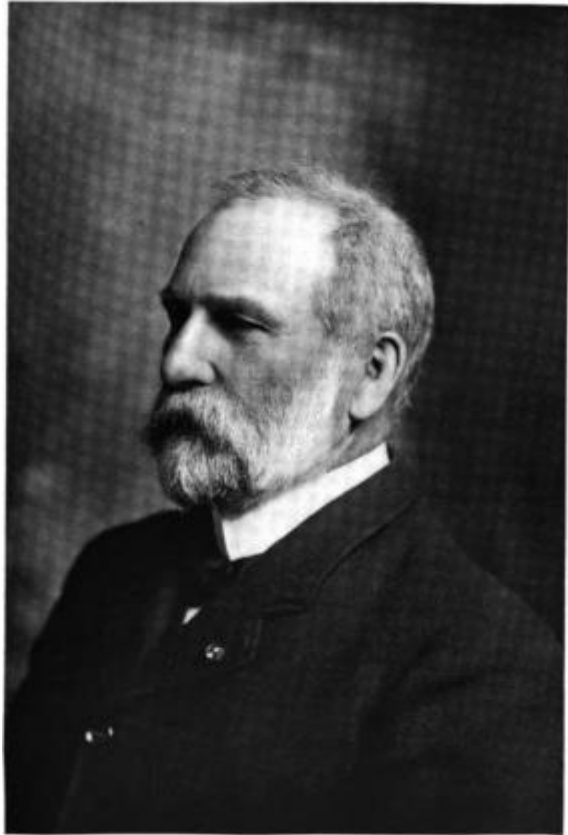


Erastus Burrows Soper



ADDRESS

BY CAPTAIN ERASTUS BURROUGHS SOPER

MR. PRESIDENT: A month at General Conference, riding on a lumbering stage-coach through California dust and sunshine over the mountains and through the forests, not omitting the Mariposa Big Trees, to the Yosemite Park, and the discomforts and novelty of a first overland journey, are not conducive to the preparation of an address suited to an occasion like this; and which, with my arrival in the midst of the Board's annual sessions, must be my excuse for reading from a hastily prepared manuscript my words of greeting.

More than fifty years ago a typical circuit-rider, standing upon this hill, gazed out upon a fairer prospect than had greeted the eyes of Caleb and Joshua in the promised land. On every hand the broad expanse of fertile prairie was green with gently undulating grasses, dotted with groves of native wood and fruit-trees. He had come to Iowa with the pioneers. He had formed and ridden circuits, observed the resources of the country, and noted its capacity to sustain in affluence a dense population, and the increasing influx of settlers, and their character. The Iowas and the Sacs and Foxes left their hunting-grounds as the pioneers came. In spring-time and early summer the prairies were covered with such a growth of grasses and such a wealth of beautiful flowers as those who have not beheld them in their primitive state fifty and sixty years ago could hardly now believe. And the groves, redolent with the bloom of the wild thorn, plum, cherry, apple, haw, and grape, betokened the fruitage to follow. The grass grew to a height suf-

ficient to conceal the deer and elk, and matured only to be frost-killed and consumed by fierce fires. The wild fruit ripened, but no one came to gather, save the birds and wild beasts. The fruitful, fertile hills and plains were found, by the pioneers, in possession of the deer and antelope, the bear and the elk, the wild turkey and chicken, the coon and the squirrel, the wolf and the rattlesnake; and its streams, ponds, and lakes alive with wild water-fowl, and their shores, the home of the mink, the otter, and the beaver. When George B. Bowman stood upon this hill, contemplating the prospect before him, but a small portion of either the prairie or timbered lands had been occupied; yet he saw, that, as the tide of emigration rolled westward, the time was near at hand when all would become the homes of an active, free, and enterprising people, hating slavery and loving freedom and intelligence, and that to win the land for Methodism, Christian culture must go hand in hand with religious fervor.

Actuated by the spirit of Coke and Asbury, and inspired with a faith that knew no obstacles, he determined to devote himself to the founding and building, on this hill, of an institution of learning, dedicated, as the motto adopted indicates, to God and Humanity. But he was not alone in this work. He gathered around him a band of devoted, God-fearing men equally willing to share in the labors and sacrifices incident to the undertaking.

The story of how in their poverty and weakness the first building was erected and completed in 1854 has been told. It is not our purpose to repeat here the struggles of those noble men. They have now all gone to their rest, as have also many of their successors, whose labors and sacrifices were scarcely inferior.

Nor shall I speak of the effect on the institution of the great Civil War, which called to the field and farm, nearly the entire student body. The tide of activity and enterprise following the Civil War, and the resultant awakening among the youth of the land of a desire for education, filled the college halls and taxed its resources to the utmost. The advance along educational lines by competitors, and the comparative poverty of Cornell, has caused, in order to keep apace, a desperate, continuous, and at times seemingly hopeless, struggle. But the prayers and tears of its founders and projectors, the labors and sacrifices and loyalty of its President and ill paid professors and teachers, and the generosity and labors of the godly preachers of the church, supplemented by the divinely guided labors and deliberations of its Trustees, have not been in vain. To-day there stands upon this hill, where Elder Bowman

stood fifty years ago contemplating the completion of the Iowa Conference Seminary building, the leading denominational college of Iowa, the pride of its Methodism, the joy of its alumni.

The fifty years of history just finished has been made during the settlement of the state and the development of its resources; the planting and nurturing of enterprises, whence comes its material wealth and prosperity. Much of the harvest of results remains ungathered. The generations of pioneers who founded and nurtured the institution in its infancy and weakness are gone. Their children have built up and sustained a school the scope of which, and its influence upon Iowa and the great West, was never dreamed of by the founders, and whose material resources, measured by the poverty of those days, would have, to them, seemed opulence. But what was riches in their day is comparative poverty in ours. A million dollars to-day means little more than one-tenth of that sum fifty years ago. The style of living, expenditure therefor by all classes of society, and methods of education, and the training in the schools, are upon substantially the same relative basis.

But notwithstanding the measure of success that has come to us, we would not have you for a moment suppose that even our most pressing needs have been met. Modern methods of education, like our civilization and mode of living, require many accessories not deemed needful a generation or more ago. In order to keep pace with the training afforded by the colleges of to-day, and to compete with our state institutions, we must have, in addition to the library building already provided for, a gymnasium for young men, another for young women, a heating and lighting plant, a science hall, and, in the near future, a men's dormitory and a main college building. For the erection of these buildings, even on a modest scale, many thousands of dollars will be required, none of which is yet in sight. Again, very much of our endowment is not productive. Subscription notes not yet interest-bearing, gifts burdened by annuities, or payable at death, enter largely therein. It is an adage that experience only intensifies, "Beggars cannot be choosers." We can only take what we can get, and make of it the best use possible. Never yet in the history of this institution has its legitimate income met its legitimate expenses. According to the amount of this deficit, by so much has the burden and anxiety of its trustees been increased and made heavier. And it does seem to us that the great Methodist body of this state and country should not permit one of its institutions, with a history so replete with

sacrifice, labors, and successes in educational, church, and civic fields, to be retarded in its growth and crippled in its work (expending its energies begging from door to door) for want of a few hundred thousand dollars, the interest on which would enable it to live within its means, and free from anxiety concerning its daily bread, pursue its great work of preparing men and women to take part in the world's great uplift. Now, I would not for one moment have you think that we greet you with feelings other than of profoundest gratitude for the great blessings that are, and have been, ours. We feel that the measure of success that has crowned our labors can be regarded as little less than phenomenal. We only allude to our wants and pressing needs, that you may know that these festivities and rejoicings do not cause us to lose sight of our shortcomings. And, while we have no desire or purpose to cover up or conceal from you our needs and weaknesses, we have no wish to exploit them; and, in all sincerity, we beg to assure you of our steadfast purpose, through faith and labor, to overcome all obstacles, and, under Divine guidance, accomplish all our devoted friends expect of us.

With this brief statement of why we are here, what we have done, and hope to do, and what we need, in order to accomplish these greater results, the Trustees of Cornell College greet our distinguished guests, and welcome one and all to our jubilee and the festivities of this semi-centennial celebration. To many of you it has been a sacrifice to leave your labors and duties to meet and celebrate with us our anniversary. We thank you for coming, and hope that your visit may be as pleasant to you as your presence is gratifying to us.

We thank you, friends, who come as representatives of other institutions of learning, and, through you, the institutions you represent, for the courtesy of your coming to rejoice with us over what we have, in our first half-century, been able to accomplish. Many of your institutions have not, in their early history, been strangers to the same difficulties we have encountered, and have come up "through great tribulation" to the successful realization of the fruits of your great endeavors. You will understand what the measure of success attained has cost us.

Clergymen of our beloved Methodism, Alumni, and former students of the college! much of that success which we have attained is due to your loyalty, labors, and generous sacrifices. How can I fittingly greet and welcome you? For Cornell's growth and nurture

you have prayed and labored. Its success is yours. Rejoice, shout for joy, sing praises to Him who giveth victory! but forget not that only half the victory is yet ours.

Patrons and generous friends! we thank you for the interest you take in our success, and the substantial aid you have afforded us in building up, from its humble beginning fifty years ago, the Iowa Conference Seminary to a college of high grade, graduating yearly its half-hundred Christian men and women. Weary not! you have done well. It is the Lord's work. May His blessing ever be upon it and all connected with it.

Governor Van Sant said: If Comrade Soper can prepare as good a paper as that when he is tired, I would like to come to the Centennial to hear him when he is rested. I think that the next speaker hardly needs an introduction. When President Roosevelt wanted a Secretary of the Treasury, he came to Iowa, and took his pick from the many who were willing to take the position, and you can be certain that every cent in the treasury will be spent or properly accounted for. I have now the pleasure of introducing to you your own Leslie M. Shaw, of the class of '74.

Secretary Shaw had been appointed by President Roosevelt as his representative at the Semi-Centennial Celebration. As he arose, his doctor's gown became somewhat entangled, which further intensified the great applause which greeted him.