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CHAPTER

II.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTLINGS

One citizen, referring to Naperville back in the 1870's and 1880's, wrote, "A fine old town of verdant gardens and friendly sharings." Many oleanders in huge pots stood on both sides of front doorsteps along Chicago Avenue. Arbor vitae hedges, Persian lilacs, snowballs, and flowering quinces grew in front yards shaded by evergreens and maples. At rear porches were Virginia creepers and honeysuckle vines. The lots were huge, with room for vegetable, herb, and berry gardens. The back fences were lined with elderberry bushes on the edge of the woods just outside. Again a quote from the "Clarion": "One of the most beautiful parklike towns in the Midwest." A Naperville lady who spent her girlhood in Peoria still remembers how their local minister came back from a conference here with much the same report.

Home decorations in the fall often consisted of pressed colored leaves and huge bouquets of prairie plants and grasses—blazing star, fever few, flowering spurge, purple prairie clover, rattlesnake master, and big blue stem and Indian grasses. As there was no thought of conservation in those days, wild flowers were often planted in yards and gardens. Children ate anything they found in the woods. One child says in her diary, "We could digest anything in those outdoor days." As a wit remarked, "Those were the good old days when meals were opened with a blessing instead of a can-opener."

Frontier hospitality still abounded in the homes and churches of Naperville. Many people brought newcomers or strangers home with them from church services, concerts, or commencement exercises. The wife of Professor H. C. Smith (son of A. A. Smith, first president of the college) speaks of coming home from a college commencement without any guests. First time in her life that had happened. And this was nearly twenty-five years after she had come with her husband and family—and the college—from Plainfield to Naperville!

Many women found time to know their neighbors and plan various teas and sociables in this quiet little village. In addition they often belonged to the Civic Club, the Woman's Missionary Society, besides working for the Young Women's Christian Association at the college.

Most of these organizations were interdenominational, and the meetings were held in the various churches and homes. Some of this same cooperation was already in evidence back in 1870 at the laying of the cornerstone for North-Western College. The singers participating in the services consisted partly of members from the Congregational and St. John's Episcopal Church choirs.

One of the most important social events of the early 1880's was the celebration of the Golden Wedding Anniversary of President A. A. Smith and his wife of North-Western College. There were many guests "from abroad"—according to the wedding pamphlet—from "Traverse City, Michigan; from Janesville, Wisconsin; from Norwich, Connecticut; etc." At least it would take more hours then to get to Naperville than would be needed today for a jaunt over from Europe! Letters and poems of congratulation poured in from all parts of the country where this famous couple had lived and worked. Lengthy Victorian hyperboles of congratulations were read on behalf of the children, the grandchildren, the brothers and sisters, the nieces and nephews, the faculty, the students, the alumni, the townspeople, and the bishops of the Evangelical Association. Music was "rendered" intermittently. The program must have "consumed" hours of time! (Everything was "rendered" and "consumed" in the "elegant eighties"!) Here is a typical "regrets" received: "I never was invited to any gathering for which I had greater love and honor, and from which I could expect more pleasure and satisfaction, and which I had so great a desire to attend, as the Golden Wedding to which you had the kindness to invite me."

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On the cultural side, music has always been an important factor of community and church life in Naperville. In the Naperville Centennial Pamphlet, mention is made of a Naperville Brass Band as early as 1866. The Zion Church in 1869-70, in an effort to raise its standard of singing, voted unanimously to discard "Strophen Singen" —that is, having the minister read the lines of the hymn and the congregation chant them after him. An amusing incident is related of a minister who told his people, "Mine eyes are dim, I cannot see—I left my specs to home." The well-trained congregation chanted the lines back at him. In remonstrance he exclaimed, "I did not mean that you should sing! I only said my eyes are dim!" Again they chanted!

North-Western College brought a new cultural center to Naperville. Some concerts and lectures continued to be held in Scott's Hall (second story of the building just north of the National Bank on Washington), but those now sponsored by the college and held in the chapel had wide acclaim from the townspeople as well. In its first year in Naperville the college purchased a Chickering Piano ($350.00). Professor H. C. Smith soon organized a "singing class" in the basement of Zion Church. All interested citizens were invited to join, and the class became a democratic community project.

For nearly fifty years the musical activities of both the college and church were greatly influenced by the guidance of Professor

Smith. He was elected both chorister and organist for the College Chapel Sunday School choir in 1870 and served in this capacity for many years. Several contemporaries in their diaries have written of this "flourishing choir" in the 1880's and also of the church choir under the same inspiring leader. He even conducted Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. combined choruses in concerts in the chapel on Sunday afternoons. Of course there was no grand piano nor pipe organ, but 'tis said that Professor Smith fairly inspired the small upright and the little reed organ! Sometimes the squeaky choir chairs could be heard above the music but no one seemed to mind.

For twenty-three years William R. Hillegas, as secretary of the Zion (German) Sunday School, kept an accurate and detailed account of the attendance and money from each class. In the Record Book of 299 large pages (9½ inches by 17 inches) the lines are spaced one eighth of an inch apart, yet the writing is beautiful and legible. This museum piece is a fascinating old document written by a dedicated and meticulous person.

(See illustration)

In the Zion Sunday School at this same period an organ was occasionally rented for six months at a time, for $4.50. Also in the 1880's this Sunday School bought new "double singing" books and gave away the "single" hymn books to the Lutherans. (In the "single" hymn books, only the melody of the music accompanied the words.)

In 1899 a special meeting was called by the College Church to elect a choir master and also an organist. Those who sang in the choir must be resident members of the church and attend regularly. Also they must participate in both morning and evening services. The Standing Music Committee (the Pastor, the Organist, and the Chorister) were to report selections of music to the trustees for ratification of same before any music could be purchased.

In 1903, $100.00 was added to the budget of this church for music: the Organist to receive $25; the Chorister, $25; the Organ-blower, $25; and the other $25 to be used for carefully selected music.

During these decades while Professor Smith was fostering concerts in the Zion and Chapel Churches, in the college, and in the community, he also interested others in venturing into Chicago with him to hear Grand Opera and listen to Anton (not Artur) Rubinstein play the piano with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Rubinstein's comments on this orchestra back in 1872 are most interesting: "Never in my life have I found an orchestra and a conductor so in sympathy with each other, or who followed me as the most gifted accompanist can follow a singer on the piano. There exists but one orchestra of sixty or eighty men which plays so perfectly, and it is known as the

Imperial Orchestra of Paris, but they have no Theodore Thomas to conduct them."

Increasing numbers of people began attending Grand Opera concerts as the years passed by, especially when such singers as Melba, Schumann-Heink, Patti ,and Scotti appeared on the programs. The Wagnerian Operas were particularly popular with the Evangelicals, as they presented no language barrier for many of them. Of course the pagan background was an insurmountable obstacle for more than a few, but not for all. They had no qualms, however, about listening to Paderewski!

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But not all of life was colorful and cultural during these decades. There was still much discomfort and sickness caused by inadequate facilities and inclement weather. Rooms were poorly heated and ventilated. People often sat around with damp clothes and wet feet. Ladies especially had to be absent from church or college because of heavy snowdrifts they could not plow through with three or more long quilted petticoats. Diaries tell of extremely cold weather—sometimes thirty degrees below zero—and of terrible blizzards. One summer in the 1880's a pelting hailstorm smashed windows in the college, the churches, and many houses, and destroyed all the young fruit. Only the half-ripe grapes were salvaged and made into jelly by housewives all over town. At the Children's Prayer Meeting that week in Zion Church, the subject was "Hailstorms of the Bible." One lady had looked up fifty references. No wonder the weather was allotted considerable space in journals and diaries of the time!

Of course there was a prevalence of colds, grippe, and malaria, with the application of home-prescribed remedies: camphor or lemon in hot water, quinine, asafoetida pills, sage and peppermint tea, and paregoric. A poultice of powdered slippery elm was the most effective cure for a sty.

There were at least two reasons for the use of home remedies: first, doctors were very few; second, incomes for most people were rather small. Salaries for either teachers or preachers in those days were not much—something around $500 to $700 a year. But of course we must remember the cheapness of food: butter, eleven cents a pound; eggs, twelve cents a dozen; milk, three cents a pint; soupbone, five or six cents; dressed five-pound chicken, twenty-five cents. Someone described those times as "the good old days when the butcher gave away liver, cut the bone out of steak before he weighed it, and gave away enough scraps to feed all the household pets." Those were the days of 10-cent paper money, pennies the size of quarters, huge silver dollars, and precious five, ten, and twenty dollar gold pieces.

People in the town of Naperville, however, were also interested in life outside of their own community. Many persons watched the red glow in the East one evening in 1871, only to learn later of the terrible fire that had almost annihilated Chicago. Donations were "lifted" in the churches to help relieve the suffering. A decade later (1881), when a great forest fire in Michigan took the lives of many people and destroyed thousands of homes, money was sent to the Red Cross from

Zion Church. This fire came only four months after Clara Barton had organized the Red Cross.

At Garfield's death in 1881, all the bells in town were rung for half an hour—the large one in Zion Church leading all the others. (This bell had been used as a fire alarm ever since 1870.) Scott's Hall was draped in white and black. The North-Western Glee Club sang at the Community Services. At Grant's death four years later there was a service of mourning at the college chapel, and one at Zion Church, with the same ringing of bells.

One of the happy celebrations came with the installation of electric street lights. Before 1888, people carried kerosene lanterns when navigating many of the unlighted muddy streets. The "Naperville Clarion" recorded the event as follows: "Shortly after seven o'clock the lounge factory whistle sounded which brought people to their respective doors and by the aid of eighty-six incandescent electric lamps they saw the good old village of Naperville take her first step toward prosperity and fame. . . . Enthusiasm was wrought up to the highest pitch."

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Besides participating in all these various phases of community life during these last decades of the century, the people of Zion and College Chapel congregations were also helping in the development of several organizations within their own groups, both German and English. The Sunday School had originated with the church back in 1837, just seventeen years after the organization of the first Sunday School Society in the Evangelical Association in 1820. One of the rules of that society read: "The schools shall begin in the three winter months at half-past seven o'clock; and in the three spring and three fall months at six o'clock in the morning, and at one o'clock in the afternoon; to continue open at least two hours each time."

Though the original rules had been considerably modified by 1837, yet with the scarcity of secular schools, children were particularly encouraged to learn to read and spell at the church schools. In 1840 there was an enrollment of nearly 200 "scholars." Christmas programs were given (in German, of course), and in the summertime picnics were held in the woods. Through the years there was a steady increase in numbers.

A second Sunday School was organized in the College Chapel Church soon after its origin in 1870. Classes consisted of faculty, students, and some townspeople who preferred English services. The school was originally divided into three departments: Senior, Junior, and Infants. It is interesting to note the names of some of the classes in the last two departments. In the Junior: "Busy Bees", "Golden Links", "Crown Gems", "Bright Jewels"; and in the Infants: "Buds of Promise." They met in various classrooms of the college. Shortly after this, monthly dues for a member of Zion Sunday School were reduced from ten to five cents. One way to offset friendly rivalry!

In her "Reminiscences" Miss Mary Bucks speaks of the "wonderful college Sunday School" back in 1878 with Professor H. H. Rassweiler as the inspirational superintendent, with his "wonderful teach-

ers' meetings.'' In the late 1880's this Sunday School was expected to pay $15.00 yearly for the support of the church. The amount was raised to $25.00 in 1891, but four years later was reduced to $15.00 again.

It is rather interesting to note that up to the summer of 1878 the Sabbath Schools of various churches in Naperville were held at different hours, and a considerable number of children and young people were enrolled in two or three Sunday Schools at the same time—a few even in four!

The yearly Sunday School picnics were still important social events. Spring must have come earlier in those days, for on March 28, 1877, the two Naperville Evangelical Sunday Schools had an all-day joint picnic at the camp grounds one mile east of Naperville with several other nearby Sunday Schools of the same denomination. Many of the younger people walked out this Saturday morning starting at 9:30, carrying their basket lunches, and chanting favorite hymns as they mosied along. Housewives furnished enough extra food for the North-Western students. Lemonade and ice-cream were being sold at stands on the camp grounds even at that early date. A carefully worked-out program of music, Bible study, and ''recitations'' had its share of interest and devotion for several hours in the afternoon.

The Christmas celebration was also a ''highlight'' of the year, with the tender stories and songs of the Christ-child, appealing to both young and old. Here again many hours were spent in preparation of a program which always included as many children as possible. At the end of the afternoon or evening these youngsters were starry-eyed and satisfied as Santa gave them each a paper bag containing an orange, some peanuts, and perhaps a few old-fashioned chocolate drops!

Children love to feel they are an important part of any group or organization with which they are connected. With this in mind, a Children's Day program was presented for the first time in Zion Church in 1897, and has been observed annually ever since.

In the 1890's spelling books and reading books were almost as important in Sunday Schools as singing books and Bibles. Classes were organized in which people could learn either German or English. In the Zion Church it was resolved in 1899 that as soon as $50.00 in birthday money could be collected in Sunday School, a library would be started. Two years later, in 1901, with $51.71, on hand, books were purchased—1/3 German, 2/3 English. (And this was in the German Sunday School, remember!) By 1906 the library contained 197 books.

In the Chapel Sunday School, funds were also being collected for a library. In fact, libraries were sprouting up all over town at the turn of the century. In May of 1907, the Chapel Sunday School gave the collection for one Sunday to the Nichols Public Library, contributed in 1898 by a public-spirited citizen, Professor J. L. Nichols. In 1907, Carnegie Library was dedicated on the campus at North-Western College. Books were still too expensive for many families to buy, but more and more people these days were beginning to read—just for the fun of it. Tennyson, Whittier and Longfellow were the favorite romantic poets. Emerson was too erudite for many; Whitman, too

shocking for others. And for those who were daring to read novels, Charles Dickens easily headed the list. Girls were shedding tears over too-good-to-be-true heroines like Elsie Dinsmore and boys had their ambitions fired by Horatio Alger—whose heroes suffered all kinds of hard knocks but always ended up on top!

The largest funeral (up to that time)ever held in First Church was that for Rev. Schutte in 1914. People from all parts of town and from every church in Naperville were there—those of his own middle-aged group, many older people, and many, many younger persons. On his tombstone in the Naperville Cemetery you will find engraved, as he requested, "He was a lover of children."

In addition to wide-spread interest in Sunday Schools the Evangelical Association had long been concerned with missionary work. Committees had been appointed before the Civil War to investigate and report any preachers who neglected to perform their duty in the mission cause. There was great insistence upon money collected for missionary projects being spent for no other purpose whatever, no matter how worthy! At least one Sabbath a year must be devoted to the missionary cause. With this in the background, it is not surprising to find a Woman's Missionary Society being established at Zion Church in 1881. Dues for the society were optional. Ten dollars purchased a life membership, which might be bought by men as well as by women. During the 1880's the society increased its funds through voluntary contributions of boys who planted corn for sale, sawed wood, sold eggs, and did extra house chores for ladies in the community. "During these early decades (1881-1910), the main concern of this group of women was not so much to raise money to send missionaries as to create interest in missions and to offer prayers for the successful work of the missionaries." Social and cultural events crept in occasionally, but the main purpose continued to be religious. Some of the different studies year by year were on India, China, Japan, Africa, Siam, Mexico, Russia, and Hinduism.

The motto of the organization, "A Woman's Missionary Society in every congregation and every woman a member," has never been realized, but meetings during these years were very wll attended. Closely affiliated with the adult organization was the Mission Band for Children, organized in 1885 by Mrs. H. C. Smith—the first organization of its kind in the whole denomination. One little boy came home almost crying because there was no marching and no band playing!

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There were various questions and issues with which the conferences of the Evangelical Association were concerning themselves at this time. One of these of course was the licensing of ministers. In 1878

at a Quarterly Conference at Zion Church it was resolved "that all applicants for recommendation for a license to preach be required to exercise before the society before the pastor circulates a petition for recommendation." For a number of years a change of procedure was considered, but it was not until 1900 that a resolution was adopted to the effect that a Society (congregation) must know a candidate for two years as a member of the congregation before recommending him to the annual conference for a license as a preacher on trial. Before this, the candidates were often granted licenses on trial without being required to meet any such standards. No doubt there were some among the students who became temporary members of College Chapel and First churches for ulterior motives.

But there were also national and international issues and movements upon which these men in conference volunteered their judgment. As early as 1850, one of the eastern conferences resolved that a committee be appointed for the purpose of establishing a mission in Germany to offset the spread of Rationalism, "which has caused some of our friends and relatives to be found in the path of error." The attitude toward Spiritualism was definitely negative. One conference labeled it as "contrary to the scriptures and in the strongest sense objectionable and sinful; wherefore we should stand aloof from this species of unrighteousness." An equally drastic condemnation was made of the polygamous practice of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons).

Then in the economic field, even back in 1880, a conference delegate expressed fear of industrializing the "day of rest on the Christian Sabbath. . . . As friends of the laborer we appeal . . . to those who are in the employ of powerful corporations to use their utmost endeavor against consolidated capital to prevent bribing the working men by offering extra compensation for Sabbath work."

Besides these conference concerns, we might also point out the thoroughness with which morals and behavior of church members was brought up for investigation by class leaders in matters of drinking Lager beer, not attending prayer meetings, being absent from conference sessions on behalf of duly elected delegates, etc. One class was "in a state of unrest" in one of the early congregations from May 1869 to August 1870, about the method of electing exhorters. Finally after these many months of wrangling, they resolved "that the matter be settled by the class leader and the preacher in love and understanding!"