I suppose every sincere teacher wonders now and then whether the work he or she is doing with young people is accomplishing much. All too often, I am afraid, teachers have to absorb complaints, while receiving few compliments. Some way should be devised for imparting the former student's thanks and appreciation to those teachers whose instruction he can now
see—from the viewpoint of maturity—was invaluable to his development. I am sorry to say I don’t know where a single one of my High School teachers is now living or working.

We had several unusual personalities among the instructors at Mason City High during the time that I spent there from 1907 to 1911. There was Mr. Meade, the principal. A slightly stooped, balding little man, he wore a perpetually sad expression. I don’t know why, but perhaps he had troubles we kids knew nothing about. I think he noticed I wasn’t getting much attention during my senior year and that I was too painfully self-conscious for my own good. One day he took me aside and said he wanted to see me get a little recognition from my class and the rest of the school. He suggested that I take some part—I have forgotten what it was—in the class day exercises in the school assembly room, which meant speaking from the raised platform at the front of the big room, the same platform on which William Jennings Bryan stood for a few moments one day as he shook back his great mane and told us he “just wanted to leave us a few thoughts.” I was terrified at the idea, and told him so. Somebody else had to do the job, whatever it was, but I always appreciated Mr. Meade’s thoughtfulness and his kindly effort to give me some little bit of prominence.

There was Mr. E. N. Jory, who came from Iowa State College to coach athletics and teach algebra and geometry. I have never forgotten what he told us at the beginning of one of our classes with him on the first day of school. He said, “I’m not going to lay down
a bunch of rules of conduct for you to follow, saying 'Thou shalt, and thou shalt not,' but I'm asking you simply to be ladies and gentlemen." I think we always were too, when we were in his classroom. He taught geometry so I could understand it, no mean accomplishment in itself. Before Mr. Jory came, I am ashamed to say that I flunked geometry sadly and completely under another teacher whose name I have forgotten. I simply didn't try to learn the stuff, and Glen McEachran and I decided "to hell with it" for that fatal semester. I was always careful not to let my own boys learn of this stupid episode.

Mr. Williams was from Grinnell College and taught history. We loved him for he was witty and good-looking, and held the state record for the broad jump. In a class on Roman history one day he was questioning one of the girls about some ancient character of considerable prominence. The girl was pretty vague but said she thought this personage kind of looked after the Colosseum. Mr. Williams cracked, "Maybe he was the janitor!" Discipline was never a problem in this classroom for we all knew that the discussions would be lively and the class periods often all too short. I felt that it would be nice indeed to be just about like Mr. Williams when I got older. We kids thought Miss McMahon, who taught German, had a crush on Mr. Williams.

Now that I have brought Miss McMahon into the record, I must tell you something about her. She was a swell-looking gal, with snapping brown eyes, glistening black hair and a well-corseted figure, though one hip was just slightly larger than the other. Don't ask me how
I happen to remember such things. She was a stickler for good classroom deportment, and despised excessive noise and horseplay when classes were moving through the halls between periods. She especially did not like the hilarity that often went on in the boys' washroom at the end of the hall, and sometimes she threatened to barge right in and call us down. We were always afraid she would do it too, but she never did.

Miss McMahon knew how to teach German. Whole class periods would be conducted with scarcely a word of English. She would say as we entered, "Guten Morgen, Herr Wilkinson. Wie geht's diesen Morgen? Machen Sie die Bücher zu, bitte. Haben Sie eine Grossmutter?" And so on. I wish I had studied harder then.

For a Latin teacher I had Miss Anna Stanbery, a member of an old and distinguished Mason City family. She was, shall we say, amply built, and undulated rather than walked, but she had a wonderful smile. Not as dramatic as Miss McMahon, she insisted however, on our knowing thoroughly all about "Amo, amas, amat; amamus, amatis, amant." Meaning, "I love, you love, he loves, etc." Under her supervision we learned that, "Omnia Gallia in tres partes divisa est." I still like to rattle off, provided I have an audience, of course, "Magister dimisit liberos a schola." This sounds impressive when spoken rapidly but all it means is, "The teacher dismissed the students from school." Miss Stanbery became irritated with Albert Bryant, a great pal of mine, and me one day when we appeared in class without having studied the assigned lesson. She sent us forth-
with out of the room with instructions to report at once to the assembly room, where we presently arrived, grinning sheepishly, and were greeted by the sly winks of those already in the room who knew well enough that we had been booted out of class.

I can’t say that Latin has been overly useful to me, considering the two years I spent at it, but it often makes a bit of reading or a technical term of greater interest. For instance, if I say to you that I have just been planting “salix Babylonica,” you might think I had been doing something pretty important, when, as a matter of fact, all I had been up to was sticking some weeping willow switches in along the creek banks.

English was taught by Miss Miles, who was tall, slender, a bit stern-looking it seemed to me, with beautiful red hair, and quite a few freckles. I think it must have been under her direction that I first began to take an interest in writing. About that time I became a sports writer for Ink Spots, our High School paper which appeared about once a month. I recall reporting in great detail the Mason City-Blue Earth football game one cold autumn afternoon. I saved some copies of Ink Spots for a long time, but I can’t find them now, so the record of my first efforts at news reporting is gone forever — no great loss however.

I wonder if the gay and tuneful operetta, “The Gypsy Rover,” is ever produced any more. Our class of 1911 had its final fling at theatricals when we presented this sprightly show on the stage of the old Wilson Theatre. The title role was played by the man who,
in collaboration with his wife, had written the words and music of the show, and had come to the school to supervise its production. He had a good voice, and the lyrics were catchy. One scene, in which he took the leading lady in his arms and sang to her, “Though I must say adieu, I’ll come back to you. Sorrow fills my heart, that from you I must part,” had us all winking back the tears. But Ed Hodgkinson, playing the part of a bold Robin Hood sort of fellow made us feel better when he sang about what good bandits he and his Gypsy pals were—“And our system, you’ll agree, is just as good as it can be; for we leave the poor alone—but the rich we rob out of house and home.” And when the robbers demanded of Lawrence Watts that he turn over his watch to them, he protested that he was “just passing the time away.” Ruby Potter and I did some kind of a dance in one scene, pretending to gaze into each others eyes while we sang “Glances meeting, set two young hearts a-beating.” Ruby wore glasses and the footlights shone on them so I was never sure whether she was looking at me or not.

Many years later, my wife, Mary, and I saw the same show staged by another high school class in Lyons, Iowa. The tunes were just as tuneful, but I felt sure that our own graduating class did much better with them. I may have been a bit prejudiced. George White’s Scandals and The Ziegfeld Follies were all right of course, but The Gypsy Rover was definitely big time stuff in 1911.

I must tell you about our Junior-Senior banquet. This was a high spot in my high school career. And
for good reason. You may not believe this—I'm sure my own boys won't—but I had never had a date with a high school girl during the nearly four years that had elapsed up to the time of the banquet. Now it was simply out of the question to go to this affair, the really big social event of the season, without a girl. But the thought of asking one terrified me, though there were several I thought attractive. One of the prettiest girls in my class was Katharine Farrer. She had a nice low voice, lovely brown eyes, and once in a while she had smiled at me. I thought there might be a chance that she would go to the banquet with me. How to ask her was a tough problem. Finally I observed that she nearly always came a little early in the morning and took her seat near the rear of the big assembly room to study for a while before the others came.

So I came early too one morning, and sure enough, Katharine was in her seat, with nobody else near by. I must have stammered out some kind of an invitation. She looked up kind of surprised and said, with just a shade of disappointment, I thought, she was awfully sorry but she already had a date for the occasion. This was a situation that I had not foreseen, and I retreated to my own seat in some confusion. Perhaps I was even a little bit relieved. I had tried, hadn't I? And the girl had other plans.

But this wasn't the end of the affair. About the middle of that same morning, as Katharine passed my desk to go to some classroom, she dropped a neatly folded note on my desk. Probably my fingers trembled
a bit as I opened it behind my history book. Here is what it said, for oddly enough I still remember the words, "I have closed up the other deal—I hope. And I will be glad to go to the banquet with you—if you still want me to." Well of course I still did want her to and managed to convey this information to her somehow before the day was over. I never did ask her how she got out of the first date.

The banquet was a highly successful affair, held in the main downstairs hall of the old High School building. Howard O'Leary, who became a banker at Mason City in later years, made a clever and witty speech, and on the menu were strawberries "au naturel." After the dinner and the program were over, I knew the thing to do was to offer to take Katharine for a buggy ride. She was agreeable so we strolled over to where I stabled my horse three or four blocks away. As we walked along I wondered what I should do with the young lady while I hitched up the horse. Should I have her walk down the dark alley and sit in the buggy while I got Romeo out of his stall, or should I have left her at the schoolhouse and picked her up there? Katharine solved this situation neatly for me by saying she would wait on the sidewalk at the entrance to the alley until I drove up.

I don't recall where we went or much of what we talked about, except that Katharine told me how she planned to go to a physical culture school after graduation, and then hoped to come back to the old school and teach physical education. I suppose the reason I remember this is that she did exactly that. A few years
later, after I was out of college, had married, and was living on the old homestead in Lime Creek Township, I happened to meet Katharine one day in town. She was, indeed, director of athletics and physical education for girls at Mason City High School. I thought this was a striking example of how to plan one's career, and then make it come true.