

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE FIRST SCHOOL

Before he was twenty-one, Grandfather was teaching in Wausau High School. This was an wholly unexpected turn in his affairs. Grandfather from earliest childhood had planned to be a lawyer and there was no thought of abandoning this ambition when Grandfather accepted an assistanceship at Wausau.

In Part II is recorded how Grandfather became dissatisfied in his Senior year with his studies in the Graduate School of Economics and, finding that he could complete the remaining required units "in absentia", decided if opportunity offered, to spend the rest of Senior year teaching.

At just that time he read a notice on the bulletin board stating that Wausau High School needed an assistant to teach history and other subjects. What could be more interesting? Grandfather applied for the position and received a wire to meet the principal of the Wausau High School at Appleton. Grandfather spent Christmas Day with his mother and next day took the train into what then seemed to him far away northern Wisconsin.

At Appleton he met Karl Mathie, who was to become Grandfather's closest friend for the remainder of his life. Mr. Mathie appeared to have more confidence in this youthful college student than the student had in himself and took Grandfather back with him to Wausau as school was to reopen the following Monday.

All seemed new and strange. The atmosphere was crisp and cold

and invigorating. Already we were in mid-winter, with huge snow drifts and the temperature, which was constantly below freezing, frequently dipped below zero. When Grandfather opened his window at night, ice would form in the pitcher in his room so thick that he would have to break the ice with his fist in order to get water to wash with in the morning. As yet, bathrooms were a luxury for the few and were not an annex to boarders' rooms.

Shortly after we arrived, Mr. Mathie suggested that he was going over to Marathon City - about twenty miles away - and invited Grandfather to accompany him. Grandfather gleefully accepted and, being warned that the drive would be cold, put on what he thought would be more than plenty of clothes. No, dearies, we did not go in a closed automobile - there was no such luxury in that day. We went in a two-horse open sleigh with jingling sleigh bells just like in your pictures Santa Claus rides on Christmas Eve. Grandfather had no idea weather could be so cold. We stopped now and then to go in somewhere to warm up, but when we went out it seemed only the colder. The ride, however, was most interesting through the great pine forests and over the snow-covered clearings.

Monday soon arrived. Grandfather was to teach six classes covering subjects in History, Latin and English. Since these classes filled all the school day except one period, most of the preparation as well as the correcting of student papers had to be done in the evening. Besides, Grandfather had to make a written synopsis of Taine's English Literature (four volumes) and Bascom's Philosophy of English Literature (one volume) for his University credit in English. Furthermore, he had to read a book on Finance and to take a course of six University extension lectures by

Dean Birge on Bacteriology in order to complete his University work.

This seemed more than enough to keep Grandfather occupied, but, alas, one day Superintendent Moss, meeting Grandfather on the stairs, said: "In looking over the teachers' certificates recently, I did not find yours, did you file your certificate?" "And what," Grandfather innocently inquired, "may a teacher's certificate be?" You see, Grandfather had intended to be a lawyer and had precipitated himself into teaching so unexpectedly that he did not even know that a teacher was required to have a certificate.

"Why," Mr. Moss replied, "you can't teach school without a certificate." To which Grandfather replied that there must be some mistake about that, as he had already taught a month and received a month's pay. The superintendent explained that it would make trouble for both of them unless Grandfather had a certificate. "How was one to be obtained?" Grandfather asked. "By writing examination for a first grade certificate," Superintendent Moss replied. Superintendent Moss could give the examinations and Grandfather could write them on Saturdays. So for the next four Saturdays Grandfather wrote examinations in more than twenty subjects, most of which, such as Physics, Geometry and Higher Arithmetic, were subjects which Grandfather had not studied for years and which had nothing to do with his immediate teaching schedule.

However, Grandfather wrote the examinations and passed in all except penmanship. No, dearies, the failure was not due to Grandfather's handwriting which at times, truth compels him to confess, was not above criticism, but because he gave the wrong answer to the second question. The first question was - "Write the principles of the system with which you are

familiar." Grandfather wrote out an alphabet of small script and "caps" and analyzing these, found twenty-six principles - that is, curves and slanted lines which made up his handwriting. That, presumably, was a correct answer.

The mistake came in answering the second question, which was - "What system is this supposed to be?" To which Grandfather thoughtlessly replied "Spencerian". Now the Spencerian system, it seems, has only nine principles and you see how very wrong his answer was. If Grandfather, in answering question two, had proudly asserted it was his own system, you see the answer would have been quite correct, for anyone who had tried to read his handwriting would probably have readily granted that there were twenty-six different principles in Grandfather's system. However, Superintendent Moss good-naturedly overlooked this mishap and issued a certificate.

A little later Grandfather found time to look up the law on teacher's certificate and found he might have obtained a permit by writing the State Superintendent and did not need to write any of those examinations. Moss was really a good-natured and well-intentioned man whom in later years Grandfather came to like very well, but at the moment Grandfather was peeved at having been required unnecessarily to write all those examinations when he had so much else to do.

The next year an opportunity came for what was probably a wicked but, at any rate, an amusing clearing of the score. Grandfather was the principal of West DePere schools and the Northeast Wisconsin teacher's convention was held at Green Bay nearby. As a courtesy to a neighboring

principal the management invited Grandfather to discuss a paper. It was the usual practice to have someone of importance present a paper and then to tack on the names of half a dozen people to discuss the paper, each being allowed five minutes. For the most part, this was an empty honor, most of those listed saying only a word of commendation or not speaking at all.

Grandfather accepted and got quite a start when he received a program that he was to discuss a paper to be presented by Mr. Moss. Ho! Ho! Mr. Moss would advocate having high school teachers carry extension work to farmers just as University professors carried lectures out to residents of minor cities. What could be more fun?

The day arrived. It was Grandfather's first teacher's convention. Mr. Moss was not a good public speaker. He read his paper. As the president called on those scheduled to discuss the paper, no one responded. Finally the president said: "I have on the list one more name - that of a Mr. Parlin. I don't know whether he is here or not." "I am here," said Grandfather. "Would you like to discuss the paper?" dubiously asked the president. "Yes, sir!" Grandfather replied.

The crowd looked querulously at the unknown youth, who acting as though he really wished to say something, walked rapidly to the platform. Grandfather had only five minutes, but a lot can be said in five minutes if no time is wasted. Grandfather launched into a humorous description of Mr. Moss and his teachers lecturing the farmers on their specialties of Algebra and Latin and Botany, while the farmers asked questions as to how they could apply this information to the raising of pigs and corn.

Grandfather spoke rapidly and with words and gestures pictured the scenes between the teachers and the farmers as vividly as he could. Soon the whole convention was laughing heartily. When Grandfather concluded his five minute speech, several of the leading men of the convention were moved to add mirthful words of their own. Moss was not able to defend himself extempore and had to sit helpless while the convention played football with his paper and the whole idea ended in a grand laugh.

This was not very nice, was it? No, it was not nice, but it was quite a lot of fun. Incidentally, Grandfather's first speech to a teacher's convention had made a hit. He was no longer unknown. He had embarked on a course of speech-making that gave him leading roles in many conventions and finally made him president of the State Teachers Association, the highest honor in the gift of the teachers of the state.