

Hon. Charles Negus

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HON. CHARLES NEGUS.

CHARLES NEGUS, the author of the articles written for the ANNALS on the Early History of Iowa (whose portrait is published in this number of the ANNALS), is a native of Massachusetts, and was a boy of his own genius — marked out his own course of life, and is indebted to no one for his fortune.

Silas Negus, his grandfather, was a physician by profession, the father of four children — two girls and two boys. One girl died young; the other was married and had three children, but all are dead. The oldest son was for many years a noted physician in Webster, Mass. Lyman Negus, the father of Charles, was the youngest of the family, and died when young; and at this time there is no descendant of Silas Negus, bearing the name of Negus, except Charles and his family.

Silas Negus was a man fond of notoriety, sought to move in the highest circles in society, did not care for money, and was quite limited in his means. Japhet Cortis, the grandfather of Charles on his mother's side, was of quite a different turn. He was a farmer, rather miserly in disposition, careless in his personal appearance, and his great ambition was to have well cultivated fields, good stock, and money at interest, and he was one of the wealthiest farmers in his township. Lyman Negus was a young man of a business turn of mind, and was employed, after he became old enough, as a clerk in a mercantile house in Boston.

Susan Cortis, the mother of Charles, was regarded as the belle of her parish, and her beauty, and the wealth of her father, caused her to have many suitors. Lyman Negus and Susan Cortis were clandestinely married when quite young neither of them being nineteen years old. This act was not agreeable to their parents, and particularly to the old gentleman, Japhet Cortis, for he thought no young man worthy of his consideration unless he was disposed to cultivate the soil for a living. But when he found his daughter was married, to make the best of it he could, he proposed to his son-in-law

to put him on a farm ; but this mode of making a living was not in accordance with the idea of Lyman, and he proposed to take his young wife to Boston, and would not yield to the requests of his father-in-law.

The old gentleman being possessed of rather a tyrannical disposition and disposed to have everything his own way, and being somewhat vexed at the manner in which his daughter had been married, his feelings became aroused, and he dealt out to his son-in-law some very severe reprimands. Smarting under the cutting words of the old gentleman, he abruptly left.

These things took place after the commencement of the war of 1812, and at a time when the United States was making great efforts to raise troops ; and Lyman meeting with a recruiting officer while smarting under the reprimands received from the old gentleman, enlisted as a soldier in the regular army. The regiment to which he was assigned was at first stationed at Boston. This happened before the subject of this sketch was born, and was a rash act on the part of his father, which he afterwards deeply regretted, and efforts were made by himself and parents for his release, but without success. He visited his wife several times after his enlistment, but soon after Charles Negus was born, his regiment was ordered away from Boston, and he never saw his wife or son after he left that place. The last that was ever known of him for a certainty by his family was that he left New York with his regiment for Mobile, for the purpose of settling some difficulties with the southern Indians. It was reported that he was killed in battle, but the particulars of his death were never ascertained by his family ; yet it is probable that the report was true, and that his ashes remain somewhere in the sunny south, as he never was heard of afterwards.

Thus Charles, when an infant, was left without paternal care, and lived most of the time in the families of one or the other of his grandparents till in the ninth year of his age. This year was a sad period in the events of the life of Charles, for during that year his father's mother and his mother's

father died, and both of the families of his grandparents were broken up, and his mother was married again. Charles no longer having a home with his grandparents, went to live with his step-father. Being an orphan, he had been tenderly cared for by his grandparents, petted and indulged in all his whims. His step-father had but little experience in managing for himself. He was an only son, and his father, after he was married, gave him a farm and the means with which to carry it on. A few months after this his father died, and he undertook to settle up the estate. Within about a year and a half after his marriage he got a large addition to his possessions by receiving the patrimony of his wife.

This sudden acquiring of wealth, instead of being a benefit to him, nearly proved his ruin, for the settling up of his father's estate took him a great deal from home, and having money at his command, those of not the best character sought to associate themselves with him. He became reckless, drank, and gambled, till in a few years he had spent nearly all he had. But, to his credit, he afterwards reformed and became an industrious man.

Charles, for the first year after he went to live with his step-father, had a very pleasant home; but after he became dissipated he saw very different times from what he had enjoyed with his grandparents. His step-father became cross and abusive to him and his mother, took no interest in his welfare, but made him work very hard, and the family relations were anything but pleasant.

Charles was a remarkably large, stout boy, and but few of his age could compete with him in strength and activity, while his step-father was a very small man, and when under the influence of liquor was almost like a child in strength. The conduct of his step-father was such that Charles had no respect for him, and often used language to him which was not becoming in a boy to a man. And on one occasion, when Charles was only about twelve years old, for an offense of this kind, his step-father procured a large switch and prepared to whip him; but as he advanced towards him, Charles looked

him sternly in the face, and said: "You have the ability to do with me now as you please, but when you are drunk I can manage you, and if you whip me now, the first time you get drunk I will pay you back for it." This kind of reasoning caused his step-father to drop the switch, and he never afterwards attempted to chastise his step-son.

Charles's step-father was desirous of keeping him at home for the services which he could perform, and by the laws of the state had the right to control him till he was fourteen years old. When at that age Charles chose a guardian, and left his step-father. From that time he managed his own affairs and shaped his own course. The example set by his step-father, and the associations thrown around him, were not such as were intended to improve the morals of a youth, and Charles was rather inclined to be a rude boy, though the sad effect upon the domestic happiness of his mother, produced by the drunkenness and gambling of his step-father, caused Charles to resolve, when a lad, whatever else he might be, he never would be a gambler or a drunkard, which resolution, thus far in his life, has been scrupulously kept.

When in his seventeenth year, there was a great religious revival in the neighborhood where Charles lived, and many became converted. Among others, he joined the church, which produced a great change in his life. His leisure moments, instead of being spent in amusements, as formerly, were now employed in reading and study, and from that time he became a hard student.

Soon after this he engaged to work at the machinery business; but at the end of a year, contrary to the advice of his guardian and most of his friends, he quit that business and went to school at the Wesleyan academy, a Methodist institution at Wilbraham, Massachusetts. The only means he had to support himself with was about seventy dollars, which he had accumulated by his own industry, and a hundred dollars, with the interest on it, which his grandfather Cortis left him by his will. While here he earned enough to pay his board, and only used his money to buy his clothes and books and pay his

tuition. He was at this institution a little over two years, and in this time had advanced in his studies far enough to enter college.

His classmates were making their calculations to go to college, and Charles was desirous to go with them, but his little means had been exhausted, and he saw no way by which his desires could be gratified. This caused him many anxious thoughts and gloomy hours. But about six weeks before the term closed, a cousin of his, an interesting young lady, who was making ready for her nuptials, was taken sick, and on the day appointed for her wedding were performed the services of her funeral. This young lady was possessed of some means, and in her last moments thought of her cousin, and in the distribution of her property by will gave Charles two hundred dollars. This enabled him to enter college with his classmates, and he became a student in the Wesleyan university, at Middletown, Connecticut, in 1834.

Charles was not ashamed to turn his hand to anything by which he could make an honest dollar. While most of the students spent their leisure hours in amusements, he spent his in some useful labor. In this way, and by teaching school in the winter, he graduated in 1838, with honors higher than most of his class.

The tax on his physical and mental faculties was such that it very much impaired his health, and when he left college his friends thought he would be soon taken away with consumption; but, being possessed of a vigorous constitution, and having a relaxation from his study, he soon regained his health. While at school he not only obtained book knowledge, but learned another important lesson—the value of money, and what it cost in hard labor to make a dollar.

After leaving college, his first intention was to become a teacher, and he engaged in a high school in New London, Connecticut; but he soon changed his plans, and commenced the study of law. After a few months, for want of means, he had to seek employment, and, in the fall of 1839, went south. When he had got to Petersburg, Virginia, he had

only four dollars left. Here he stopped, and found employment as a teacher in the family of Mrs. Broadnax, near Dinwiddie court house. He stayed in this family a year, and in the fall of 1840, applied and was admitted to the bar.

He then started for the west, and came to Iowa, when most of the present territory of the state was Indian country, and the population only forty-three thousand, and settled in Fairfield in the spring of 1841, where he has continued to reside to this time, and has been identified with the growth and prosperity of the state.

LETTER FROM PROF. PARVIN.

IOWA CITY, March 22, 1871.

Secretary State Historical Society :—

DEAR SIR:— In the January number of the ANNALS, in your enumeration of the lectures delivered before the society, you have overlooked some, not important, perhaps, in themselves, but, as part of the history of a historical society, necessary to be included. I therefore beg to present you a full record, as a correction of that on pages 469–470.

The *first* lecture before the “Historical Society of Iowa” was delivered by T. S. Parvin, at its *first* anniversary, at Iowa City, on the 24th of December, 1857, in the old athæneum, then standing on the Sanxay corner, diagonally from the Presbyterian church. The subject was, “An Historical Discourse, relating principally to the early discoveries in the Mississippi valley.”

The *second* was at its *fifth* anniversary, January 8th, 1861, in the Methodist church, by Hon. Hiram Price, of Davenport; subject, “The Advantages of Historical Associations.” Following this address was a fine banquet, to which a hundred or more friends of the society were invited, and attended.

The *third* was also delivered by T. S. Parvin, in the chapel of the university, on the 17th of July, 1862, upon “The

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