might have employed me in any capacity, even in our small county seat or in the villages where I had some acquaintances. If I could have started as a delivery clerk, or in some equally responsible "position", I might have worked up to something, and, along the way, my slight acquaintance with ledgers and balance sheets might have helped me. As it was, I had been filled with the idea that I surely would obtain a job as a bookkeeper within a reasonable time, though under the circumstances this was really out of the question.

I wrote to an old acquaintance of my parents who had

⁶ The income from tuition fees collected from students in the Union Business College must have been about \$7500 for the nine months that the school was open each year. The outlay for teaching was about \$900, and other expenses were perhaps as much as \$1600 for the year. With a student body of eighty to ninety, the net income of the principal was about \$5000 per year.

long lived in Denver. He was a business man with some influence, but he replied that Denver was over-run with bookkeepers who were living in Colorado because of weak lungs. I borrowed \$2.50, and joined an Accountants' Bureau of Wichita, Kansas, early in the year 1889. The managers did not promise a job, but did promise to put me in touch with persons wanting a bookkeeper. It was not long until a notice came that I should apply for a position with Washmeyer, Hartley & Raub, a firm located somewhere in Indian Territory. I made my first formal application for a job, following carefully all the rules that had been recommended to me. After waiting restlessly for about two weeks, I received a reply from a Mr. Richter, of Hartley & Richter, successors to Washmeyer, Hartley & Raub. The vacancy had been filled before the receipt of my application, the place going to a young man from some town in Kansas. Mr. Richter added that, for my sake, he was sorry that I was late. This was just before the opening of Oklahoma to settlement.

Spring and summer went by, while I marked time by working steadily on the farm. During these slow passing months, or, to be more specific, on March 1, 1889, a Mr. Demas Simpson Thomas, who had purchased the farm adjoining ours on the south, moved into the neighborhood. The family consisted of himself, his wife and one daughter. The daughter, then almost fifteen years of age, was destined to play a large part in my life as she became my wife several years later.

In this period, while the belief that I must crash into the business world still possessed my spirit, I met a young man, older than myself, who gave me a new idea. He had gone to Chicago twice, where he was able to find work in some store each time, merely by "running his face". He recommended this easy method to me. I failed to ask him why he was not still in the great city adding one success to another, but, though superficial, my adviser was suave and fluent and could readily have given a plausible explanation. I incubated the idea for a long time, and then found an opportunity to try it out. An excursion to Chicago was advertised by the Monon Railway for a Wednesday early in September. The round-trip fare from Delphi was \$1.50. The special train would reach Chicago at about eleven A.M., and return at night. My plan was to buy a round-trip ticket, but not to come back, in order to save \$1.85 on the regular one way fare. I made my prepara-

tions which included the purchase of a fair-sized valise. It was made of dark gray canvas-cloth decorated with plenty of tan leather in addition to the straps. It looked well, but I felt that I should carry along some ledgers, journals and daybooks that I had worked through and my bookkeeping text, which added too much weight.

Soon after my arrival in Chicago, a slow rain began to fall. I bought an umbrella. It did not cost much, and it looked quite neat before it was opened up. I soon discovered that it was a real family umbrella, which, after the first use, always looked like those of Uncle Josh that are shown in cartoons in spite of anything that I could do to it. I engaged a room in a small, clean, well managed hotel on State Street for which I paid fifty cents a day. I was able to get my meals at surprisingly low prices at various convenient restaurants. If I could just find a job, all would be well. I took the precaution on my second day to put away in a separate pocket \$3.35, the fare to Delphi. On Thursday and Friday, I went to many parts of the City, using the street-cars. I bought newspapers and answered want-ads. I called at several places to ask for work. I wrote several letters home, not one of which was received until after my return. I held out until Saturday night, living on five cents worth of buns the last day. It was quite an experience for a nineteen-year old youth, and there were no regrets except in regard to the position that I did not find.

My train left Chicago at 8:30 P.M. and reached Delphi at 12:30 A.M. I was again in familiar territory, but I was a bit over four miles from home with a heavy valise, a large umbrella (strapped on the side of said valise), and I had eaten nothing save six light buns since Friday. Nevertheless, I started on the long walk with no misgivings. When I was nearly half way home, I looked back and saw a man walking in my direction nearly a quarter of a mile behind me. I decided to out-walk him, but he constantly gained on me though I did my best. I detached my umbrella, for use in case of necessity, and slowed down. When this pedestrian came near, I found that he was a middle-aged, unmarried carpenter, who lived with a family in our neighborhood. Possibly he slackened his pace, but I think not. At any rate, I did not fall behind during the remainder of that walk.

From the time of my return until the Christmas holidays, I hauled gravel, hauled cordwood, husked corn, helped work

a cross-cut saw, and did many other jobs that farm life can furnish in fall and winter.⁷ January found me occupying a seat in the country school where I had been a pupil before entering high school. My object was to review all the "common branches" and then take the teacher's examination in an attempt to obtain a license. In that period, the only requirements to be met before becoming a teacher were: the possession of a license; the attainment of the proper age; "good moral character"; and a contract with a Township Trustee or School Board. I stayed in school six weeks, working regularly with the eighth grade pupils, but also covering what the class had passed over during the early part of the term and what they would study in the latter part of the term, after the date when I planned to withdraw. I went to the county seat and wrote on the February list of State Board questions. As a result I was granted a twelve-months license.⁸ I did not obtain a school before the opening of the term in September, but, after about a month had passed, the teacher of the home school was shifted to a district northeast of Delphi and I was placed in charge of about forty-five pupils with all the grades from the chart class to those who would finish the eighth grade in the spring of 1891.

Having concluded my review work at the end of February, I went back to farm activities, to which I devoted my time until about July 1. Then I began to work at a small factory which produced drain-tile of varying sizes from three to ten inches in diameter. The tile factory had been established in 1886, less than a quarter of a mile from our home, but on the opposite side of the highway. In the spring of 1890, the business changed hands and the new proprietor, who was a tile manufacturer of Hendricks County, Indiana, sent a force of five men from his own community, to which he added one young man from South Delphi. After a few months, one of the laborers left his job. I was taken on as a temporary hand, so I

⁷ In this period, I tried to get started in the business of selling electric belts at \$3.00 each. To begin, I must buy two belts at half price, persuade two persons with back trouble to wear them, and obtain a testimonial from each. After that, I was to be given a virgin territory, when great success was sure to come to me provided I should show the requisite energy and business ability. To make the story brief, this venture did not work out in accordance with what was outlined in the literature sent me. I purchased the two belts, found two elderly persons to use them, obtained the testimonials, made no sales, and surrendered the job with all of its possibilities at the end of a few weeks.

⁸ The regular common school licenses were issued for six months, twelve months, twenty-four months, and thirty-six months. The grade of license issued, depended on the average of grades in all the subjects included, and on the lowest grade made by the applicant in any subject. The subjects covered by the examination questions were: writing, spelling, history, physiology, grammar, geography, arithmetic, reading and science of education. The County Superintendent graded the manuscripts.

supposed, but was retained until I began to teach in October. One man hauled dirt from the pit; another shoveled this dirt, after treating it with a prescribed amount of water, into the hopper of the mill (called "filling the gum"); a third man cut the tile with a revolving frame across which steel wires were stretched at regular intervals. The "off-bearer" had merely to grasp the frame and bring it down firmly and quickly to cut off four tiles from the tube of moist, moulded earth. He set the "green" tile on a flat car, which when loaded was pushed back into a long shed by the fourth man, who replaced the filled car with an empty one. I was the fourth laborer. It was my duty to set the newly made tile on strips of wood, in one after another of the many stalls in the long drying shed. The small sizes were easy to put in place, but the larger tiles required expert handling.

The fifth man on the force operated the steam-engine which furnished the power for the mill and for the water-pump. The sixth man cared for the kiln in which the tile were burned. When tile were properly finished and cooled, the entire force worked together to empty the kiln and rick the tile on the yard. Likewise, the entire gang worked together to refill the kiln. I labored at this factory for three months. My wages were seventy-five cents per day and meals. One member of the force became ill and died during August, and still later another left for his home in Hendricks County because of a temporary sickness. New men were picked up to fill these vacancies, one of whom was beyond sixty years of age. He had for many years owned an elevator (warehouse) in Delphi. He had also carried on a sort of private banking business. For many years he had been a more or less successful buyer and seller of futures in connection with the Chicago Board of Trade. Now, his job was to shovel dirt into the hopper of the mill. This he did day after day without complaint. One day when engine trouble caused a halt for a time, this dapper, little gentleman, with a neatly trimmed full-beard, a pleasant voice, and an excellent command of English, told several of us some interesting facts. "The most money I ever made in one day was \$3,000", he remarked. "The most I ever lost in one day was \$9,000". He believed that his failure in business was due not to working the Board of Trade, but to working it too steadily. He was not bitter. He did not want any sympathy. He went along working very cheerfully for seventy-five cents

a day and board. It is a pleasure to record that some of his old friends were able after a few weeks to obtain an office job for this elderly man in Hammond, Indiana, which he held during the remainder of his active life.⁹

There were no regular pay-days in connection with the little manufacturing institution for which I worked. Workmen were paid such sums as it seemed absolutely necessary for them to have, from two to three weeks after their requests were made. We lived simple lives, and, receiving board and room, not much cash was required. I spent my nights at home, and usually got my breakfast there except when I was detailed to cook for the factory force. I do not remember the exact amount, but am sure that I was ahead as much as thirty dollars when I quit my job. The proprietor settled with all the employes soon after I severed my connections with his factory. I did not begin my teaching career with money in the bank, but I did have a few dollars in my pocket. I was a young man of twenty when I took charge of the country school in the neighborhood where I was born and where I grew up. I did not accept the job because I felt a "call" to the work, but because there seemed to be no other chance to get a start in life.¹⁰ My conscience still hurts me for imposing myself on that room-full of young hopefuls, but, like thousands of other young men, I had to find myself, and used the public schools as the means to that end.

⁹ The name of this gentleman was Jacob Bridge.

¹⁰ My wages were \$2.40 per day, for five days per week. The school was in Deer Creek Township, which maintained a slightly higher wage scale than was paid in the remainder of Carroll County to teachers in country schools.