



Palistine Class, Galena, Illinois, 1850-61

Photograph loaned by Robert H. Bachelor, the Galena Lad, youngest member of the class. Next to him is James W. Scott, later owner and publisher of the Chicago Times Herald. The boy on the upper right of the picture is George B. Swift, who became Mayor of Chicago.

LEAVES FROM THE LIFE OF BISHOP JOHN H. VINCENT

I. THE PALESTINE CLASS: A UNIQUE EXPERIMENT IN PEDAGOGY IN THE FIFTIES

Kate F. Kimball

SOME fifty-odd years ago, a seven-year-old lad in the town of Galena, Illinois, undertook a trip to Palestine. It was, to be sure, merely an imaginary trip for those were not yet the days of extensive personally conducted tours, and as for bureaus of "University Travel" they still had a half century to wait. One particularly interesting feature of this seven-year-old boy's trip was that it was made by all sorts of people, boys like himself, young girls, mothers, grandmothers, even fathers. Moreover the Galena Lad and his friends had one supreme advantage; they were quite captivated by the spell

of a bright young teacher, who had an imagination, and the touch of whose genius awakened all their enthusiasm.

This Methodist preacher who came to that Illinois parish in 1859 was a young man of twenty-seven, brimming over with energy and enthusiasm and full of schemes for the betterment of his parishioners. Ever since, as a youth of fifteen, he had taught a country school in Pennsylvania, when he took his pupils out of doors for recitations to bring them close to the heart of nature, the *unusual* in education had taken firm hold on him. No dry-as-dust methods appealed to him in the remotest degree.

To teach was his delight. Every fiber of his being felt the dynamic touch of life and though chafing under the consciousness of an incomplete education for his own life work, the enthusiasm for "life more abundant" for all those about him became the keynote of his existence. Out of the youthful activities of those years very significant tendencies began to show themselves, upon which one looks back with a certain fascination in view of the development of his later life. Four years earlier than the time when the Galena Lad first met him, the young preacher at the age of twenty-three in his second pastorate in

Irvington, New Jersey, had already begun to realize with keen distress the need of the church for greater intellectual leadership among the men and women to whom the education of the coming generations was being committed. The teaching of the Bible appealed to him as a calling worthy of his highest faculties,—but the preternaturally solemn methods occasionally employed by teachers of the Holy Book repelled his ardent spirit. He realized that the Lord had endowed him with the reverent and sacred gift of humor and he was constantly stirred by the thought that every one of his splendid

as a breath from the neighboring salt sea, and with an unmistakable spiritual quality about it. Little did they dream that through this young leader, America was one day to give to the world a new idea, leading the way in breaking the bonds of sectarianism and establishing a world-wide brotherhood.

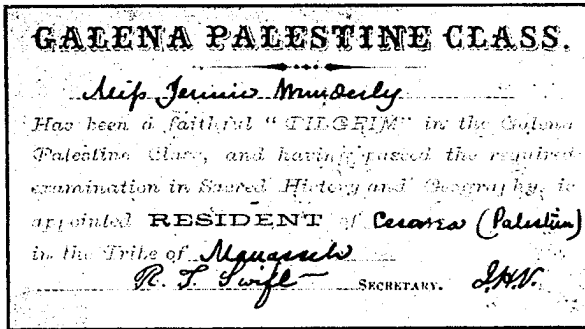
Then the scene changed. The young preacher found himself in a new environment. He had been transferred at his own request to a field near Chicago. The Rock River Conference of the M. E. Church in Northern Illinois placed him first at Joliet and later at Mt. Morris. This was the country of Lincoln

the youngest of that company, the little Galena Boy, looks back with reverence to the Great Heart who journeyed with them all the way.

The beginnings of that unique "Palestine" journey in Galena, aroused the same intense enthusiasm which had characterized similar classes held by the preacher in far away Irvington and later at Joliet and Mt. Morris, Illinois. This imaginary journey which took place on Saturday afternoons was to include five stages, each of which was to be marked by definite achievements of *Pilgrims, Residents* (in Palestine), *Explorers, Dwellers in Jerusalem* and *Templars*.

People from all the various churches found themselves eagerly aspiring to achieve that first degree of *Pilgrim* which was to mark the lowest round of the ladder, and they entered upon the work of the "Initiatory Lessons" with zest. "Grown ups" readily consented to be children on this particular occasion that any attempt at discrimination because of mature years might not tend to break up the *esprit de corps* of the younger ones, and this hearty co-operation of the old and young added to the good fellowship of the whole class. The result was that many who had long since left their school days behind, developed new ardor as they tested their mature powers and began to find the *Old Book* living before them with a charm heretofore unappreciated. These "Initiatory Lessons" also gave the boys and girls a chance to show their mettle side by side with their elders.

With judicious care the teacher trained his aspiring band, holding frequently in mind for the sake of the younger ones the old eastern proverb, "He is the best teacher who turns our eyes into ears." An incident of the preacher's youth in Pennsylvania when he joined a class in "Singing Geography" was happily utilized at this time. The young man had mastered the system and himself experimented with it in neighboring towns. One can see how useful such an equipment would prove in his Palestine Class. Therefore song was freely interspersed with these Saturday afternoon diversions. Incidentally the leader developed a few geographical chants of his own. Chant No. 1 on "The Lands of the Bible" beginning "Armenia, Media, Parthia. Persia," was



Certificate Awarded to a RESIDENT of the Palestine Class at Galena, Illinois. Loaned by Mrs. Jennie Wunderly Duer

energies must be used for the Lord's work. Out of this youthful determination to make the Christian life as real and vivid as ever Bunyan did, developed his famous "Palestine Class" which during two happy years in Irvington, became the wonder and admiration of his own and the surrounding parishes.

He seemed to have no difficulty in getting together on Saturday afternoons, a lively collection of boys and girls, while not only mothers but grandmothers claimed the privilege of going, and it was noted that some of the fathers also were able to secure a little free time at the end of the week! A Methodist meeting pure and simple? Not at all. The young preacher was on the best of terms with all his brethren of the Church Universal. He had a genius for friendship and delighted in the various points of view of his fellow-workers in other branches of the Church Militant, while they, pastors and people, many of them, delighted to look in upon this young peoples' meeting, fresh

and of Grant, and those were ominous days when the rumblings of '61 were heard on every hand. Plainly the bright young presence of the preacher was more than ever needed for good cheer in such troublous times. Appointed at length as a pastor in Galena, Illinois, the home of Ulysses S. Grant, he was brought closer than ever to the stirring events of that time and when the war actually broke out, the leader of the Nation's armies went forth from the preacher's own parish. Meanwhile this youth of twenty-seven had been lifting his people with all the power of his splendid vitality. No wonder that in later years he recalls his "Palestine Class" as "one of the most valuable devices of all his pastoral career, a help in his entire work as pastor, teacher and preacher." No wonder that several hundred people discovered in this weekly concentration on Bible themes, under their sympathetic leader, new spiritual power to carry them over the peculiarly rough places of their daily life. Nor any wonder that to this day even

first as joyously rendered and as familiar to the young singers as any of the new war songs springing up at that time and soon to become a deep and a tragic note in the nation's history. Nor can any of the members of those "Palestine" days ever forget the last two verses of the "Song of the Tribes":

First Judah, Simeon and Dan
With Benjamin repeat
Manasseh, Ephraim we scan
And Issachar we meet.

By Issachar lies Zebulon
Then Asher, Naphtali,
And passing through Manasseh, East
To Gad and Reuben fly.

The effect upon Public School teachers of geography can only be surmised as studious pupils began to reveal an unexpected familiarity with parts of the earth's surface not usually specialized upon in the common schools, and as for American History even the American Aborigines had no chance whatever in comparison with the "first families of Canaan" whose mirth provoking names, Hittites, Ammonites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites and the like, recited in concert at the Palestine Class, insured their immortality.

Those eventful Saturday afternoons in the church lecture room were signalized by the presence of a conspicuous outline wall map of Bible lands, but the "Initiates" had to look at it with the eye of intelligence for it bore no names which might give the slightest clue. The ingenuity of the leader kept everyone on the alert yet the human frailties of his class were constantly borne in mind and each member had a small duplicate of the large map accompanied by a printed key which made the solution of any problem easily worked out at home. Other leaflets were also given out weekly, so that not even the "Wayfaring Man" need err therein. To avoid the danger of having members depend too much on the concert recitations, a half dozen test questions were given out each week for the class to answer in writing for the next lesson. When some of the church members, unable themselves to join in the race for Palestinian honors, expressed a commendable curiosity regarding the class, an altruistic spirit speedily developed and certain ingenious ones cheerfully worked out an exercise on "The great and goodly cities of the Bible Lands" which formed a most diverting church entertainment,

several of the lads and lassies pointing out the cities mentioned while other young people each in a sentence characterized the individual city's peculiarities, to the great gratification of interested parents.

As the time drew near for the first formal recognition of the *Pilgrims*, enthusiasm began to increase to a white heat. A series of questions covering the subjects which the "Initiates" had been pursuing was carefully drawn up and published in the town paper, as a general basis for the examination which

was soon to take place. This excited much curiosity and when week by week those who were ready to try conclusions with their fate as *Pilgrims* came at an appointed time and wrote out answers to the questions submitted by their leader, the varied character of the *Pilgrims* showed how surprisingly well adapted the plan was to all ages. Boys and girls used to school "exams" entered the lists without fear, men and women realized that their general training in the battle of life stood them in a good stead after all, and as to fellow

No. 1. THE LANDS OF THE BIBLE.

Ar - men - ia, Med - ia, Par - thia, Per - sia, Chal - de - a, Shi - nar or

Bab - y - lon - i - a, A - ra - bia, Phil - is - tia,

Mes - o - po - ta - mi - a, As - syr - ia, Phe - ni - cia,

Syr - ia, Ca - naan, E - gypt, Lib - ya, E - thi - o - pi - a,

Spain, It - a - ly, Greece, and A - sia Mi - nor.

ministers, even they were not to be left behind! How the fraternal spirit developed when old and young gave each other the right hand of fellowship of a bona fide *Pilgrim* in possession of a certificate signed by the class secretary, and began eagerly to speculate upon what excitements were in store for them ere they attained that next coveted stage of *Resident* (in Palestine).

If the approach to the *Pilgrim* stage had seemed rather world wide in its outlook, the *Pilgrims* found that their next achievements were likely to be more intensive. A definite acquaintance with Genesis and Matthew, assigned as their specific Guide Books, caused a rearrangement of the entire schedule of family prayer in many a home. Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias were also kept in more convenient places and books on Palestine were found to be most acceptable as Christmas presents. The dramatic incidents of this period of preparation for becoming *Residents*: the Story of Nimrod the Mighty Hunter, Abraham with his five redoubtable journeys, heightened by the skill with which the leader discussed them, or drew in some fellow pastor who had visited Palestine and could relate his own experiences, perhaps the reading of an occasional stirring description from some archaeological journal, and the singing of the impressive "Song of the Mountains" were features which made the afternoons pass swiftly, and almost ere they knew it, a goodly number of the class were duly accredited as *Residents*.

Now came a stage of the journey which greatly heightened the enthusiasm. The keynote for *Residents* was the command given in Joshua XVIII, "Go and walk through the land and describe it." Each *Resident* with his mind firmly set on that third rank of *Explorer* just ahead, must properly qualify himself by becoming responsible for some town or other locality which he must be prepared to describe or comment upon whenever the teacher might see fit. This gave an appearance of reality to the whole meeting and the members naturally became very familiar with the towns in which their friends lived. The Biblical narrative assumed a personal quality unknown before. There were doubtless many playful allusions. The member who was assigned to Mt. Carmel, for instance, was con-

sidered especially fortunate as the situation lent itself to very dramatic treatment either regarding Ahab or Elijah. As to the member from Kadesh-Barnea, was it true that a certain sympathetic quality developed among the others owing to the melancholy incidents which were necessarily stored away in that *Resident's* memory? When descriptions of deserts and caves and the Dead Sea impressed on the pupils the dreary qualities of certain parts of the country, the Cheerful Chant on the "Valleys of Canaan" set to a popular air, served to emphasize also the more engaging features of the land. One member who had been assigned a residence on Mt. Hermon was quite electrified when she learned that their leader when living in the neighboring parish of Mt. Morris had at one time, in pursuit of strenuous physical exercise, erected a mound some ten feet high which he humorously referred to as Mt. Hermon. Had any member of that class been gifted with second sight perhaps he might have discerned that the preacher's impulse to erect a Mt. Hermon in his back yard at Mt. Morris was to reappear in due time in the world-famous relief map of Palestine erected at Chautauqua, New York, a unique educational experiment which has enriched the experience of thousands who will never see the Holy Land itself.

In the degree of *Explorer*, the class entered upon a wider responsibility. They had qualified for this degree by reading Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, and with the Pentateuch behind them were considered equal to the problem of reporting on a less familiar section of country, some mountain, river, city or country in Bible Lands but outside of Palestine itself. The short reports required at occasional intervals on these more remote regions, intensified the delight which the class took in their steadily growing acquaintance with Jewish History leading up to its Golden Age, read by every *Explorer* in Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings. Quite dramatic songs interspersed with quizzes, map reviews and other pleasing features, stirred the spirit of these young patriots. The song of "The Fifteen Judges" described a strenuous people for strenuous times. "The Mighty

Fallen" lamented the tragic fate of Saul, then the "Song of Judah," rejoicing in their young King David was sung by a section of the class followed by a rousing effort on the part of the whole class to give the "Song of all Israel." Meanwhile the studious ones had worked away on their individual copies of the "plan of Jerusalem" till they became so familiar with the mountains, brooks, valleys, pools and gateways of the Holy City, that they easily burst forth into song, "The Mountains of Jerusalem" set to the tune of America!

It seemed fitting to initiate these *Dwellers in Jerusalem* into their new privilege first by the recitation of their keynote from the 48th Psalm—"Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces," and second through the poetical setting of Montgomery's well-known lines referring to the Holy City:

"There towered the palace; there in awful state
The temple reared its everlasting gate;
No workman's steel, no ponderous axes rung;
Like some tall palm the noiseless fabric sprung."

It was during those happy days spent by the *Dwellers in Jerusalem* now fairly in sight of their final goal, that of *Templar*, that a genuine inspiration arose by common consent. The class had frequently taken part in dialogues in which Biblical journeys to their friends were represented and the practical usefulness of the class on these occasions had gradually developed a kind of community spirit. Palestine treasures that came to one member were naturally shared by others till one afternoon when several of such happened to be brought to the class, the idea of a general exhibition for all members past and present was suggested; then the scheme broadened to include all parents and friends, then all the Sunday School teachers in town, and then by a wild leap of altruism anyone in town who might be interested. These *Dwellers in Jerusalem* had already stepped far beyond the bounds of denominationalism, they had drawn no line of age or race—why leave out anyone who might like to come?

And now these "would be" *Templars* diligently pursuing their studies had passed through the dark pages of their last studies in the Old Testament, and

as they sang together the Song of "Christ" to that ethereal and familiar air "What fairy-like music," the joyous opening line,

"Break forth into singing, ye places of dearth,
Salvation has come to the ends of the earth,"

fell upon them like a benediction; for those Saturday afternoons had already come into their daily lives with a power scarcely realized.

The story of the proposed venture by the Palestinians for a town exhibition was published in the local paper and people "interested" were invited to send loans for the exhibit. Committees were appointed to have charge of the different treasures and others to provide suitable places for them. The whole town seemed eager. People who had never betrayed the slightest interest in the Palestine Class hunted up the leader and offered unique contributions and when the exhibition was finally in shape it presented an imposing appearance. Few people in the town had ever seen any thing like it. Maps, pictures, relics, and other curiosities from the far East, models of The Tabernacle and the Temple, stereoscopic views, etc., were displayed, and *Dwellers in Jerusalem* with tiny badges, served as guides, while schemes for a Biblical Museum for the town were agitated.

The next day came the final meeting of the class and the conferring of certificates upon the *Templars*. Mild ex-

citement seized the younger members of the class, our Galena Lad among them, when their leader presented to them not merely the customary modest certificate, but to each a wee gold medal, the leader's personal recognition of the forty eager students who had for so many months loyally responded to his enthusiasm. On one side the medal bore the inscription "Palestine Class 1855," in memory of its birth in New Jersey, and on the other a wreath enclosing the mystic letters, P. R. E. D. T.

The interval of years from 1855 to the present is a long one; yet even now with the weight of fourscore years upon him, the eye of the venerated preacher kindles as he recalls those early enthusiasms, and if you can catch him in a reminiscent mood, a gleam of humor will light up his face as he chants softly "Armenia, Media, Parthia, Persia."

LETTER WRITTEN TO THE GALENA LAD

Suez, March 6, 1863.

Dear Robbie.

I see your round, rosy face every day or two in my picture of the "Templars" which I have brought from home. You are sitting with the rest of the class—your large, broad forehead rising like a little dome among them. How many facts about Egypt and Arabia and Palestine you have stored away in that head. Do you forget any of them? And are there any thoughts in that brain about your old friend and teacher?

I came from Malta—(the Melita you used to sing about in our "chant of the islands") to Alexandria. There I visit-

ed Pompey's pillar and Cleopatra's Needle and many other interesting places, such as the Pashaw's Palace, the old Coptic Convent, etc. Then I rode to Cairo and visited the Citadel, two large Mosques, the Pyramids, the Sphynx, Memphis, etc.

The Arabs are very funny and clever people. The donkey boys are cunning and good natured and say a great many things in English and French. They learn to speak from the travelers and are very proud of the few sentences they know. One little fellow went with us who kept saying things that made us laugh all the while. He offered to come to America with me, if I would give him one shilling a day. At one place we slept all night in a dirty Arab house. We had no bed, but lay down on some carpets with quilts and shawls over us using our coats for pillows. The fleas crawled over us, and the dogs outside kept barking all night. We were tired enough and slept pretty well. Yesterday three of us came to Suez and went down the Red Sea to the place where the Israelites crossed. The place is very wild and grand with scarcely a green thing to be seen. Among the wild, ragged cliffs, the deep gorges, the sandy and rocky plain we kneeled down and prayed to the God of the Hebrews. It was a bright moonlight night and we were alone in the desert. But I must not write any more now. Good bye till I get to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, March 27, 1863.

Good bye Robbie, until we meet in Galena. This city is a good old city. It is just such a place as I hoped to find it only more beautiful. But I will tell you more when we meet. Love to your Grandfather and Grandmother and Parents, and Uncle and Aunt. Believe me

Your true friend,
J. H. VINCENT.



Gold Medal Awarded to the Palestine Class at Galena, Illinois. Loaned by Mrs. Jennie Wunderly Duer