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Good Roads

The report of the Illinois Good Roads Commission, recently made to the legislature, contains these significant sentences:

It has slowly but surely dawned upon the minds of thinking people that it is the wagon road that, first and last, coming and going, carries nearly all of the commerce and traffic of the country. We have spent many hundreds of millions of dollars in improving rivers, lakes and harbors, and in subsidizing railroad and steamship lines, and have wholly forgotten the fact that but for the humble wagon road there would be little use for cities, railroads, harbors or steamships.

This is the fundamental view to take of the movement to provide better wagon roads throughout the state. The country road has been practically neglected since the state was first settled. It should have been recognized from the beginning as the main and most important artery of travel, the basic fabric of all our means of transportation.

The report of the commissioners states that in the last twenty-five years the people of Illinois have spent approximately \$75,000,000 on their wagon roads, and that they are in little better condition now than they were a quarter of a century ago; that "with a continuance of present conditions we shall have very little, if any, better roads at the expiration of the next twenty-five years than we have now."

The question of good country roads has ceased to be a matter that concerns the farmer alone. The cities and towns of the state, the railroads and other great business enterprises, realize now as never before that the wagon road is the chief feeder to all other means of travel and transportation. It is no more important to the farmer to be able to haul his produce to town over a level and well-surfaced highway than it is to the town and the city, to the railroad and the steamship, to have him come over such a highway.

Thus the present movement for good roads comes from the city as well as from the country—in fact, the city appears to be the more insistent of the two in its demand for the needed improvement. The question of state aid, therefore, enters into the problem in the building of roads, involving the abolition of the present wasteful and inefficient township system of road-making.

Good wagon roads must be built just as good railroads are built. There must be uniformity of method and of material throughout; there must be uniformity of supervision and one standard of excellence for every foot of road constructed. And as all are beneficiaries of the wagon road, all should share in the expense of its proper building.

Christ of the Andes

South American club women are coming nobly to the front. Buenos Ayres boasts of twenty-seven associations of women. Just now interest gathers around Senora Angela de Oliviera de Costa, president of the Christian Mothers' Association of the College of Lachordaire. Through her efforts the

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statue of Christ of the Andes was erected on the boundary between Chili and Argentina at the conclusion of peace between those two countries. She personally addressed the two executives, and as a reward of success the pope issued a medal of honor to the Society of Christian Mothers of Chili and Argentina in recognition of the part they had played in establishing peace between the countries.

History states that for seventy years Chili and Argentina had been quarreling over their boundary lines and finally decided to resort to war. Great preparations were made. Then, yielding to counsel, the commissioners decided to settle the difficulty by arbitration and devote the money intended for war to internal improvements and roadmaking, and to erecting on the disputed boundary, 14,000 feet above the sea level, a statue of Christ made under the direction of the Christian Mothers, is called "The Christ of the Andes."

Conkey Stiles

Eugene Field.

AS near as I could find out, nobody ever knew how Conkey Stiles came to know as much of the Bible as he did. Thirty years ago people as a class were much better acquainted with the Bible than folks are nowadays, and there wasn't another one of 'em in the whole Connecticut valley, from the Canada line to the Sound, that could stand up 'long-side of Conkey Stiles and quote Scripture. Well, he knew the whole thing by heart,—from Genesis, chapter first, to the Amen at the end of the Revelation of St. John the Divine; that's the whole business in a nutshell!

His name wasn't Conkey; we called him Conkey for short. His real name was Silas Stiles, but one time at a Sunday School Convention, Mr. Hubbell, the minister, spoke of him as a "veritable concordance of Holy Scriptures," but bimeby that name got whittled down to "Conkey," and the "Conkey" stuck to him all the rest of his life.

When Conkey was eight years old he got the prize at our Sunday School for having committed to memory the most Bible verses in the year, and that same spring he got up and recited every line of Acts of Apostles without having to be prompted once. By the time he was twelve years old he knew the whole Bible by heart, and most of the hymn book, too, although, as I have said, the Bible was his specialty.

Conkey was always hearty and cheery; we all felt good when he was round. We never minded the way he had of quotin' things from the Bible. It was like this: Conkey, we'll say, would be goin' down the road, and I'd come out of the house and holler: "Hello, there, Conkey! where be you goin'?"

Then he'd say: "John XXI:3."* That would be all he'd say, and that would be enough; for it gave us to understand that he was goin' a-fishin'. Conkey never made a mistake; his quotations were always right.

The habit grew on him as he grew older. Associating with Conkey for fifteen or twenty minutes wasn't much different from readin' the Bible for a couple of days, except that there wa'n't any manual labor about it. I guess he'd have been a minister if the war hadn't come along and spoiled it all.

In the fall of 1862 there was a war meetin' in the town-hall, and Elijah Cutler made a speech urgin' the men folks to come forward and contribute their services—their lives, if need be,—to the cause of freedom and right. We were all keyed up with excitement, for next to Wendell Phillips and Henry Ward Beecher, I guess that Elijah Cutler was the greatest orator that ever lived. While we were

*"Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a-fish-ing. * * *

shiverin' and waitin' for somebody to lead off, Conkey Stiles rose up and says: "I. Kings XIX:20," says he, and with that he put on his hat and walked out of the meetin'.

"Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee."

He didn't put off his religion when he put on his uniform. Conkey Stiles, soldier or civilian, was always a livin', walkin' encyclopædy of the Bible, a human compendium of psalms and proverbs and texts and I had that confidence in him that I'd have bet he wrote the Bible himself if I hadn't known better and to the contrary.

We were with McClellan a long spell. There was a heap of sickness among the boys, for we weren't used to the climate, and most of us pined for the comforts of home. Lookin' back over the thirty years that lie between this time and that, I see one figure loomin' up, calm and bright and beautiful, in the midst of fever and sufferin' and privation and death; I see a homely, earnest face, radiant with sympathy and love and hope, and I hear Conkey Stiles' voice again speaking comfort and cheer to all about him. We all loved him; he stood next to Mr. Lincoln and General McClellan in the heart of everybody in the regiment.

They sent a committee down from our town, one Thanksgiving time, to bring a lot of good things, and to see how soon we were going to capture Richmond. Mr. Hubbell, the minister, was one of them. Deacon Cooley was another. There was talk at one time that Conkey had a soft spot in his heart for the deacon's eldest girl, Tryphena, but I always allowed that he paid as much attention to the other daughter, Tryphosa, as he did to her elder sister, and I guess he hadn't any more hankering for one than he had for the other, for when the committee come to go home, Conkey says to Deacon Cooley: "Well, good-by, Deacon," he says, "Romans XVI:12."*

The histories don't say anything about the skirmish we had with the rebels at Churchill's Bridge, along in May of '64, but we boys who were there remember it as the toughest fight in all our experience. They were just desperate, the Confederates were, and—well, we were mighty glad that the night came, for a soldier can retreat in the dark with fewer chances of interruption. Out of our company of one hundred and fifty, only sixty were left. You can judge from that of what the fighting was at Churchill's Bridge. When they called the roll in camp next day, Conkey Stiles wasn't there.

Had we left him dead at the bridge, or was he wounded, dying the more awful death of hunger, thirst and neglect?

One said, "Let's go back for Conkey!"

A detachment of cavalry went out to reconnoiter. Only the ruins of the preceding day remained where we boys had stood and stood and stood—only to be repulsed at last. Bluecoats and graycoats lay side by side and over against one another in the reconciling peace of death. Occasionally a maimed body, containing just a remnant of life, was found, and one of these crippled bodies was what was left of Conkey.

When the surgeon saw the minie hole there in his thigh, and the saber gash here in his temple, he shook his head, and we knew what that meant.

We heard Conkey's voice once again. For when just at the last, he opened his eyes and saw that we were there, he smiled, feeble like, and the grace of the book triumphed once more within him, and he says—it seemed almost like a whisper, he spoke so low: "Good-by, boys; 2 Timothy IV:7."

And then, though his light went, the sublime truth of his last words shone from his white, peaceful face.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith!"

**"Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa who labor in the Lord."

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