



A. E. Sheldon: Historian; Poet

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ADDISON E. SHELDON
1937

Historian – Poet

Doctor Sheldon said it:

“ . . . The deeds of pioneers in a new land are transformed into the hero tales and place legends of the later generations. It is well that in the process what is brave, generous, and strong survives; what is common, mean and trivial perishes.”

That is the role of the historian — the good, the wholesome, the invaluable role which Doctor Sheldon filled for so many years in distinguished fashion for the state of Nebraska — filled it energetically, sympathetically, lovingly, and ably until within the closing weeks of his final illness, which culminated in his death Wednesday night. It was the good in human experience which attracted his attention. He knew the weakness and the frailties of human nature. He knew the less satisfying side of Nebraska settlement, development, and progress. Historical accuracy could not permit him to ignore it. But that which had his greatest enthusiasm; that which gave eloquence to his words and a flash of genius to roll back the years, were the good, the gallant, the unselfish and the noble deeds of men and women in Nebraska.

There was the spark of the dreamer, the poet, and the practical philosopher amazingly well engrained in Doctor Sheldon. So happy was the observation of one speaking of him, who said: “He is more of a Nebraskan than most of us born here. To him this state is not a mere geographical subdivision but a fatherland, an empire to love and defend.”

He was more of a Nebraskan because the fields of wheat and of other small grains, and of corn waving in the winds, were the music of the industrious hands of men who found happiness in the simple life of the soil. He loved the land in passionate devotion. He loved the farm, the hills and the valleys, the timber and the birds. He loved the little animals of the prairies. Such were the qualities that made him a distinguished interpreter of Nebraska life in all of its vicissitudes and its triumph. He had

a great and a practical sympathy for the unfortunate and the downtrodden. He had a reverence for simple justice. And those convictions, with his knowledge of political processes, and how political processes work, gave him a recognized leadership in political thought and in the legislation that has affected generations of Nebraskans.

He had a love of language. He spoke a number fluently.

And while there were no chains upon his imagination, and frequently it reached beyond the seas in the true technique of any historian, to endow appreciation of progress at home with the value of contrast with progress abroad, so great was his wonder and his faith in America that his eyes would be misted when he sang the songs of this tide which swept out through the West, across the Missouri River, and finally to rest in Nebraska. He was a prodigious, painstaking worker. He wrote voluminously. He carried on a large correspondence. Never once did he spare himself and his strength. And in the recent years he gave most of his thought to the new Historical Society building which is to reflect the story of Nebraska. Through the long lane of the years, without effort, with only faith and joy, he bridged the lonely campfire of the covered caravan to the age of the airplane overhead. Never did it disturb him. Never did it produce doubt in his mind. Here was sturdiness, the sturdiness of genuine character; here was purpose, the purpose of free men and women living in the faith of God and in the hope of themselves to create a culture that has strengthened the faith in human nature.

—*J. E. Lawrence, President,*
Nebraska State Historical Society.
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