

In his last paper before this club - that on Witherspoon - and in his last funeral address - that on Professor Matthew B. Hammond, Dr. Thompson emphasized the significance of family stock and inheritance. In his own person he once told me, he often felt the stirrings and impulses of his own ancestry, the adventurous spirit of that paternal grandfather who, a weaver by trade, came from the north of Ireland in 1814 and settled on 160 acres of land in Guernsey county near New Concord, Ohio, where he lived as a farmer until his death; the more contemplative inclination of his maternal grandfather, the wool-carder, of Irish-English stock, who after losing most of his property by flood, moved to Cambridge, Ohio where his youngest son David, a shoemaker, met and married Agnes Oxley the school mistress in 1854. They had ten children of whom William Oxley Thompson was the first, born November 5, 1855, in Cambridge,

His teacher-mother taught him reading and spelling before he entered the village school at New Concord when he was five years old. He went to school one winter at Zanesville and attended several village schools thereabouts until at fifteen he entered Muskingum College in 1870. Of his village schooling Dr. Thompson remembered chiefly the value of mental arithmetic and his first instruction in Latin and algebra at Brownsville. The year before entering Muskingum he worked as a hired hand on a farm at eight dollars a month and board. When he entered college he was acquainted with farm life and village life and knew how to earn a little money and to save for his schooling. In 1872, finding no opportunity to teach in Ohio, he went to Illinois where an uncle procured him a school in Marshall County. After teaching three winter terms there and doing farm work in the summers, he returned from Illinois to Muskingum College continuing steadily through two years, also acting as janitor for one year and later, on the sudden disappearance of a professor, as tutor in mathematics. Despite another winter of teaching and saving, he needed \$100. in order to finish his course at Muskingum. Learning of this two farmer friends in Illinois borrowed and sent the money to him. He not only won friendships during his youth but created in his friends a deep personal loyalty and concern for his success. This too was his good fortune through life. These practical experiences certify his worth as boy and youth to his first employers and associates, who recognized in him the quality of which real manhood comes. His strength, persistence, and ambition to get on, his wit and good humor in the face of difficulties, his immediate understanding of the people whom he met, especially of average working American pioneer humanity, continued through life and made him the great commoner that he became, known and beloved by all.

He returned to village teaching in Illinois immediately after graduation from Muskingum in 1878, repaid with interest the note for \$100. by teaching and farm work among his former friends, and entered the Western Theological Seminary at Allegheny, Pennsylvania, from which he was graduated in 1882. There as during the Muskingum years his studies were interrupted by lack of funds. A friendly professor saw both his need and his ability and procured for him a twenty-week's summer school at Plumville, Pennsylvania, which he conducted on a subscription basis and thus reached his senior year in the seminary. Licensed to preach in 1881 he ministered to two country churches during the summer while he also taught at Glade Run Academy, returning to the seminary for his last year. A scholarship of \$200. from an unknown giver enabled him to complete the course.

In the spirit of his forbears he sought adventure and at once offered himself as a missionary to Siam. Instead he was located as home missionary at Odebolt, Iowa, without assurance of salary, to build up a church that was reduced by quarrels to a membership of twenty, of whom but three were men. He arrived early at Odebolt, filled impromptu the place of a missing Fourth of July orator and found himself in demand as a preacher not only at Odebolt but also at two country schools in the neighborhood with over half

of a promised \$900. salary pledged. For three years he served Odebolt and during the remainder of his life often referred to his success in making that a peaceable and happy community. Dr. Thompson was often chosen as a mediator in the years that followed. Here in Ohio both in church circles and in schools and later in business groups he was sought for his help and influence in times of trouble. He had a gift for such services. He seldom failed to find a compromise that was at least tolerable. Confidence in his judgment was equalled by confidence in his good intentions. He took every situation as it stood at the moment and sought the immediate and most practical methods of carrying on. And among the thousands of his friends I think he never lost one.

His pioneering spirit took him from Odebolt to Longmont, Colorado, in 1885, where he repeated the Iowa experience of preaching at Longmont church and also serving several outlying ~~loghouses~~ log schoolhouse meetings every Sunday. From these, two churches were organized. The Colorado Synod had decided to establish a college at Longmont, Dr. Thompson assisted in raising the last \$50,000. of endowment, and was elected its first president, a position that he held for three years.

Coming to Detroit as a commissioner of the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in July, 1891, he learned that he had been recommended for the presidency of Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, and while a spectator of the state republican convention in Columbus a little later, was notified of his election. He began his eight year service at Miami in August, 1891. To this old college with its roll of distinguished alumni he brought a renewal of life and hope and a firm belief in a grand future. Soon he was president of the Ohio State Sunday School Association and was heard in many pulpits in the state as well as many educational gatherings. During the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of Miami Dr. Thompson was elected president of The Ohio State University and for the succeeding twenty-five years, state and land grant college education became his dominant life interest. All that he had done previously seemed to be a direct and designed preparation for his administration of the university on broad principles of state and national service.

He was fortunate indeed in beginning at the time when the state had been made ready for an unprecedented educational growth, not only in higher institutions but in the local schools. It was fortunate for Dr. Thompson that his own education was always accompanied by labor and was often interrupted. A whole system of alternating work and study has been since organized in order to conserve the values inherent in what was to him a practical necessity. He always took his pleasure in applying to any work in hand such learning and knowledge as had become his own by experience. Theory and practise were so closely united in his life that his career represents the theory of practise. His fellow students at Muskingum regarded him during the senior year both as student and official of the small institution. He always impressed his colleagues in the university ~~with~~ with the feeling of personal responsibility for the way in which things were going. ~~He~~ Minor matters of administration, he seemed to allow to take care of themselves. It is remarkable how many times they did. The man on the street would pronounce him extremely lucky but the fact is that his practical personal resources were far greater than those of the men about him. He had an unswerving faith in "the power not ourselves that makes for righteousness". Not only in the great issues and conflicts of the world but also in the smallest details of daily life he felt that inner power and the light that it gave and received abounding strength and joy for his work. He was, therefore, never a defeatist in any of his activities and he made easy adjustments to new demands without sacrifice of principle.

It was inevitable that Dr. Thompson should be called during the Great War into the councils of the nation. He was one of the first of the university presidents to telegraph to the administration at Washington placing the entire resources of our university at the disposal of the government. In the state and national Councils of National Defense he rendered conspicuous service. He was designated by the Department of Agriculture for a trip through the northwest in the interest of increased production and conservation of food and, incidentally, on his return favored this club with an account of his experiences. He was sent as chairman of a commission to England and France on a similar mission. After the war president Wilson appointed Dr. Thompson a member of the Industrial Commission on the relations of labor and capital, and later as chairman of the commission to mediate between the anthracite coal operators and the miners.

He was active for many years in the Association of Agricultural Colleges and Experimental Stations and the National Association of State Universities, and participated actively in executive committee work preparing legislation for enactment by Congress for the benefit of agriculture and the institutions that teach agriculture. The land grant colleges looked upon Dr. Thompson as their most influential leader in securing federal aid and reauthorization.

Dr. Thompson refused to be considered a great scholar in any line. Scholarship apart from practical application to ordinary human life aroused no enthusiasm in him. He refused to be considered a specialist even in education but constantly supplied to the specialists on his faculty the humanizing example that was needed to shrink their theories to what ~~was~~ ~~the~~ practicable in the humblest schools and homes. He refused to be considered a theologian but he was a close friend of the great theologians, knew their conclusions, and was regarded by them as their statesman, the practical mediator in theological difficulty, the outstanding figure to assuage dissension. He conceived that his own function in all of his varied activities was a socializing function in which the specialties lost themselves in human service and true American citizenship.

When such a man, in the fullness of years and honors with magnificent work magnificently completed and duty noble done, with faith in a happy outcome for common humanity still strong and virile, passes to his final rest, it is no time for mourning our personal loss. It is rather a time for solemn triumph over the great possibilities of our common human nature, for joy in the assurance that America will continue to produce from the ranks, high exemplars of those fundamental American qualities that give us abiding courage, hope, and faith.

Joseph V. Denney

Read before the Kiv-Kab Club

February 20, 1934