

SAMUEL EVANS ROGERS PIONEER BANKER AND BROKER

Kentucky Youth of Push and Spirit Could Not Be Content Until He Had Reached New Country and Had Taken Up the Work of Its Development for Uses of Civilized Man

EIGHTY-FIVE years ago today, on February 19, 1822, Samuel Evans Rogers was born in an humble house near the town of Flemingsburg, Fleming county, Kentucky. His father, William R. Rogers, was a potter. But in the son was born that spirit which is the spirit of the great men of all ages who rise from humble beginnings, the spirit that overcomes all obstacles and arrives at the desired end, the spirit that animated Lincoln, Garfield, Grant and a host of others who have "made themselves."

Today on his eighty-fifth birthday Samuel E. Rogers can look with satisfaction at the life he has lived and feel that he has accomplished that for which his heart longed when he was a boy. For he contributed much to the development of Omaha and especially in real estate and banking, two lines which make particularly for the permanence of a city, he took a pioneer and always a leading part.

He early showed a thirst for learning. Many a night in his boyhood he sat studying long after the rest of the family were asleep. Many a hickory tree contributed its bark to make torches for the young searcher after wisdom. From such books as the "Life of Washington," the "Life of Marion" and "The Development of Western Civilization" he drew his inspiration to be and do something in the great empire that was then opening.

As the studious lad grew up it became apparent that he was not going to follow in his father's footsteps. He was impatient to get to the frontier, of which he had read and heard so much. While still little more than a boy he went to clerk in his brother's store in Michigan town, Ind. There he met and married the wife with whom he lived an uninterrupted and ideal life of sixty-six years. She was Miss Martha Brown, and they were married in 1841 when he was 19 and his bride scarcely 16 years of age. Mrs. Rogers died January 13 of this year.

Wife Second's Husband's Ambition

His wife proved a woman of remarkable parts. She immediately acceded with her husband's desire to go to the west. But first he set about securing a higher education, entering Wabash college in Crawfordsville, Ind., from which he was graduated with the degree of master of arts in 1843. He read law for a time in the office of Joseph A. Wright, who afterward became governor of Indiana. Later he moved to Pekin, Ill. It was at a time when that state was prolific in great men and its greatest man was in Pekin at that time. It was Abraham Lincoln, a struggling young lawyer.

"I lived close to the court house," says Mr. Rogers, "and I often went over to listen to the arguments. Among others I had an opportunity of listening to Lincoln. He was a tall, awkward fellow, and his clothes didn't seem to fit him. It struck me that he made a very odd figure, but he was not a bit self-conscious. He went on with his argument, interspersing it now and then with a story. The lawyers used to make sport of him, but he took it all good-naturedly and when he began talking to a jury he made them 'take notice.' I remember he had a little peculiarity in his pronunciation, something he had brought with him from his backwoods home, and the opposing lawyers used this as 'capital' to try to make him appear ridiculous. But he always came out ahead because he was perfectly self-possessed and could turn the joke on to the other fellow every time. One of those words I remember was 'alternate,' which he pronounced with the accent on the second syllable. His opponents held that it should be placed on the first syllable. They tried to imitate him in the pronunciation and thus render him ridiculous. But his odd pronunciation seemed to only render him the more conspicuous in the trial because his logic was so strong and his temper so good and he was so likable that he seemed to come off always with first honors."

Such was America's greatest man in the making. Ten years later this awkward young lawyer was to be thrown into the vortex of the greatest crisis in the history of the greatest nation in the world.

Postoffice Couldn't Hold Him

It was while he was postmaster in Havana, Ill., that the call of the west came to Mr. Rogers most irresistibly. He was a true Kentuckian and pre-eminently a pioneer. He was of that race of sturdy giant men whose delight it is to penetrate the wilderness, to hew down the trees, bridge the rivers, build railroads, lay out towns, cities and farms—in short, to make nature yield up her best. There is a certain joy in the heart of this type of man in overcoming obstacles and he sees his reward in results. And when the call of the wilderness came to him he decided to go. Accompanied by his father he set out in a wagon in the late summer of 1854 and came to Council Bluffs. The country across the river to the west was just to the liking of the frontiersman. It was a wilderness almost unmarred by the step of any but the moccasined Indian foot. "Uncle Billy" Snowden's log house had been built less than two months and "Uncle Billy" says he was the first settler in Omaha.

The morning after their arrival in Council Bluffs the two men, father and son, crossed the river and looked over the townsite, which was just being roughly laid out. The father took up a claim of 320 acres to the south of the city, while the son decided to erect a house in the town—or rather on the townsite. He chose the southeast corner of Eleventh and Dodge streets, where the police station now stands, and there he built the first house in Omaha. "Uncle Billy" Snowden's residence was a log cabin, but Mr. Rogers built a real house. He cut and hewed the walnut logs for the frame. He bought the boarding for the sides in Council Bluffs. He hauled the shingles from a place more than fifty miles south of Council Bluffs. Altogether it was a comfortable house and it was certainly the "finest in Omaha." The home was ready by October and then Mr. Rogers brought his wife to the west and became a permanent Omaha settler.

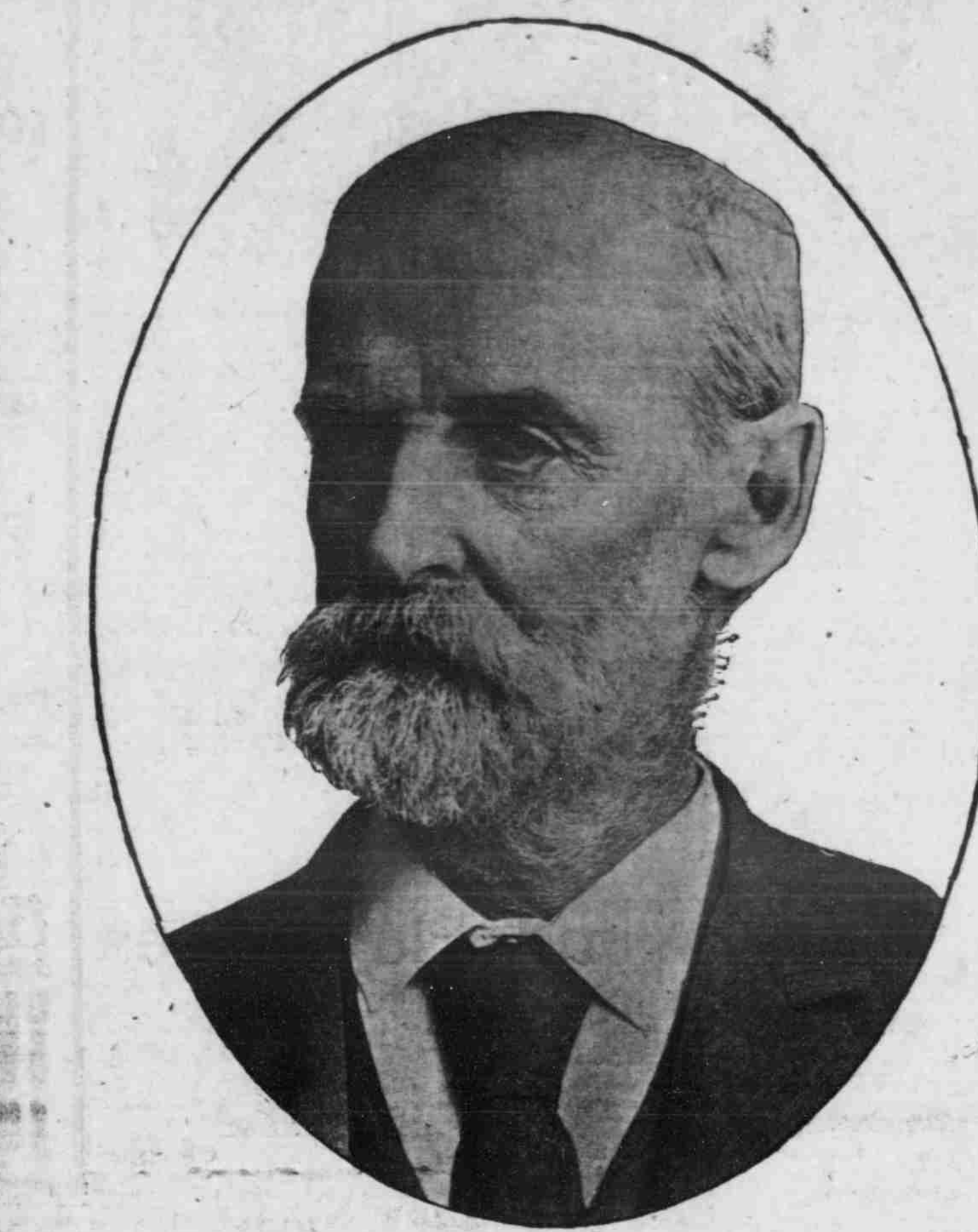
There was practically nothing for a man to do, especially in the winter. With only one other family in the "city" business and social life did not consume much of the young man's time. He immediately began to do service for his adopted state, being elected to the upper house of the territorial legislature at the election of the November after he arrived. The other members of the council from Douglas county were O. D. Richardson, A. D. Jones and T. G. Goodwill. Dr. Miller was clerk.

Voters in the Early Day

"There were just 102 votes cast in Douglas county at that first election," he says. "The majority of the voters came across from Iowa. No, I wouldn't say there were any election frauds. In that day voters were scarce, and it was an indication of growth if we could show a big election list. Those who came across to vote intended to make Nebraska their home eventually and were only waiting in Iowa until homes should be built."

During four sessions of the legislature he served in the upper house. There he did good work for the city of Omaha, always on the alert to defend its interests. He held the deciding vote in the first legislature upon the question of location of the capitol. The vote stood seven for Omaha and six against. He was the mover of the second question submitted to the first territorial council of Nebraska. In the fourth legislature, that of 1858, he was again instrumental in heading off a "stampede" of the law-makers from Omaha. A bill was up at that time for the relocation of the capitol and a majority of the members left the capitol building and made that famous march of January 7 to Florence, alleging that they were unsafe in Omaha. Mr. Rogers was appointed a member of the investigating committee which condemned this removal to Florence, and held those who had gone responsible for the trouble. The result was the reconvening of the legislature in Omaha. He was one of seven men admitted to the bar by the first supreme court of Nebraska in June, 1855.

Mr. Rogers entered the mercantile business in Omaha in the



SAMUEL EVANS ROGERS.

firm of Hellman, Blair & Co. in 1858, their store being located at Thirteenth and Farnam streets. He continued there until 1862, in which year he took a load of goods overland to Salt Lake City. During this trip he had the novel experience of being shot at by an Indian. The arrow just grazed the flank of the horse on which he was riding. He served for a time as county commissioner in 1866 to fill a vacancy caused by the death of James G. McGeath.

The most notable activities of Mr. Rogers, however, were in banking and real estate. He began in these lines soon after his

arrival. A small frame building on the corner of Eleventh and Douglas streets bore the proud legend, "S. Rogers, Bank," as early as 1857. The office even boasted a safe, which was the admiration of the white settlers and a marvel to the Indians who viewed it. The panic and money famine of 1857 swept over the country just after he had established his infant institution and for a long time its fate hung in the balance. Eventually it was closed at the time when there was no money with which to run a bank, aside from the almost worthless city scrip. Later he helped organize the State

Bank of Nebraska, and was one of the chief stockholders. This institution prospered with the growing city, and was finally merged into the present Merchants National bank, of which great institution Mr. Rogers was vice president from 1875 to 1898.

Activity in real estate began in the early 60's, at which time Mr. Rogers was the owner of a number of acres of the soil on which the city was to be built. He always had the optimistic faith of the successful pioneer and looked for great development in the town, but he never imagined it would attain its present proportions.

"I put it down in the early days as a 10,000 city," he says. "And it took a pretty optimistic man to expect that much in those days."

With the advent of the real estate boom his business assumed vast proportions. He proved an indefatigable worker, frequently being busy all day, out through the city and then working half the night at his office. He took a leading part in the development of the south part of the city, and laid out and named Vinton, Castellar, Dorcas, Martha and other streets. He was identified with the Credit Foncier scheme of George Francis Train, Nebraska's eccentric genius. Train walked into the office one day and announced his great scheme. He immediately negotiated the purchase of 500 acres, most of it from Mr. Rogers, though he also purchased a part from the Kountze brothers. This tract extended from the present Pierce street south to Deer park and from the present Second street to Twentieth street. Train bought the land for \$100 to \$200 an acre, though Mr. Rogers received only \$1,000 of this in cash. The remainder was secured by mortgage. Train laid out the northeast eighty acres in lots and erected ten frame cottages sent out from Chicago all ready to be put together. These houses cost \$1,200 each and were rented to some of the leading families of Omaha at \$60 a month. Train then sold the entire tract to the Credit Foncier of America, of which he was president. He filled the eastern papers with great advertisements of these lots and with glowing predictions of the future of Omaha, but his scheme proved a failure. Mr. Rogers brought suit with Kountze brothers for the foreclosure of the mortgages. This suit was fought by Train, though at a disadvantage, he being confined in the Tombs prison in New York at that time. After the matter had been in the courts sixteen years Mr. Rogers again gained a clear title to the tract in 1888.

Builder of Omaha Homes

His work in Omaha real estate extended over many years. He built hundreds of houses and has probably sold more lots in Omaha than any other one man. Even these great interests were not sufficient to occupy his attention, and he bought lands outside of the city and even in the far west. He was a member of the company which exploited the South Omaha real estate in connection with the establishment of the stock yards there. He was at one time owner of one-third of the townsite of Brownville. In 1879, with Frank Murphy, General W. W. Lowe and James L. Lovett, he bought more than 3,000 acres of oil lands in Wyoming on which they sunk three oil wells which proved of great value. The wells still exist, though they are plugged up—the Standard Oil wouldn't tolerate competition. He became interested in Florida lands in 1882, at which time he made his first trip south. His main purpose was to spend the winter months in the mild southern climate and at first he and his wife went to a hotel.

"But that was too easy a life to suit me," he says. "There was nothing to do all day, and so I just bought a few acres of land and went out and planted some orange trees."

This manifestation of the old pioneer instinct that has always been strong in him led to another profitable venture. He combined business and pleasure there on his own home in the midst of the lands he had bought for a song in 1882. At the end of twelve years he had an orange plantation which yielded him an annual profit of from \$10,000 to \$12,000.

Mr. Rogers was one of the incorporators of the company which built the Coliseum in 1888. This building, though not a financial success to those who erected it, did much to forward the interests of Omaha in advertising the city and bringing national events and attractions here. The national convention of the people's party which nominated General Weaver of Iowa for the presidency was held in this building in 1892. Patti, the great singer, appeared there before an audience of 8,500 in 1890. When the Omaha Real Estate Owners' association was organized in 1891 Mr. Rogers was elected a member of the board of advisers of that body. He has been a member of the Masons lodge ever since he became old enough to join that organization. When the first lodge in Omaha was organized, January 9, 1857, he was among the charter members. He has always remained a member of the Blue lodge. He has been many years a member and trustee of the First Unitarian church of Omaha.

Home Life is Peaceful

Mr. Rogers' only son, G. Samuel Rogers, is vice president and treasurer of the Rogers Real Estate company of which Mr. Rogers is president. The Rogers family home is located at Twenty-second and Chicago streets. It is large, well located and comfortable. In it Mr. Rogers has lived for eighteen years. And there, surrounded by his son and his son's family, he lives today, the evening of an eventful, useful and busy life. The boy who studied by the light of a hickory bark torch in the Kentucky woods more than seventy years ago has made good use of his education and filled an important place in the development of the city which he adopted as his home.

The weight of eighty-five years has by no means broken down that sturdy pioneer body, inured to hardship and born to the endurance of many of nature's health-giving vicissitudes. Mr. Rogers stands more than six feet tall and is but little stooped with age. He is cheerful, kindly and likeable. Courteous and hospitable, he is the ideal type of the Kentucky gentleman, a type whose renown is world-wide. He is in excellent health, eats heartily and sleeps soundly. He still makes a practice of taking a long walk daily whenever the weather permits. He has made it a life-long rule to be in the open air as much as possible, and to this he attributes in large degree his unflinching health. He possessed all through his busy life that remarkable and valuable faculty of not worrying. Even in his most strenuous days he could go home from his office and in the bosom of his family forget all about business until the next day. And this has brought him to his latter days the most patient and kindly of men. Though he was an indefatigable worker and capable of accomplishing a great deal in a given time, he was not a hard taskmaster with the many men he employed. He always had quite the opposite reputation. Men said he "spoiled" the workmen by being too indulgent with them.

Loss of Wife Heavy Blow

The death of his wife, which occurred January 13, 1907, was the greatest bereavement which ever visited him. They had lived in the most intimate companionship for more than sixty-six years.

In his contempt for such modern "conveniences" as false teeth and eyeglasses Mr. Rogers showed the spirit of the self-reliant pioneer. He never used either of these. His family prevailed upon him to have a set of false teeth fitted at one time. The molars have remained in a drawer unused, the pioneer declining to "fill his mouth with crockery." He never used eyeglasses and today possesses as keen eyesight as the keenest. He has always been and still is an omnivorous reader and a deep thinker. He has been called by some of his friends a "book worm" from his love of delving deep into literature and history. He is a thorough reader of the daily press and better posted on current events than most citizens. He takes a number of magazines and reads them. Samuel E. Rogers, sturdy backwoodsman, lawyer, pioneer, banker, can well rest upon the honors he has gained during his life and can look proudly upon the accomplishments of his four score and five well spent years.

Weidensall in Vienna and Prague

MY TRIP to Austria included two cities only, Prague and Vienna. Prague, the capital of Bohemia, is an unusually interesting city. It is situated on the River Moldan and has a population of 216,000 inhabitants in the city proper; with its suburbs, it has about 400,000 inhabitants. It has a most beautiful situation naturally, which, together with its many excellencies as a city, makes it one of the most attractive places in Europe. The old castle and the cathedral are on the top of a high hill, on the opposite side of the river from the city proper, and accordingly appear to very great advantage. The castle, located where it is, was certainly a place that would afford strong resistance and furnish safety to all that entered it. The cathedral was close to the castle, and is remarkable as the place where the Bohemian kings were crowned. It contains many interesting things, particularly the inside walls of the room in which the kings are crowned were adorned with precious stones, inlaid. One of these inlaid stones had the exact appearance of a beautiful large butterfly.

There are other very fine churches in the city proper. The great bridges across the wide river are of stone, well built and make a fine appearance. One of them has high towers at both ends of it, unlike any other bridges I have seen. Possibly they may have been for the protection of the bridge at one time. The river view, with its great bridges, its attractive shores and swarming boats, was simply magnificent. There are many large and handsome public and private buildings, broad and beautiful streets, boulevards, splendid parks, and a popular island resort. The last of those is on the main city side of the river, where there are provisions for all manner of enjoyment in the warmer season of the year.

Vienna, the capital of the Austrian empire, the seat of government, and the residence of the royal family, is situated on the Danube canal and has a population of 1,760,000 inhabitants, about 150,000 Jews. According to its size, Vienna is second to but few cities, if any, in its beautiful appearance and its special attractions of a superior kind. Its magnificent theater building com-

pares very favorably with the Grand Opera House in Paris. The majestic museum and picture gallery, as they face each other in one of the largest and most beautiful squares of the city, are simply grand. The Great Charles church, the largest in the city, now undergoing repairs, and the St. Stephen's church, with a tower 138 meters high, are historical, imposing and attractive, both in themselves and in the places where they are located. From a chancel in the rear of St. Stephen's church, in St. Stephen's Platz, Speratus preached the evangelical doctrines for the first time they were preached in the city and for which he was banished. The boulevards, public squares and parks are in the front rank. One of the boulevards is claimed to be the most beautiful in the world. The Albertus picture gallery is famous for its rare collection of pictures, in miniature and sketches.

The St. Augustine church, an old and historic one, has in it, among other notable things, a very unique monument of the finest marble, fashioned in the form of a tent with the door curtains drawn aside. Among other noted monuments in the city are: Mozart's, who was a native of Vienna; Joseph Ressel's, inventor of the screw propeller, and Emperor Joseph II, who gave tolerance for Protestant churches in 1782. An inscription on the monument says of him: "Who lived for the good of his people, while not long, but wholly (totus)." It is most refreshing to look upon such a monument with such an inscription in these intolerant countries. The very old part of the city, Hofburg and Hofplatz, the former a garrison and the latter a market, are intensely interesting places to visit and note how well preserved they are. Vienna must be seen to be fully appreciated. I had little time to find out much about Austria, except what is generally known. The country looks well and is doubtless productive. The climate is fine and enjoyable. Why Austria does not stand higher in the grade of nations is doubtless very largely due to the intolerance of the Catholic church and the race divisions of its people. No country can be strong where any institution is permitted to come between it and its people, or where the great body of the people, including the most

humble, are not in sympathetic love with it, because its chief aim is to be at the people in every way. It certainly should exist for the people and their greatest welfare.

The old Emperor Francis Joseph is one of the last of the splendid old rulers in Europe, viz., Queen Victoria, Emperor William I, King Christian, King Oscar, etc. He is a good man and merits the heart-sympathy of his people, which he doubtless has. I am sure that Austria will not know what a treasure it has had in the old emperor until he will have passed away.

I reached Prague, capital of Bohemia, yet in Austria, October 29, 1906, at 11 o'clock a. m. As there was no Young Men's Christian association work that I knew of, I put in the whole time sightseeing. My time was short, but I compassed the city fairly well. I crossed the wide river and went up on the top of the high hill, from which I had a good view of the city and the surrounding country. I passed through the old castle, now a military post, and visited the old cathedral, which is near to the castle and very closely connected with Bohemian history. In it the Bohemian kings have been crowned. The church is quite dark within and its exterior unattractive. Its elevated position makes it plainly visible from all parts of the city and country. I crossed several of the great bridges and walked up and down the fine river streets. I went through a large number of very small narrow streets and squares and was lost several times in the masses of small streets, alleys, etc. I was very tired. At the close of my wandering through the city I went to the depot, where I had the most sudden and worst attack of vertigo I ever experienced. I could scarcely stand or walk. I was fearful that my world trip had come to a sudden stop in a strange city, where I knew nobody and the English was practically unknown. I presume I had overtaxed my strength. I staggered into a restaurant to take some supper, hoping that that would restore me to my normal condition. I had to sit down and hold on to the chair to give my order; I feel sure that I was considered drunken. The meal, only part of which I ate, strengthened me very much. It then became a grave

(Continued on Page Two.)