

# THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

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ALBERT G. LANE (1841-1906)

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Josiah Lane, the father of Albert G. Lane, came to Cook County with his wife in 1836 and settled at Galewood on the old Gale farm a little northeast of Oak Park, then a long distance from Chicago, but now within the city limits. On this farm Albert Lane was born, March 15, 1841, and here the old farmhouse still stands. Albert was the oldest of eight children. When the Lane family came to Cook County in 1836, the total population of Chicago did not exceed two thousand, and the exports from the Chicago port that year amounted to \$1,000.64.

Soon after the birth of Albert the family moved to Chicago and settled in a cottage on the site now occupied by Rothschild's department store. The cottage was later moved to 132 West Monroe Street, and is still occupied by the family. Upon the great open prairie, used as a cow pasture, the boy Albert ventured as far west as Ashland Avenue in the capacity of herdsman; and from this time the sturdy, independent character of the lad rapidly developed. When he began school, the entire school attendance of Chicago did not equal that of one of our largest schools at the present, and there was no high school.

As a carpenter, Albert Lane's father found difficulty enough in supporting his family of eight members on a dollar and a half per day, and at the age of twelve years it seemed necessary for the boy to leave school and go to work, as he could thereby turn in one dollar and fifty cents per week toward the family expenses.



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Albert cheerfully complied, but his heart longed for his school, and he gained permission to return to it by offering to earn the dollar fifty per week out of school hours. He did it, of course—he never failed at anything—and by selling papers he carried himself through grammar school and into the first class of the first Chicago high school. With this class he would have been graduated from the high school under Mr. Charles Dupee in 1858 at the age of eighteen years, but he had to leave school a short time before graduation.

In the Lane family teaching was second nature, and to it Albert naturally turned. In the year that he left school he was placed in charge of the old Franklin School, and was its principal until 1868, a term of ten years, when he succeeded John F. Eberhart as superintendent of Cook County schools. With one interruption of four years he filled this office with distinguished ability until December, 1891—that is, for nineteen years. During the four years' interim he turned his attention to banking—and with marked success.

The year 1873 brought to Albert Lane misfortune such as tries the very souls of men and tests their integrity to the utmost. As county superintendent he had on deposit in the Franklin Bank school fund money amounting to \$33,000. The bank failed, and the deposit was absolutely wiped out—a total loss. As a depository the bank had been approved by the county commissioners, and Mr. Lane was probably under no legal obligations to refund the money. To add to his perplexities, he failed of re-election as county superintendent the same year. Now his splendid conception of honor and his superb courage came to the front. No legal technicality for a moment dimmed his vision. To him the educational fund was a sacred trust, and without a moment's hesitation he entered upon the task before him.

Getting his bondsmen together, he called upon them to make good the loss, and pledged them that every dollar with interest should be paid back to them. He converted into cash whatever of property he had accumulated, applied it on the debt, and then for nineteen long years he labored and saved to wipe out the balance—and he did it—principal and interest amounting to

\$45,000. It was my good fortune to call upon him at his office at the consummation of this struggle. I found him out of the office, but he came in soon after, and never shall I forget the sort of glory that seemed to envelop him, as, stretching to his full height, he brought his hand down upon my shoulder and said with the utmost intensity: "Bright, I have just paid the last dollar of it." In the annals of Chicago can be found nothing more thrilling than this heroic struggle of Albert Lane. His will be a name to conjure with in teaching civic virtue when that of many a Chicago millionaire shall have passed into oblivion.

The county superintendent was, *ex officio*, a member of the Cook County Board of Education. Acting in this capacity, Mr. Lane was largely instrumental in bringing Colonel Parker to the Cook County Normal School. This was a momentous event in the history of that institution, and the next few years made the school not only of national but also of world-wide importance. Mr. Lane fully appreciated the value and importance of Colonel Parker's work, and in all of the troublous times which followed he stood staunchly for the school and made possible its final triumphant success.

Beginning in December, 1891, Mr. Lane served as city superintendent of Chicago for seven years. They were the most arduous years of his life. Through the pernicious meddling of the city hall, politics became rampant in educational affairs, and the balking of his plans for the schools so added to the natural burdens of the office that even Mr. Lane's splendid health gave way. He never recovered from the strain of the last two years in the city office, and it was doubtless fortunate for him that he failed of re-election in July, 1898. Here again Mr. Lane's loyalty to Chicago schools shone forth, and with it a dignified manliness of character. He cheerfully accepted the office of district superintendent, and, in so doing, rendered a service to the city of Chicago which it would be difficult to overestimate. His intimate knowledge of school affairs of city, county, and state was unequalled by that of any other man. This, added to his sound judgment, his vast acquaintance, and his unselfish devotion to the schools, made him almost indispensable as a counselor to his successors in the city

office. This service was freely rendered and fully acknowledged. He remained at his post until well into the last vacation, though often working under intense weariness.

Albert Lane had often expressed the hope that he might "die in the harness," and this desire was practically gratified. After a short vacation at Bay View with his family, and as the constant companion of his little granddaughter, he felt called upon to return to his post of duty; but his strength gave out on the return trip, and a very few days closed one of the noblest lives that have ever blest this city.

Albert Lane's work was not confined to Chicago or Cook County. For thirty-five years he was a potent factor in the State Teachers' Association, of which he was at one time president. No other man has contributed more than he to the success of the National Educational Association. For many years he was a member of its executive committee and was also its financial manager. In a recent letter Mr. Irwin Shepard, secretary of the association, said: "I do not see how we can go on without him." The National Educational Association accorded him its highest honor in 1893, when he became its president. Few men have enjoyed so general a personal acquaintance among prominent educators throughout the United States, and to none was accorded greater respect.

Albert Lane saw almost the entire growth of Chicago. He loved the city intensely, and he gave all the worth of his splendid manhood to her service. His impress upon the county schools was remarkable. He rendered to the city just as generous and devoted service as to the county. This service was fully appreciated by the teachers with whom he worked, and today thousands of them mourn his loss.

As a citizen Mr. Lane shirked no responsibility. He proved that a schoolmaster may be a man among men; for few enjoyed so generally or so genuinely as he the respect and confidence of his fellow-citizens. He was a devoted member of the Methodist church, and in its service his life was spent. Thousands of young men connected with the Young Men's Christian Association, of

which he was trustee, knew Mr Lane, admired him as an ideal Christian gentleman, and emulated his example.

His devoted wife said of him the other day: "He was all that a son could be; he was all that a husband could be; he was all that a father could be; he was all that a church member could be; and you know what he was as a citizen and as an educator."

Yes, we know full well. His labors are ended, but the influence of a noble life can have no end. Albert Lane's cheerfulness, his devotion to duty, his courage, his unselfishness, his clearness of vision and fearlessness in living up to his convictions, the charming sincerity of his friendship, and his keen sense of right and justice, all added to the rarest integrity, made up a character which is our inheritance. We admired him, we trusted him, we loved him. We are better teachers because he labored among and with us.

Mr. Lane was married in July, 1878, to Miss Frances Smalwood, a teacher in the high school. Two children blessed this union.

To his sorrowing wife and daughters we express our warmest sympathy in their great bereavement.