CHAPTER I

FORWARD!

One hundred years ago the Indians roamed the wooded hills around the "Four Lakes of Wisconsin." Today the tourist, winding along the smooth hard roads, between some of the finest dairy farms in all the United States, sees in the distance a great gray-white dome rising in stately grandeur from one of these hills among the lakes. The buildings of the state's great University loom from another hill a mile away. It is the most welcome sight in the world to the home coming traveler as his train crosses Monona Bay. But he who gets his first glimpse of the capitol of Wisconsin at night is the one who sees something which he can never forget: a marvelous white dream standing out cameo-like among the soft green foliage against the blue-black sky, and high over all, the gleaming bronze figure of "Forward" poised as if eager to carry the whole state onward and upward with her.

The farmers and city workers, who are the rulers of Wisconsin, have given themselves a home for their government which might arouse the envy of the greatest monarchs of the past. In this granite home of theirs are marbles from France, Italy, Algiers, and Greece; marbles from Tennessee, Missouri, and Vermont; granite from Norway and Wisconsin; limestone from Minnesota and Illinois. There are glorious paintings of great masters; costly mosaics; magnificent spaces and stairways.

Are we worthy of the home we have built for ourselves? Are we fit to follow our proud leader "Forward"? Where has she led in the past? How far have we gone with her? Whither shall we follow her in the future?

A few years ago a book was written called "The Wisconsin Idea." All over the United States people speak of "The Wisconsin Idea."

What is the Wisconsin Idea? It is simply this. It is the way the people of Wisconsin have met their problems. It is the example Wisconsin has set to the rest of the world in meeting the problems of living and working together.

Every state has contributed some examples of good ways of doing things. The state of Massachusetts, for example, has been a pioneer in many things. Massachusetts claims to be first, or among the first, to provide free schools, free text books, savings bank insurance, a minimum wage law for women, regulation of child labor and of the hours of labor of women, one-day rest in seven, mothers' pensions, the income tax, and many other things which did not come easily, but which are accepted now as a matter of fact by almost every state in the union.
Wisconsin has pioneered with Massachusetts in some of these very things. These two states, in fact, have kept very close together in their methods of meeting their problems.

When you have finished this book you will know some of the problems Wisconsin has been forced to meet and how it met them. You probably know something of them already. Almost everyone knows about Wisconsin’s part-time schools; its extension courses; its agricultural short courses; its Immigration service and other services to farmers; its development of dairying; its cooperative marketing; its protection of industrial workers; its assistance to law makers; its income tax.

As we go along, you will see how Wisconsin has tried to prevent wrongs rather than to punish them; to protect the weak against unjust treatment by strong individuals or groups of individuals, but to be reasonable in all of its dealings with these strong individuals or groups; to be scientific, acting in the light of all the facts that can possibly be obtained; to be democratic, calling into service the representatives of every considerable element in the state; and bringing education within the reach of all.

Almost everyone knows something about some of these items. Few, however, stop to think of the problems out of which they grew. People attack or defend these institutions without knowing much about the reason for their existence.

Wisconsin people ought to know the contributions they are making to the science of government and to the science of living. They ought to know more about them than just their names. To help them to know more about them and to think what they want to do about them, is the purpose of these lessons.

The “Wisconsin Idea” is constantly changing. As new problems arise, we evolve new ideas to meet them. If our ideas are good, the “Wisconsin Idea” is good. Whether the statue of “Forward” shall in the future stand truly for the character of the growing state, or whether it shall become merely a monument to a dead past, depends entirely upon us. Wisconsin’s living, working, voting citizens, and upon the way we meet our problems.