



DR. CHARLES H. RAWSON

DOCTOR CHARLES H. RAWSON

A due appreciation of individual worth and all that constitutes manhood of the highest type must include Doctor Charles H. Rawson, who held a high place in the affections of all the people of Polk County in the early days.

He was born in Craftsbury, Orleans County, Vermont, July Sixteenth, 1828, of ancestry dating back to Edward Rawson, who emigrated from Dorsetshire, England, in 1636, joined the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, and was elected Secretary of the Colony annually for thirty-five years, until the government was turned over to Sir Edmund Andros. As such Secretary, he signed the warrants issued by Charles II of England, and sent by him to America for arrest of the regicides. A man of superior ability and force of character, he became very prominent in the Colonies, and for services rendered the Commonwealth, the Government gave him five hundred acres of land. The family increased largely, and among his descendants were able lawyers, skillful physicians, prominent legislators, and gallant military men. Old Harvard graduated several of them, and in the War of 1812, they fought for independence.

On the farm of his father, Charles H. spent his boyhood days. He attended the common schools, was studious, ambitious to secure an education, and at the age of twenty-one, he decided to become a physician. He studied medicine with Doctor A. P. Barber, and later graduated from the medical college at Woodstock. Immediately after graduation, he went to Canada, where he practiced two years. He then attended a lecture course at the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons, graduating with high honors. He then joined the medical staff of Bellevue Hospital, in New York, his first experience being with the Smallpox patients, where he proved very successful.

In 1849, when the hegira from Eastern states began toward the California gold fields, he was selected surgeon for the steamer *S. S. Lewis*, on her trip around "The Horn" to San Francisco. He served on the vessel until it was wrecked near Acapulco; then he joined the medical corps in the Marine Hospital, in San Francisco, as surgeon, where he remained two years. He then returned to his old home in Vermont.

In 1856, he learned from some friends that Des Moines had been selected as the new Capital of the State of Iowa, and was a promising field for a physician. He accordingly came here, in October, with his young bride, arriving in one of Colonel Hooker's stages, at three o'clock in the morning. The town did not present a very attractive appearance to them, so great the contrast with what they had left behind them. The population was sparse. A few small frame houses and log cabins, some small stores on Second Street, constituted the little hamlet. The people, however, were very soon convinced that the new-comer was a physician of unusual skill and ability. His practice increased so rapidly, for he was of that specific temperament which wins public esteem, it diverted him from all thought of his environments or old Vermont.

When the Civil War came, he enlisted in the Fifth Iowa Infantry, and was appointed surgeon of the regiment, which subsequently became the pet regiment of the Third Brigade, Seventh Division, of the Army of the Mississippi, and noted for its gallantry, brilliancy, and bravery—qualities which cost it dearly in numerous engagements. At the memorable battle of Iuka, a slaughterous event, September Nineteenth, 1862, of the four hundred and eighty-two engaged, fifteen commissioned officers were killed and wounded, thirty-four privates killed, and one hundred and sixty-eight wounded—a total of two hundred and sixteen men. Again, at Champion's Hill, May Sixteenth, 1863, of three hundred and fifty officers and men, nineteen were killed and seventy-five wounded. At Lookout Mountain, it distinguished itself by storming the breastworks of the enemy.

The Doctor's ability and professional skill won him promotion to the rank of Brigade Surgeon, but the labor was so severe, for he would, in cases of emergencies and great casualties, leave nothing to be done by subordinates

that he could do himself, his physical system broke down and he was compelled to resign. He came home, and so soon as he had regained his health, resumed his practice and formed a partnership with W. H. Ward, which continued until 1881.

During the twenty-five years' practice of Doctor Rawson in Des Moines, I am confident he visited every family in the city, either in his practice or in consultation, so universal was public confidence in his skill, and esteem as a citizen. In numerous cases, involving the exercise of profound knowledge, when prominent physicians of the state were called in consultation, his decision was the final one. His practice also extended to several adjoining counties.

In 1865, when the United States Pension Office was established in Des Moines, he was appointed, without his knowledge, President of the Board, which place he held year after year, many times tendering his resignation, which would not be accepted, and he held the place to the end of his days.

He was a man of high moral sense, an exemplar of right living.

Politically, he was a Republican, always interested in public affairs, often suggested for some public office, but positively refused to permit his name to be used for such purpose. Socially, he was inclined to reticence, yet of that temperament which won unwavering friendship. He was optimistic, firm in his convictions, yet equally respectful of the opinions of others. In those early days, the code of medical ethics was more rigidly observed than it is now. The chasm between the different schools of medicine was never bridged. Though the Doctor adhered strictly to the ethics of his profession, Doctor Ward, many years so intimately associated with him, often said he never heard him speak disparagingly or discourteously of the therapeutics of other schools of medicine, or practitioners thereof, a trait which gained their respect and high regard. He was a member of the Masonic order and Crocker Post, Grand Army of the Republic. To the poor and unfortunate, and especially to families of soldiers, he was a friend indeed, ever ready to respond to their needs in sickness, without a thought of fee or reward. In the sickroom, at the bedside of the suffering one, his very presence was a benefaction, and there it was were formed friendships tender and true, which

time could not efface; especially was it so with children and young people.

No instance of his hold upon the hearts of the people could be more notably cited than that of his last illness. In May, 1884, several physicians of the city went to Washington, to attend a meeting of the American Medical Association. Though his own practice was quite large, he kindly assumed the care of patients of his colleagues during their absence, but the burden proved too great, his strength failed, and he was forced to go to his bed. Immediately, Doctors Ward, Hanawalt, and Swift attended him constantly—applying their profoundest skill, prompted also by their brotherly affection for the sufferer. Every physician in the city also visited his residence to express their esteem and sorrow in behalf of their associate, but, despite all the power of human skill, love and affection, after many days of anxious watching, on the Twenty-seventh of June, 1884, he quietly passed into that slumber which has no awakening.

Religiously, he was a consistent member of Plymouth Congregational Church.

May Tenth, 1907.

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