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Tribute to Moses Pettengill at the 75th anniversary of the First Congregational Church, Peoria, Ill. Dec. 15th, 1909

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TRIBUTE TO MOSES PETTENGILL

At the 75th Anniversary of The First Congregational Church, Peoria,
Ill., Dec., 15th, 1909, by E. S. Willcox.

To stand here on such an occasion as this brings back a flood of memories,

"Of old, forgotten, far off things
And battles long ago"—

memories of the many good and true men and women whom I have known here in Peoria, who, in their day fought the good fight, finished their course and kept the faith in all that was good and true, in God and in man.

And it is well to remember that there have been such men here and to recall their names, especially in these days, when every morning's paper brings us such sickening tales of lawlessness, of vice and crime, that we shudder to open it.

What would our city be to-day but for the good men who here, in the early days, by lives of sobriety, honest industry and lofty moral purpose, laid the foundations of our present civic life.

"And God said, if ye hear it,
This weeping of the spirit
For the world which ye inherit,
Do I not hear it too?"

"Arise, and to your stations,
Ye lighted, living nations;
These be my dark foundations;
To raise them is for you!"

As I passed down Jefferson street a few days ago, I caught sight of what gave me a twinge of pain, for there, across the street from me, corner of Jefferson and Liberty streets, lay great piles of broken brick and mortar, that were once a house, a home, a landmark in our city; and every brick lying on that ground, that had stood there compact and silent for long years, spoke to me of the man of like enduring qualities, of upright integrity, of noble, generous sympathies who had set them in those walls more than 60 years ago—Moses Pettengill.

Am I saying too much when I say that Moses Pettengill was in every good word and work, and for many years, our foremost, leading citizen?

At his hospitable table, I a young

man and a stranger here, had often sat, and at the same table had sat Abraham Lincoln.

I came to Peoria in 1852 from that notoriously abolition town, Galesburg, and found myself doubly a stranger in a town where the prevailing sentiment was the reverse of ours.

Only seven or eight years before, a delegation of our Galesburg people had come down in their farm wagons and tried to hold an anti-slavery convention here in your old Congregational church, but a big crowd of Peoria's most "respectable citizens" tried to break up the meeting, gathered at the Court House, passed resolutions, mobbed them, ran their wagon wheels into the Illinois river and hurled hard things and harder words at them.

But there was Moses Pettengill in the front, facing them, firm as a rock with his old New England principles, immovable and undismayed. He lived through it; I venture to say he brought this church through it, and through the succeeding years of calumny and discouragement. He paid off that debt of over \$4,000 and lived to see this church lift its head high and triumphantly among all the churches around.

Mr. Pettengill was a successful business man, an honest man, a generous, kind hearted man, always ready to help a struggling and worthy young man or any good cause. But he was especially a pillar of this church—the pillar which held it up for years.

So firm, so clear headed, so far seeing, so good and so true to duty always!

All through the stormy times in which the better part of his life was passed he stood erect like Seneca's sailor who, amid the tempestuous waves, cried out,

O, Neptune, you may save me if you will, you may sink me if you will but whatever happens I shall hold my rudder true!

Such a sailor, such a pilot, such a captain, such a man was Moses Pettengill!