

Josiah Bushnell Grinnell

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In haste truly Yours
S. J. Guinn

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JOSIAH BUSHNELL GRINNELL.

BY PROF. L. F. PARKER, OF IOWA COLLEGE.

The town of Grinnell is eminently the monument of its founder, Hon. Josiah Bushnell Grinnell. The volume, "Men and Events of Forty Years," written by himself, is the best possible record of his life. More than "two hundred years before he was born" Huguenot ancestors began in France to develop his power and purpose. He may have been improved by his ancestral environment in Wales during a quarter of a century and among New England Yankees five times as long. He aided the family of Myron Grinnell to celebrate "Forefathers' Day" in New Haven, Vermont, by becoming a member of it on the two-hundred and first anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth. The names given to him seemed to impose weighty responsibilities, for they had been borne by men distinguished in theology and in law. His family designation has also been honored by such men as Henry Grinnell of Arctic fame, Moses H. Grinnell, long a congressman and a collector of the port of New York, and by Julius Sprague Grinnell who prosecuted the Chicago anarchists in 1887 and has been pilloried by Governor Altgeld.

The life of an average Yankee boy need not be written in detail, nevertheless young Grinnell was more than an average Yankee boy. That boy, too, was father of the man we know so well. He was early in love with animals and with flowers, with business and with boys, with independence and with mankind. An orphan at ten years of age, at home later with a keen-eyed business man and an entertaining story teller, in winter schools and in summer trusts beyond his years, he became a school teacher at sixteen, an academy student at eighteen, and was in search of a college for further study a year afterwards.

Those first years of Mr. Grinnell's life had been years of ever increasing slavery agitation in this country. Southern families had been alarmed by the Charleston negro insurrection in 1820, and still more terrified by Nat Turner's bloody uprising in 1831. Congress had fought its way along into the Missouri Compromise, had smothered anti-slavery petitions and become almost ready to smother the ex-president, John Quincy Adams, when he presented them. In the south, the life of a northern man who openly advocated the anti-slavery views of Jefferson would not have been worth a groat, and in the north itself \$5,000 were offered for the head of Arthur Tappan. Mobs made anti-slavery meetings perilous, destroyed anti-slavery presses, and murdered Elijah P. Lovejoy. Anti-slavery men organized societies, divided themselves into Garrisonian ultraists and Birney moderates, and in 1840 cast nearly seven thousand votes for an abolitionist for President of the United States.

Mr. Grinnell caught the growing fever of the time and was easily induced to enter Oneida Institute under the presidency of Beriah Green, a noted Birneyite. The school was known as a manual labor institution with a leaning toward moral and intellectual novelties; the President was a man of large heart, vigorous brain, little admiration for the "heathen" classics and a special love for the thought

and the deed of the hour. The Institute was his "lengthened shadow." The students caught his spirit and incarnated his ideas. They put on Beriah Green; they usually put off no part of themselves. Young gentlemen of all colors met and mingled hilariously, seriously, studiously. They had a royal good time as boys, as students and especially as debaters who loved to discuss live questions in their societies extemporaneously, that is, to speak on a theme given them after they had taken the stand and addressed the chairman. That custom developed a ready mastery of all their resources of wit, of logic and of memory; it may have led to some neglect of the deliberation of the judge in an over stimulus in the arts of the advocate.

Such men as Alvan Stewart, the immensely witty abolitionist, and Gerrit Smith, the very wealthy one, were most welcome at Whitesboro. Stewart, Smith and Green left their impress on that institution, but no influence seemed so masterful over Grinnell as that of President Green.

During those years dietetic reform, also, was in the air, and with it the promise of a richer purse, clearer brain and better scholarship to all students who should adopt it. That "great reform" broke in upon Oneida Institute, of course. For a time young Grinnell and others were carried off their feet by it. They abjured tea and coffee, butter and meat, and then stretched bodies which were growing more emaciated daily upon a single blanket on an oak board at night. For such physical vagaries nature furnished a ready rebuke in a weakened digestion and in semi-sleepless nights until the young reformers were ready to re-reform. (We may well regret that nature does not protest just as promptly and as effectively against all intellectual and spiritual Grahamism.)

Denunciation of the dime novel and advocacy of the serious pamphlets and booklets of the American Tract Society made Mr. Grinnell an agent of that society in Wis-

consin in 1844. He wrote that at that time he "was vain enough to think that 'he' could speak to edification, and that, with the dash of an 'unfledged reformer'," he "might rattle the bones, seemingly very dry, in the valleys of conservatism." The absence of a liberal degree of self-confidence at the age of twenty-two is a prophecy of future inefficiency; its presence is not always a proof of a brilliant future. Perhaps young Grinnell did not over-estimate his own powers; he probably under-estimated the inertia of those conservative dry bones. Whitesboro had elevated and intensified his earlier purpose of manliest action. Fired by its enthusiasm he dashed into his Wisconsin field with the confidence of a crusader. He preached and talked politics, became acquainted with influential men and was invited to a pastorate. He saw the prairies and fell in love with them. The ministry had highest attractions; he returned to New York for further preparation.

Thenceforward till 1846 he maintained the tropical ultraism of Whitesboro in the midst of the arctic conservatism of Auburn Theological Seminary.

Eventually like attracted like. The radical Congregationalists of Union Village (near Albany, N. Y.) sought the pastoral ministrations of the Auburn radical. He preached there to "nabobs and niggers," it was said sarcastically and extravagantly. It was true, however, that men of means did sit on one side of his church while the other was occupied by intelligent and industrious colored men. A more dangerous field was then awaiting him.

The capital city of this nation was a torrid region for abolitionists when the nineteenth century was pivoting into its closing half. 1850 was the year of most important compromise; Judge William Jay said that year began the "scoundrelizing of our people" by the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law. It was the year before Webster's seventh of March speech which was the knell of his politi-

cal death, the fourth before "Bleeding Kansas," seventh before the Dred Scott decision made the entire Union slave territory, and only the tenth before South Carolina seceded. During that eventful year Mr. Grinnell began the erection of an anti-slavery church in Washington. His first sermon in the building owned by that body was preached on Nov. 25, 1851, and in the presence of such men as Senators Salmon P. Chase and John P. Hale, and of Representatives like Joshua R. Giddings.

He was aided there by Dr. Gamaliel Bailey, in whose *National Era* Uncle Tom's Cabin was then appearing as a serial, and by many active abolitionists in the north. Nevertheless, cautious in speech as he was, he soon learned that few northerners who believed that all men who were created equal could long enjoy good health in that city. He was politely, yet very suggestively escorted to the cars for a permanent residence elsewhere. As he parted with those attentive friends he gave them assurance that he would meet them again, a promise which he was never able to redeem until, as a representative from Iowa, he voted to confiscate the property of one of them who had become a little too bold as a "rebel in the civil war."

Mr. Grinnell was then far on toward Iowa. He made but one further stop on his way; that was in New York City as a pastor, where, as usual with him, technical theology was second to practical philanthropy. There he came into closer intimacy with Horace Greeley and his *Tribune*, with Joshua Leavitt and the *Independent*, and with many others whose good will to him became helpful, at last, to his prairie town and to Iowa. While there he married Miss Julia A. Chapin, of Springfield, Mass., whose exact knowledge, balance of mind, workful sympathy and high aspirations were promotive of all his later achievements.

Excessive speaking in the open air forced him to resign his pastorate. "Go west, young man, go west," was

Greeley's famous advice to him at that time. A commission as reporter for the *Tribune* bore him to Illinois in 1853 to "write up" the annual Fair of that State. His subsequent invitation through the New York *Independent* to those who wished to join him in forming a settlement where church and school should be central in public plans, attracted Thomas Holyoke from Maine, and Henry M. Hamilton and Homer Hamlin from Ohio, to unite with him in March, 1854, in choosing the spot where Grinnell now stands as the site of their contemplated Eden.

Mr. Grinnell became pre-eminently the builder of the town of Grinnell. Dr. Holyoke was a scholarly physician, conservatively anti-slavery, said little and meant every word he uttered, was true as steel in agreement and in disagreement, while he gave confidence, and won it, rather slowly. Of the four, Mr. Hamlin was the most radical in thought and in feeling, but, as an invalid on the prairie for his health, he was unable to devote much time or strength to public effort, and survived only a few years. Henry M. Hamilton, was a man of rare clearness and breadth of business vision, undemonstrative and uncommunicative, and spoke only when he had something to say. He was influential in promoting the educational, the railroad and the general interests of the place. Mr. Grinnell, on the other hand, who had originated the plan of the settlement, welcomed every man, woman and child that ever entered the town, placed every one under obligation by some personal attention, and drew every new comer into some joint effort for the common good. Probably no man ever had greater success than he in enlisting "saints, sinners and the Beecher family" in a common work. Every person became more hopeful after meeting him; differences lessened in his presence; agreements were more masterful. Optimistic, excessively optimistic, of course he was, and his optimism was so energizing that much which would have been impossible without it became the actual with it.

If one really immovable seemed inclined to remain here, in some way he usually found it for his interest to move out and to move on, and Mr. Grinnell helped him to move.

Good deeds were noticed; all ability was stimulated; the young were never overlooked; the sick and the absent were never forgotten. The eyes of strong men moisten to-day as they recall the words and deeds of forty years ago which were then a pleasure to him and which gave new courage and new life to them.

He was constantly on the wing and always working for the town. The railroad was needed; he was in touch with all forces which governed it. The educational thought among the settlers in 1855 blossomed into a Grinnell University idea and bore fruit in 1859 in Iowa College instruction in Grinnell. Before and ever after the latter date he bore the college on his heart and aided it by his wide-open purse. Purses, also, other than his were closed by springs which he could and did open for the college benefit, to a degree unequalled by anyone else. Blair Hall stands as the monument of his success in obtaining funds from a single contributor. Goodnow Hall and the Mary Grinnell Mears Cottage are memorials of the work of his spirit as it wrought through his daughter and her husband.

When, on June 17, 1882, the tornado swept through the town and over the college campus, smiting buildings into splinters and life into death, Mr. Grinnell at once flew eastward, and thousands of relief came back quickly along his track from Chicago, from New York, from Brooklyn and elsewhere. Men like John V. Farwell, William E. Dodge and Henry Ward Beecher anticipated his coming and aided him in making such appeals as only he could make. He had no peer before an audience in an hour like that.

The year 1854 made Kansas central in public thought, and Grinnell soon became a station on the under-ground R. R. between Kansas and Canada. John Brown was

welcome here. In Mr. Grinnell's house he continued to develop the plan for the attack on slavery which he soon after began at Harper's Ferry and ended on the Virginia gibbet at Charlestown. Gov. Wise's search for co-conspirators involved Mr. Grinnell in danger of arrest, though not of conviction.

In those early Iowa decades it was a matter of course that Mr. Grinnell received the hearty support of his immediate neighbors for any political office to which he might aspire. He first sought the state Senatorship in 1856. He had come to Iowa at a fortunate hour for such a whig-republican as he, for it was the year when James W. Grimes was made governor, and when for the first time the State was in harmony with his own temperance and anti-slavery views. At the first state convention which he attended he was a center of observation; his ready wit and striking characterizations were captivating. He was chosen to write the address to the voters.

His conspicuous position in the State gave him great advantage in his senatorial campaign. He was in the prime of life, in the flush of highest expectation. His hail was magnetic. His opponent was overwhelmed by a torrent of thought and speech to which only hesitating answers could be given. The Yankee was triumphantly elected, of course, and as the champion of temperance, free soil and universal education in free schools.

The niche in educational progress was waiting for him. He was made chairman of the committee on schools in the senate and piloted the free-school law of 1858 through that body. He then voted, somewhat reluctantly, to modify the prohibitory law by permitting the sale of native wine and beer, and for two reasons. He believed that lager beer, at its best, was non-intoxicating, and (what seemed most important) that, without that concession to German thought, Iowa was likely to abandon its hostility to the extension of slavery into the national terri-

tories, and at a time when that opposition was of supreme national concern. Whether right or wrong, he never regretted that vote.

Southern secession soon followed, then the Civil War, a nomination for congress and an election in 1862 when the great issue was the Emancipation Proclamation and the admission of negroes into the army. The home vote was against him, (many of his natural supporters had gone south), but the army had become willing that white men should no longer monopolize the privilege of dying on the battle-field for their country. His majority was some 1400 in 1862, and four times as great in 1864 when he was re-elected. He lacked little of a third nomination in 1866.

In Congress an act of politeness made Thaddeus Stevens his warm friend; his entire bearing brought him into most genial relations with the ablest congressmen. Never was congressional ability in greater demand than during that time. There were giants in Washington in those days, when Iowa sent such men there as John A. Kasson, James F. Wilson and William B. Allison, and when they stood beside such other men as Owen Lovejoy, Thaddeus Stevens, Henry Winter Davis, James A. Garfield and James G. Blaine, even if we should omit the names of Voorhees, Vallandigham, Cox, Trumbull, Fessenden and Henry Wilson. Great questions, great leadership, high debate characterized that hour. Mr. Grinnell was not silent. His words were meet for such high themes, such great companionship. On one occasion they evoked the compliment of a physical assault from a Kentucky General for an unanswerable criticism of a disgraceful declaration.

Out of Congress he continued to render great service to American industries, and to various public and private interests. His railroad activities extended to several corporations. As Receiver of the Iowa Central, he was sub-

jected to the most rigid scrutiny of able and belligerent factions, called before the United States Judge, Hon. J. M. Love, for criticism and discharged with commendation and an increase of salary.

The presidential campaign of 1872 separated Mr. Grinnell for a time from his usual political friends, its close brought intense sadness, and its memory a medley of emotions. There was a wide-spread dissatisfaction with Grant's first term; deeper than that perhaps with Mr. Grinnell was loyalty to Horace Greeley who had been a most helpful friend through many an emergency during more than a score of years. The *New York Tribune* had been a power behind him when he was in Washington, in New York City and during all his Iowa life, Grinnell, man and town, had been most helpfully introduced to sympathetic circles through its columns. Coils of personal obligation encircled him. An honorable man must feel their pressure. Mr. Grinnell yielded to it. Think as we may of the wisdom or unwisdom of that episode, we must ever honor as heroic a readiness to offer a liberal sacrifice on the altar of a long-cherished gratitude. He who fails to feel it is but an atom of a man.

This memorial must close, as it began, with a reference to Mr. Grinnell's written record of his own life. The volume was long in contemplation and in preparation. It was compacted and completed only during the enforced leisure of the author's last days. The appreciative memories of a life-time which were remodeled and finished by his dying fingers, will be read by many with tender emotion; they will make ungenerous criticism impossible.

All through and all between its lines the reader discovers the author undisguised. Fervid in feeling, generous in aim, resolute in supreme purpose, facile in methods, glowing in friendship, poetic in apprehension, and at times so poetic in expression as to touch the verge of the unreal, he was easily first in his town, an eminent

benefactor of the State, a worthy servant of the Nation. Few of us would have colored every life picture which he has drawn with the exact tints he has used; some of us would have written an omitted name here and there and in brilliant colors. Differences of vision, however, necessitate diversities of judgment. All in all, the book and the man we place in highest honor; the book, because of the information it imparts, and because it is so complete a photograph of the writer; the man because he has been a benediction to our own and to many lives, a benediction to his generation.

The wife whose life added luster to his own during forty years survives him. Only two children of theirs are left to honor them. Mary Grinnell Mears, the wife of Rev. Dr. D. O. Mears of Albany, New York, and Carrie Grinnell Jones, the wife of Prof. Richard D. Jones, Ph. D. of Swarthmore College, perpetuate their name and their usefulness.

Mr. Grinnell's life has been lived; the last word concerning it has not been uttered. Men who met him in his palmiest days will continue to long for the blessing of his potential optimism and his enthusiasm, of his courage and his superb service to College, to town, to State and Nation.

GRINNELL, Iowa, December, 1895.

MEMORIAL SERVICES in remembrance of Rev. Dr. S. F. Smith, author of "America," were held in Davenport, December 1. He has a son, S. F. Smith, in that city, at whose residence he wrote an additional stanza to "America," April 30, 1889. He preached in Des Moines in 1893, and after returning east made some interesting manuscript contributions to the Historical Department of Iowa. He was born in Boston, Oct. 21, 1808, and died there, November 16, 1895.

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