

to the fish pole. He caught a little frog and baited the hook. He sat on the edge of the bridge and fished. A big fish saw the frog. It was hungry. It seized the frog and jerked the



"'T is not in mortals to command success,  
But we'll do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it.'"

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## OLOF HANSON

## *An Autobiography*

[The Editor of THE COMPANION requested Dr. Hanson to write his autobiography for publication in our school paper, in order that there might be a record of the life and achievements of one of the outstanding graduates of the Minnesota School for the Deaf. We feel assured that his many friends throughout the state and nation will be interested in reading the following life story.]

The Editor of THE COMPANION has asked me to write an autobiography. I was born on a farm in Fjelkinge, in the southern part of Sweden, September 10, 1862. My father had a large farm and kept eight or ten servants the year round. During harvest time there would be as many as thirty people working on our place. Father was also a Church Warden, and a member of the Landsting, or local legislature.

I attended public school until twelve years old. As a boy I was fond of outdoor sports. Snow balling in winter was a favorite pastime. Sliding on newly formed ice was our delight, and we used to vie with one another as to who could slide on the thinnest ice. As a consequence we broke through the ice on the small ponds near home, and got our feet wet. I never thought of this as a serious matter. On the contrary I was rather proud of it. It was my ambition to become tough and hardened. My cousins were careful not to get their feet wet, and when playing in the snow or slush they always wore rubbers or galoshes. I always looked upon them as effeminate, and had a sort of contempt for their galoshes. But they did not lose their hearing; while I did!

The primary cause of my deafness, I now believe, was getting my feet wet. I always had a "cold," and was delicate rather than robust. The immediate cause of my deafness was a snow storm. Going home from school one day we had to face a howling blizzard. I still remember vividly how we would run from one house to another and stop for shelter on the lee side before moving on to the next house. I was then eleven years old. My ears were frozen, as they had been many times before. But on reaching home, instead of telling my mother and having the ears rubbed with snow, which was the usual treatment for frost bitten members, I sneaked up behind the stove to thaw my ears. As a result my ears swelled up. The swelling subsided in a few days, and I was not sick. But I became totally deaf in my right ear. I could still hear with the left ear.

My father had bought a farm in Minnesota, and

had decided to move with the family to America. All preparations had been made. The farm in Sweden was leased; stock and implements sold, and everything was ready to leave Sweden the following spring. Then father was taken sick, and after two weeks sickness he died from nervous fever on March 14, 1874, at the age of forty-three.

The plans to go to America were upset. My oldest brother, Hans, had gone to America two years before this to manage the farm in Minnesota. He was recalled to Sweden, and became virtually the head of the family at the age of twenty-one.

It was decided to carry out the plans to go to America, and after a year's delay we came to Minnesota in the spring of 1875. The party consisted of my mother, my brother, my sister, and myself, the youngest of the family. There were also about a dozen other people going to various places for whom my brother acted as leader.

After a week's visit with relatives in Red Wing and Vasa, Minn., we went to Willmar on the new railroad just opened. Our farm was seven miles south of Willmar, and we drove there in a farm wagon. My brother had a team of horses, which was an unusual sight there at that time, as most of the other farmers had oxen for their conveyance. Our baggage came in ox carts. An uncle and a number of people from the old country had taken homesteads near us, and in a few years there was quite a colony of Swedes in that locality.

It was May; work on the farm was progressing; we were getting settled; I slept in a log house near an open window. One morning when I got up I felt dizzy, and could not hear as well as usual with my left ear. I told my mother and brother. It was decided to take me at once to Willmar to see a doctor. As we drove to town my dizziness disappeared; but my hearing diminished, and by the time we reached the doctor, I was as deaf as I am now. I was not sick, and experienced no other inconvenience; but I was totally deaf. We all thought that it would pass away, and that I would soon be able to hear again. The doctor prescribed spraying the ears with fresh, warm milk, and gave me some medicine which did not help me any.

In the fall I was taken to St. Paul and placed under the care of a specialist, named Dr. Atwood, and made daily trips to his office. Evidently he

**S**OME men went to an island about eighty miles from the city of Santa Barbara, California. They caught

found the Eustachian tube closed, and he tried to open it by blowing air through the nose with a rubber syringe. It did me no good.

While in St. Paul I lived with a Swedish family named Hjortsberg, and as I afterward learned, within a block of the home of Charles Thompson. But I did not meet him, as he was at school in Faribault. I did not know anything about him, nor did I know that there were other deaf people. I thought I was the only one.

After two months treatment without any benefit, we tried another doctor for a month with no better results. Then I returned home.

The next two years I spent on the farm. I was very fond of reading books and newspapers. I could read Swedish, but not English. We took two or three Swedish weekly papers, and I devoured them eagerly. The papers carried weekly serials, and in this way I read Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, and several other good books. I did not go to school, and no one tried to teach me English. The credit for bringing me to school belongs to Olof Norling, who was then a pupil at Faribault. His home was not far from mine, and he heard of me and informed Superintendent Noyes. A brief correspondence followed, and I was brought to school in Faribault in February 1878.

My first impression on arriving at the School was one of intense disgust with the grimaces made by the pupils in talking with one another in the sign language. I can readily understand why the sign language does not appeal to parents and the public in general, when they do not understand it. This is greatly to be regretted, because the sign language, when understood, is really attractive, and to the deaf there is nothing that can compare with it for conveying thought and entertainment.

But the kindly face and neat appearance of Dr. Noyes reassured me, and I soon felt at home. I was placed in a class of semi-mutes, under the instruction of P. W. Downing. In the class were W. C. Brower, J. L. Smith, M. O. Roberts, George Allen, L. H. LeFevre, A. R. Spear, Emma Schneider, Anna Sachs, and several others. A new world opened to me. I was given books to study,—geography, arithmetic, history, natural philosophy, etc. I wore out two or three Swedish-English dictionaries. I studied eagerly in school and out. Mr. George Wing, one of the teachers, evidently sensed that I was studying too hard, for during the Sunday study hour he would tell me that his horse needed exercise, and asked me to ride him about the country for an hour. It was a good horse, and of course I was glad to give him the needed exercise!

The class in which I was placed consisted entirely of semi-mutes, and recitations were conducted orally. But I never could understand any thing of what the other pupils were saying, as I could not read lips at all. I could speak Swedish quite well, and Mr. Downing tried to teach me to speak English. But I made little progress in that direction.

It was not until the following year, when a new oral teacher was employed, Miss Fanny Wood, that

I got a real start in learning to speak English. I attended her classes half an hour each day, and the entire time was given to drill in speech. She used Melville Bell's speech symbols, and these helped me greatly in pronouncing words. The Swedish language is almost entirely phonetic; but in English the difference between the written and spoken word was a great stumbling block to me. Here the Bell symbols came in handy. She would write "laf" (in symbols) and I pronounced "laf." But I had no idea what it meant until she wrote "laugh." Then I saw the light. I had to learn a great many words that were pronounced differently from the written words. But I made good progress. I also learned to read my teacher's lips, so that I could understand most everything she said.

In June 1881 I graduated from the school at Faribault, and in September I entered the College at Washington. The instruction I had received in speech stood me in good stead, and I have always used speech in communicating with hearing people. But in lip reading I never could make much progress, chiefly I believe from insufficient practice, and lack of that knack for lip-reading which some people seem to have in much greater degree than others.

During my last two years at College I had as my roommate Cadwallader L. Washburn. Through the kindness of his father, Senator W. D. Washburn, I secured a position during the summer vacation in the office of E. T. Mix & Co., Architects, Milwaukee. There was at that time a Dr. Spencer, who was greatly interested in teaching the deaf to speak. He was a friend of Mr. Mix, who interested himself in seeing that I received proper encouragement in learning speech and lip-reading. He instructed the draftsmen in the office that they were to speak to me to give me practice in-reading.

One day one of the draftsmen said to me: "Please pass me the ink." I could not make out that word "ink." (Try to read "ink" on the lips.) He repeated the word "ink," and presently every man in the room was yelling "ink," "ink," "ink!" But I could not make it out and was quite embarrassed. I guess they set me down for dumb, and did not try to speak to me again. But some of them learned to talk on their fingers and were good friends.

There was a teacher named Paul Binner, a friend of Dr. Spencer, and arrangements were made for me to take lessons in speech and lip-reading from him. I went to him two or three times a week, and paid a dollar an hour. But, while I tried hard to learn lip-reading I made no progress at all. In my business I have found it so uncertain and unreliable that I have always preferred pad and pencil to lip-reading.

From 1881 to 1886 I attended Gallaudet College, and graduated in 1886 with the degree of B.A. My classmates were A. F. Adams, Albert Berg, J. H. Cloud, C. O. Dantzer, J. H. Dundon, and Thomas Lynch. The last named was the outstanding football star of the time, and he was the first to pass away.

During my sophomore year I set myself seriously to consider what I should do after leaving College,

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Three professions were particularly alluring to me: engineering, surveying, and architecture. I set about investigating the possibilities of each. With a letter of introduction from Dr. Gallaudet I interviewed a prominent engineer in Washington. He promptly threw cold water on my aspirations. The engineering profession was overcrowded; many good engineers out of work; and he did not think I would stand any chance of succeeding.

With a similar letter of introduction I went and talked with a surveyor. He was more cordial. He thought I could do the office work of drafting and computation. But my deafness would be a serious handicap in the field work.

Next I went to an architect. He was an optimist. If you have the ability there is no reason you should not succeed. The sky is the limit. Some architects in New York make \$100,000 a year. But, he emphasized, you must have the ability; otherwise better not attempt it.

After graduating from College, through the assistance again of Senator Washburn, I secured a position with an architect in Minneapolis, and later moved with him to Omaha, remaining with him for several years.

Then I decided to travel and study architecture in Europe, and in 1889-90 spent a year abroad. First I went to England and Scotland, visiting most of the English Cathedral towns. I was expecting a draft from home, but when I came to London there was no draft. I went on to Paris. It turned out later that the draft had arrived in London a few days before I did, and had been forwarded to me at Cambridge, arriving there after I had left. I got another draft by cable, and the original draft turned up several months later, having been held at the hotel in Cambridge in expectancy of my arrival there, though I had already passed through.

I remained in Paris five months, most of the time as a special student at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. While in Paris I had the pleasure of sitting opposite Mr. Douglas Tilden at dinner every evening, and greatly enjoyed his conversation. During the winter a strange malady spread all over Europe, called La Grippe, and later it spread to the United States where it was called Influenza. I caught it good and plenty and for three weeks was a very sick man. My room in the hotel, heated only by an open fireplace, was not any too comfortable. But finally I got well.

Early in the spring I said good bye to Paris and went to Italy. Its beautiful works of art—architecture, painting, sculpture—fascinated me. I spent two weeks in Rome, and made shorter stops in Venice, Milan, Pisa, Orvieto, Florence, and other places of interest. While in Italy, as in other European countries, I always patronized native restaurants and hotels rather than those catering to tourists. I learned enough of the language to ask for what I wanted, and for twenty-five cents I could get as good a meal at a native restaurant as they charged a dollar for at the tourist resorts. In this way I saved

considerable money and received better service. The whole cost of my European trip, covering ten months, was a little over \$800.00.

From Italy I went northward through Switzerland, then down the Rhine to Germany, stopping at various places, including three days in Berlin. Then I went through Denmark and visited my native home in Sweden, and made a brief stop in Norway.

During my travels I made it a point to visit schools for the deaf when I could, and to meet as many deaf people as possible. I made such visits and contacts in Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, Paris, Lyons, Verona, Milan, Rome, Berlin, Copenhagen, Lund, and Skara. The Italians were the easiest of all to talk with by means of the sign language, as they use natural signs and pantomime a great deal. In other places it was not so easy, but by using natural signs together with writing, I managed to communicate with them fairly well.

Returning home, I reached New York on the Fourth of July, 1890. I went to Philadelphia where the new Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf was under construction at Mt. Airy. Through the kindness of Dr. Crouter I secured a position with Wilson Bros. & Co., Architects, and worked on the Mt. Airy buildings till nearly completed. Then I returned to Minnesota, and worked in Duluth and Minneapolis.

In 1893 there was a severe business panic, and I gladly accepted an offer from Dr. Noyes to teach in the School at Faribault for two years. My aim, however, was architecture, and as soon as business conditions improved I set up as architect in Faribault, and had a fairly good practice. Before and during my six years as architect in Faribault I made plans for twenty-four residences; eighteen store buildings and hotels; two churches, and ten schools and institutional buildings.

While my business in Faribault was growing I had an offer from Mr. Frank Thayer, an architect in Mankato, to join him as partner. Mankato was larger than Faribault; Mr. Thayer had a good business; the prospects looked good, and I moved to Mankato in 1901.

Mr. Thayer about this time became interested in a business proposition in Alaska, and made a trip to the Pacific Coast. He became enthusiastic about the West, and on his return wanted to move to Seattle, and wanted me to go with him. He secured a commission to prepare plans for a United States Court House at Juneau, Alaska. I made these plans in Mankato. The following year, in 1902, we moved to Seattle, and opened an office as architects. A little work came in, but to get a start in a new place was not so easy. Then Mr. Thayer became sick and practically had to retire from active business. I kept up the office for a time. Seattle was growing, but there were plenty of architects looking for business, and a deaf young man in a strange city did not have much of a chance. However, I readily secured work as draftsman with other architects. While a large part of my time in Seattle has been spent working for other architects, I have done considerable work on

my own account. According to my books, my work in Seattle includes twenty-four residences, eight schools and institutional buildings, ten stores and other buildings.

While I have never regretted coming to Seattle, on account of climate and living conditions, I have often felt that from a financial standpoint I would have done better to remain in Minnesota, either in Mankato or in Faribault.

There is no reason why a deaf man of ability and perseverance should not succeed as architect or engineer, and his chances will be better in a small city where he can become known, rather than in a very large city. If he has relatives or friends who can help him get a start, so much the better. If not successful in business independently he can usually get work as draftsman. If I had my own life to live over again, I would choose as my profession, either architecture, or one of the many branches in which the engineering field is now subdivided.

During the world war architectural business in Seattle was practically at a standstill. I went east and secured work as draftsman in St. Paul and Omaha, which lasted almost to the end of the war. Then I returned to Seattle arriving home on Armistice Day, November, 1918. Shortly afterward, in March 1919, in response to an advertisement, I secured a position as draftsman at the University of Washington, a position which I have held to this day. While not so brilliant or remunerative the work has been steady and the position congenial, bringing me contact with highly educated people.

For a long time the deaf of this section expressed a desire for church services for the deaf, and conferences with church officials were held a number of times. But the Episcopal church could not see its way to provide the desired services owing to lack of financial resources. In 1909 I started a Bible Class in Trinity Episcopal Church, and kept it up until I went east during the war. On my return from the east the desire for church services was renewed. At the request of deaf friends, and after consulting the Bishop and clergy of the church, I decided to study for the ministry.

After three years of study and preparation I was ordained deacon in the Episcopal Church March 30, 1924, and was ordained Priest January 6, 1929. Owing to financial limitations I have not given my full time to the ministry, but have continued my secular work at the University, while ministering to the deaf on Sundays. My work has been limited chiefly to Seattle, Tacoma, Vancouver, and Portland, with services twice a month in Seattle, once in two months in Tacoma, and once in three months in Vancouver and Portland. My work in this line has been chiefly pioneering. It is hoped that in the future conditions will permit the services of a missionary to the deaf who can give his full time to the work.

On July 3, 1889, I was married in Pittsburgh, Pa., to Miss Agatha M. Tiegel, Gallaudet '93, and a teacher in the Faribault School. If any one is under the delusion that college girls are not good home

makers, I wish to correct that impression, at least as far as my experience goes. I do not have to worry about calories, vitamins, but leave such things to my wife who has done the worrying with perfect satisfaction to all concerned. We have three daughters, all graduates of the University of Washington, and two of them married. We have a good home of our own within ten minutes walk of the University. Together we have shared the ups and downs of life, and we have been as happy as could reasonably be expected.

OLOF HANSON.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### Thompson Hall

At Thompson Hall, on the evening of April 23, Dr. J. L. Smith spoke to an interested audience of over one hundred on "The Kidnapping Game." Year after year, since Thompson Hall was first opened, he has appeared once or twice to speak to large audiences nearly all of whom are known to him personally, white haired boys and girls, in fact, being former pupils of his! He began by saying he would not go into the Lindbergh case as we all knew about that sad happening. He said the oldest case of kidnapping known comes down to us from the Greeks when Pluto came from the underworld and kidnapped the lovely Proserpine, the daughter of Ceres. He went on to tell how Ceres went to Jupiter the greatest among the gods and goddesses and demanded the return of her daughter and how that cunning and crafty old worthy hemmed and hawed and made excuses and promises of which Greek mythology is full. In Bible history the kidnapping of Joseph was narrated and step by step down to modern times dealing with the snatching of Charley Ross and the notorious Pat Crowe who found easy money by kidnapping a son of the millionaire Cudahy and got off scot free as some law of Nebraska at that time provided no punishment for kidnapping when the victims were over ten years of age.

N. F. Morrow, of Indiana, who was present and was a college mate of Dr. Smith at Gallaudet College long ago, took the floor following the close of the lecture and spoke very interestingly for a few minutes.

One new interesting fact to many present was that multitudes of us are descendants of kidnapped persons who were brought to the early colonies in America and sold as slaves. Some can brag of their foreparents coming over in the *Mayflower* but millions are the offspring of persons who came as captives to be sold into bondage on the *Juneflower* and other tubs that formed the beginning of the Cunard line.

Godfrey Lauby and Matt Anderson came from Wisconsin and were present at Thompson Hall on the evening of April 23.

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