

THE GENESIS OF THE NEBRASKA STATE UNIVERSITY.

A generation ago, as generations are counted, or to be more definite, on the evening of September 6, 1871, in the chapel of the newly erected State University building at Lincoln, J. Sterling Morton, who made the "University Address," in the course of its delivery said: "As in ancient Rome the gates of Janus were thrown open to indicate existing war, so today we open wide the doors of the University of the State of Nebraska as a token of perpetual systematized war against ignorance and bigotry, and intolerance and vice in every form among the people of the state, and the youth who in a few fleeting years will become its legislators, its judges and its governors."

Alluding to the benefits of free education in the higher walks of learning which the university provided, he said: "If these precious advantages be improved, thirty years from today the alumni of this institution will have made their impress for the good, the true, and the ennobling upon every school district of every county, and the ripened fruits of this system of education will cluster richly in the legislative, executive and judicial departments of the commonwealth."

The occasion was the conclusion of the inaugural ceremonies of the opening of the University. Seated upon the flower-bedecked rostrum were the governor and other state dignitaries, the state board of regents, the newly inducted chancellor, and the members of the faculty, while the auditorium was crowded with prominent men and women who had gathered to witness the launching of a great public institution of learning, established in perpetuity by the people, for the sons and daughters of the people. The effect of the earnest and prophetic language of the orator was reflected upon the countenances of his auditors, who realized the nobility of the event, its far-reaching influence upon the futures of those who should come after them.

The following morning the department designated as the "College of Ancient and Modern Languages, Mathematics and Natural Sciences," was opened and the University began its career by religious services in the chapel, after which came the examination, classification, and enrollment of pupils.

The task of organizing and putting the machinery into practical operation, fell upon the shoulders of five members of the faculty who up to that time had been chosen by the board of regents. Of these Dr. A. R. Benton, the chancellor and professor of moral and intellectual sciences, was especially well qualified for

the position to which he had been elected. It was my good fortune to see much of him both in and out of the class room, besides he seemed to take a particular interest in a trio of Otoe county students, (of whom more hereafter,) often inviting them to tea of an evening at his pleasant home near the school, which his geniality brightened, as his scholarship adorned the halls of learning.

As evidence of how he was regarded by his associates, here is an extract from a Charter Day address delivered by Professor Aughey years after the doctor had severed his connection with the University: "His scholarship was accurate and broad. Familiar with the classics, the amenities of literature occupied much of his attention. * * * * So broad was he in scholarship that he was at home in every department of college work. He made every object luminous by the clearness of his analysis. Neat in person, pure in thought, clear in intellect, studious in life, courteous to a remarkable degree, the charm of the social circle, he was a model christian scholar and gentleman."

Associated with Chancellor Benton were Professors Manly, ancient languages; Dake, rhetoric and English literature; Aughey, chemistry and natural sciences — while Professor Church was principal of the Latin school. Of these, personal impressions are most vivid of Professors Dake and Aughey. The former was quiet and refined in manner, student, poet, idealist, yet practical in the administration of the affairs of the class room. His love of the English classics was as intense as his knowledge of them was profound. A small volume of poems of which he was the author, gave unmistakable evidence of true poetic genius. Had he lived he would have developed into one of our sweetest minor poets. His death in 1875 was a loss to the scholastic and literary circles of the west.

Of Prof. Aughey little need be said. All old residents of Nebraska, together with those who have been interested in the growth and progress of the University, are acquainted with the valuable services he rendered it from its beginning on through the many years of his connection with it; loved and admired by the students of those early days, he soon became known to the people of the west as a lecturer and writer. His work on the "Physical Geography and Geology of Nebraska" is a standard authority on the subjects treated, being a thorough scientific description of the mineral and allodial resources of the state. Both Professors Manly and Church were also popular with the students. The former was a thoroughly competent teacher, as was also the latter, who, being principal of the preparatory school, came in closer personal contact with the majority of the pupils than any of the other mem-

bers of the faculty, a comparatively young man at that time, my impression is that the boys were just a bit afraid of him, although with youthful intuition they at once recognized his ability as a teacher. In 1875 he was promoted to the chair of ancient languages, taking, I believe, the place vacated by Professor Manly, who was compelled to retire on account of ill health. On this little band of educators then fell the entire burden of the initial work of the University. That their task was well done is proven by the success that the institution has attained, much of which is owing to the laborious efforts of its first faculty. So long as the University shall stand a blessing to the people so long should their able and earnest devotion to its interests during this formative period be gratefully remembered by the inhabitants of the state and the students who have profited by their labors.

The main University building was erected by the state at a cost of \$152,000.00, the work having been done by contract. All of the lumber and other material, except the brick, stone and mortar used in its construction, was shipped by rail from Chicago to East Nebraska City, and hauled from there by teams a distance of sixty-five miles. The corner stone was laid with Masonic ceremonies September 27, 1869, two years after the admission of Nebraska as a state, and the building was practically completed within a year. On January 6, 1871, upon invitation of the contractors, the board of regents visited and inspected the building and officially declared that it "appeared to be well constructed and substantial." Prior to this it had also been examined by a number of building experts who reported favorably as to the manner of its construction and the excellence of the material used, yet, notwithstanding these inspections and reports and its acceptance by the state, induced by them, scarcely two years elapsed before the roof had become so leaky as to require extensive repairs, and the foundation so insecure as to necessitate the expenditure of upwards of \$8,000.00 in order to prevent the walls from tumbling down upon the heads of faculty and students. The greater portion of the work was performed by John McFarland, a pioneer builder and stone mason, who will be remembered by old residents of Nebraska City, as "Uncle" John McFarland. Subsequently in 1877, the north wing of the building having been abandoned "on account of imperfect material and faulty workmanship," the public spirited citizens of Lincoln raised by subscription \$6,000, which was expended in repairing and strengthening the foundation. The manner in which this building was constructed is but a sample of other public contract work done in the early days of Nebraska's statehood, and had the intellectual sub-structure of the halls of learning been constructed of like unfit material and laid with equally faulty workmanship, the damage could not have been so easily nor so cheaply remedied, neither would the University have attained the greatness of today.

To the youth whose ideas of a great public college had been formed from descriptions of Cambridge or Oxford, or who had dreamed of "ancient Athen's classic shades," and especially to one who had lived in the shadow of Princeton's venerable walls, strolled