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Robert Longworth  
*Oberlin College*

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**ENGLISH AT OBERLIN: 1880-1960**

**By**

**Robert Longworth**

**(May 2010)**

## Preface

This essay grew out of several years of delicious conversation with Geoffrey Blodgett, whom I was privileged to reckon a very dear friend and whom I admired as an incomparably able historian. His knowledge about and understanding of the history of his alma mater, from which he retired in 2000 as Robert S. Danforth Professor of History, are exemplified in his *Oberlin History: Essays and Impressions* (published posthumously by the Kent State University Press in 2006). He told me that the Oberlin Department of English deserved some study, and urged me to undertake the task. I deeply regret that his death deprived me of his counsel during my attempt to follow his suggestion.

Happily, however, I have benefited from the discerning advice of several very astute readers. Roland Baumann, Oberlin College Archivist until his retirement in 2008, has been not only a thoughtful reader but also a generous and wise guide through the remarkably rich archival material in his custody. The members of his staff--Ken Grossi, who is currently the College Archivist; Tammy Martin; and Lisa Farrar--have been unstinting in their helpfulness. Dewey Ganzel, John Hobbs, Robert Pierce, and David Young were long-time colleagues of mine on the faculty of the Oberlin Department of English: all have read this essay, and all have offered me (perhaps too gently, but always incisively) the benefit of their good judgments. Robert Henn, whom I admired during his student days at Oberlin College and who is completing his graduate study at the University of Wisconsin, graciously furnished me his detailed and judicious perceptions about an early draft of the first chapter. Stuart Friebert, Carol Ganzel, and Diane Vreuls have all given me encouragement as well as the benefit of their own reflections on the essay.

I have tried here to trace what have seemed to me several important strands in the history of the Department of English at Oberlin. I am acutely aware that I have been extremely selective in the matters I have dealt with; and that my own training and experience in the field of English have significantly shaped my interpretation of the evidence I have

found. That same awareness has led me to break off the account at the time (in 1964) when I myself became a member of the department: my personal involvement in its affairs would fatally compromise the disinterestedness to which I have (however feebly) aspired.

In carrying out this task, I have been embarrassed to discover how little, as a practitioner, I knew about the origins and development of the field in which I toiled during my working lifetime. I have the fond hope that this essay may beguile some of my successors into better acquaintance with that fascinating subject.

Robert Longworth

Oberlin College

Oberlin OH

6 May 2010

## I. Parturition

On May 9, 1888, President James H. Fairchild convened a regular weekly meeting of the Oberlin College Faculty.<sup>1</sup> Nineteen--all but one or two--members of the faculty were present. As usual, one of their number opened the meeting with prayer. Then they took up the first item of business on their agenda. That was the weighty question of whether an organization called the "Sons of Veterans" ought to be deemed a secret society.<sup>2</sup> Secret societies were anathema at Oberlin, and after reaching a decision that the Sons of Veterans properly belonged in that category, the faculty resolved to inform any errant student members of the organization that they were required to withdraw their memberships.

The second item of business before them was a report that had been submitted at the previous meeting by a three-man, *ad hoc* committee on the English Professorship. As always, the minutes are silent about any discussion provoked by the report, but indicate that the faculty duly accepted the advice of its *ad hoc* committee and voted "that D. F. Bradley be recommended to the Trustees for the chair of Rhetoric and English Literature." The action thus taken was intended to introduce the regular teaching of English literature into the curriculum of the college.

This curricular innovation had been bruited about at Oberlin for nearly a decade. In his annual reports to the Board of Trustees, President Fairchild had begun mentioning the desirability of establishing such a chair as early as 1881.<sup>3</sup> Financial constraints inhibited progress toward that goal for several years, but in the spring of 1887 the Faculty had created the *ad hoc* committee to pursue "the question of endowing and filling a chair of English."<sup>4</sup> When in the following spring it brought in its recommendation for the appointment of Bradley, the Committee said nothing about endowing or financing the chair. But President Fairchild promptly extended the offer of appointment, apparently satisfied about growing enrollments and the increased revenue stream that they provided.

What makes this action appear somewhat peculiar today is the absence of any training or experience in teaching English literature on the part of person whom the committee recommended. Dan Freeman Bradley, who was then 31 years of age, was a relatively recent alumnus of Oberlin, from which he had received the A.B. degree in 1882 and the B.D. degree in 1885.<sup>5</sup> Not only was he innocent of any formal study of English literature; but also he could boast even of only so much training in rhetoric—that subject

from among the ancient liberal arts that the faculty had given primacy in the proffered title—as was available to all other Oberlin undergraduates and students of theology. Upon leaving Oberlin, he had served as a Congregational minister, first in Steubenville, Ohio and then in Yankton, South Dakota--where Fairchild's letter reached him. Unlearned as he was, he was clearly flattered by the summons from his alma mater, and he acknowledged a strong temptation to accept it. After more than a month of indecision, however, he wrote to decline the offer.

In his letter of refusal, Bradley told his "honored friend" (as he addressed Fairchild) that

I have long felt that this special line of work [that is, the teaching of English literature] had not been fully developed at Oberlin, and I should rejoice to see the College going forward in this direction. I feel too that every addition made to the Faculty hereafter should be made with a view to strengthening the strictly evangelical idea of the College. More and more I feel the utter uselessness of un-religious culture. I think too, that this chair should be at once established and filled.

Having recognized these reasons for accepting the offer, however, he itemized what seemed to him the even more compelling reasons for declining: first, he had been trained "for preaching and doing the work of a Pastor"; second, he had "no special training" for the "work" proposed, and reckoned that at least a year of "such training" would be required; third, his departure from Yankton would precipitate an unwholesome crisis there; and finally, "this Northwest [that is, the Dakota territory] is plastic, opening with life, filling up with people who need earnest faithful work. Few are willing to take hold of it."<sup>6</sup>

Bradley's reference to the "strictly evangelical idea of the College," his zeal for "religious culture," and his devotion to his frontier ministry clearly reflect a persistent missionary ardor in the affairs of Oberlin College, and no doubt reflect the reasons for his nomination. After all, Oberlin had been founded in 1833 by evangelical Christians for the avowed purpose of educating "gospel ministers and pious school-teachers" to rescue "the growing millions of the Mississippi Valley" from faithless "perishing."<sup>7</sup> Half a century later, the College was still struggling to keep alive that historic sense of mission, as the effort to recruit its alumnus testifies. Just such an evangelical yearning suffuses Bradley's letter of refusal; but the letter also both wittingly and unwittingly reflects the pressure of external forces that were threatening to diminish the power of those old verities.

The offer to Bradley exemplifies one way in which Oberlin had long sought to perpetuate its own pristine sense of religious mission: it replenished its faculty from the ranks of its graduates. In his magisterial history of its institutional beginnings, Robert S. Fletcher points out that "the second generation of Oberlin professors were all Oberlin trained";<sup>8</sup> and even in 1888 eleven of the voting members of the college faculty<sup>9</sup> had themselves received the A.B. degree from Oberlin. Three of the others held other Oberlin

degrees (A.M. or B.D.). In turning to one of their own, therefore, these earnest keepers of the evangelical flame must have been eager to protect the historic mission of their college.

Among the members of the faculty who voted on Bradley's appointment, three were interlopers. One of them, with a recent A.B. degree from Indiana, only lasted a year.<sup>10</sup> The other two, however, would be instrumental in changing the nature of the college. William Ballantine, who had an A.B. degree from Marietta College, would succeed to the presidency of Oberlin just two years later, in 1891. And Frank Fanning Jewett, who had been trained at Yale, would, as Professor of Chemistry and Mineralogy, contribute significantly to the growing curricular program in the natural sciences.

Science, of course, was one of the forces that were transforming higher education and the world itself in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 had launched a corrosive debate in North America about the compatibility of religion and science. As Frederick Rudolph observes, "the conflict over Darwinism in the colleges was less a matter of whether evolution was true than a matter of whether the old regime or the new regime would prevail, whether piety or intellect, whether authority resting on received truth or on scientific evidence."<sup>11</sup>

Behind--or coincidental with--the spreading faith in scientific evidence, however, lay a dramatic external change in higher education. Though linked historically as offspring of the great English universities at Oxford and at Cambridge, colleges and universities in the United States had slowly become aware of an alternative model of what the university might be, and it was to be found in Germany rather than in Britain. In the 19th century, German universities had become fertile soil for the growth of the natural sciences and for other kinds of intellectual inquiry that threatened the comfortable assumptions upon which American colleges depended. In a book published at the behest of the German government for the glorious Chicago World's Fair (or Columbian Exposition) of 1893—itsself an important cultural event that would have a strong effect on Oberlin and even on its English Department—Friedrich Paulsen captured the flavor of this powerful movement: "The older system of university instruction had started...from the assumption that truth was given, [and] that education consisted in the transmission of this truth....The newer system starts from the assumption that truth must be sought, and that it is the proper task of education to give the skill and the impulse necessary to the search."<sup>12</sup>

The shock waves stirred by that simple but radical shift in assumptions came slowly across the Atlantic and into the Mississippi Valley. The impact of its arrival on Oberlin College can be discerned in many and various ways, not the least of which was the establishment of a chair in English language and literature.

At its founding and for several decades thereafter, Oberlin had adhered to the practice of requiring its students to pursue a uniform course of study. Truth was given, after all, and the task of the College was to transmit it. Therefore, the particular subjects studied at Oberlin were largely conventional. In some conspicuous ways, however--after all, those zealous founders supposed that truth was revealed more clearly to some believers than to others--they were notably eccentric. One such eccentricity was a reduction in the emphasis on classical authors (because of their heathen beliefs) though not on the classical languages in which they wrote. Early on, another had been the selective inclusion of two English poets--Cowper and Milton--because of their exemplary Christian piety, and despite their employment of what was supposed the inferior English language. By 1844, however, Cowper and Milton were gone, and while the college curriculum afforded the student no choices, it was also quite orthodox as well as quite straitened.<sup>13</sup>

As the century wore on, that narrow course of study came under attack throughout America. A central principle of German university education, the "elective system" under which students were permitted to choose some of their courses, had breached the fortifications of the American college curriculum, first meagerly at Harvard in 1819 but then in a sweeping fashion (and led by Harvard's President Charles William Eliot) across the nation in the last third of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Oberlin itself succumbed grudgingly to the onslaught in 1875 by deciding to adopt a very modest "scheme of elective studies."<sup>15</sup>

Placing some responsibility for making educational choices on the student may have been only a pallid reflection of one principle in the German universities--*Lernfreiheit*, it was called. But it was powerful in its own right, and it came with the flickering shadows of two other central principles: *Lehrfreiheit*, or what we know today as academic freedom for the instructor; and what in 1895 an admiring Nicholas Murray Butler, the President of Columbia, called "the pursuit of science for its own sake."<sup>16</sup>

Dan Freeman Bradley must have glimpsed those shadows when he declined Oberlin's offer. His discerning letter to Fairchild anticipated seminal changes in higher education--especially the growing importance of professional training--even as it acknowledged the claims of Oberlin's own history. As for himself, by refusing appointment he abjured neither his interest in higher education nor his affection for his alma mater. He went on to serve two brief stints as a college president (at Yankton and Grinnell) and a long forty-two year tour of duty on the Oberlin College Board of Trustees.<sup>17</sup> True to his calling, however, and to Oberlin's training, he devoted the last decades of his life to the Christian ministry. He concluded his vocational service with a long pastorate in nearby Cleveland, where he was also active as a political reformer.

After its failure to secure Bradley, Oberlin did not manage to fill its new chair in English literature until more than another year had passed. The man upon whom the mantle then fell was another interloper,



one who had spent that year in Germany, imbibing (as was increasingly fashionable among academic Americans) the rich broth of learning in those fabled universities.

Curiously enough, the faculty at Oberlin had at least flirted earlier with the prospect of looking beyond the ranks of its own alumni in order to fill the position. In fact, just two weeks before proposing Bradley's appointment, the *ad hoc* committee had "reported" to the faculty "the name of E. P. Smith of Worcester, Mass."<sup>18</sup> For several years, Edward P. Smith had been teaching English--rather more language and rhetoric than literature--quite successfully at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Among his colleagues there, he was known for his sometimes sarcastic but always vehement defense of including English language and other liberal studies in the curriculum of an industrial training institution.<sup>19</sup>

In the end, the faculty voted to "lay over" this recommendation, and it went no further. The minutes tell us nothing about the reasons for the choice of the youthful, home-bred Bradley over the older and more experienced Smith, but some argument about the future direction of the College is likely to have occurred.

At any rate, following Bradley's refusal and the lapse of another year, the faculty was invited to select between two further candidates--neither an alumnus. At a special meeting held on August 8, 1889, the *ad hoc* committee submitted the names of both "William Thomas of Knoxville, Tennessee," and "Prof. McEwan [*sic*] of the Agricultural College, Michigan."<sup>20</sup> The latter had an edge in experience: since 1880, Elias John MacEwan had served as Professor of English Literature and Modern Languages at what would become Michigan State University. After weighing the merits of the two candidates, however, the ten members of the faculty who were present at the meeting voted "that our preference, in the statement made, is for Mr. Thomas." Again, no explanation is offered, but some suspicion may have fallen on Professor MacEwan's candidacy if "the statement made" by the *ad hoc* committee included the information that his resignation in Michigan had been forced when a caustic comment about a colleague had been attributed to him.<sup>21</sup>

William Isaac Thomas, the successful candidate, was twenty-six years old when he accepted the appointment and arrived in Oberlin in August of 1889 to become the College's first Professor of English. He had been born in southwestern Virginia, the son of a dirt farmer who also served as a Methodist preacher.<sup>22</sup> The preacher-farmer had moved his seven children to Tennessee, and William--the second child--had grown up, as (more or less with tongue in cheek) he would later recall, "in the woods alone with a rifle, without a dog, shooting at a mark, regretting the disappearance of large game and the passing of the Indian and of pioneer life."<sup>23</sup> At the age of seventeen, he had enrolled in the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. After a desultory beginning, he responded to the encouragement of a teacher by becoming interested in Greek literature; and eventually he became president of an undergraduate literary society.

His active engagement with a literary society was in fact less a harbinger of Thomas's devotion to English literature than a sign of his intellectual curiosity and his sociable nature. The literary society was a ubiquitous extra-curricular activity in American higher education during the nineteenth century. At its best, as Rudolph suggests, it "imparted a tremendous vitality to the intellectual life of the colleges,"<sup>24</sup> stultified as they were by the religious dogma they formally sought to inculcate. Literary societies--Oberlin itself had five of them--were fundamentally student-run debating clubs. Thomas's participation in and leadership of such an organization may be seen as early signs of his nascent enthusiasm for ideas and of the intellectual ingenuity that would mark his professional life.

Immediately after receiving his A.B. degree from the University of Tennessee in 1884, Thomas was employed by his alma mater to teach agriculture and natural history. Two years later the university awarded him its first Ph.D. and assigned him teaching duties in Greek, Latin, German, and French.<sup>25</sup> Just as Bradley was for Oberlin, he was then a favorite son in a paternalistic system of higher education. He managed to secure a leave of absence in 1888, however, and set out to spend a year in Germany at the universities of Berlin and Göttingen. In all likelihood he was on his return voyage when the Oberlin faculty voted "that Prof. Ellis be requested to invite Mr. Thomas to visit us on his way to Knoxville."<sup>26</sup>

John Millott Ellis, to whom this charge was given, was one of three colleagues who had been designated by the faculty on May 18, 1887, as the *ad hoc* committee expected to grapple with "the question of endowing and filling a chair of English." Indeed, the members of that committee are worthy of scrutiny both in light of their task and in light of the way in which they discharged their duty. Ellis, who had graduated from Oberlin in 1851, was one of those second-generation members of the faculty who had been trained by Oberlin. He is thought by Fletcher to have "recaptured the spirit of the founders more completely than did any of the other younger men."<sup>27</sup> First employed as Professor of Greek, by 1889 he was in his twenty-second year of service as Professor of Mental Philosophy and Rhetoric. In the following year, he would be a popular candidate to follow Fairchild as President of the College, but his younger colleague Ballantine would be chosen instead.<sup>28</sup>

Fairchild himself was the second member of the *ad hoc* committee--and, of course, it was he, nearing the end of his long service as president, who had begged Bradley to take the position. Charles Grandison Finney, the great voice of mid-century evangelical religion in America and the second president of Oberlin, had been a kind of tutelary genius for his presidential successor, though Fairchild had proven to be a more cautious and much less tempestuous leader than he.<sup>29</sup>

The third member of the *ad hoc* committee was James Monroe, Professor of Political Science and Modern History. Like his fellow-committee members, Monroe had been a part of the early and fiercely

evangelical Oberlin. He had received his A.B. degree in 1846, and had even begun teaching in the preparatory department a year earlier. Unlike his colleagues, however, he had a wide experience of the world beyond Tappan Square. He had interrupted his teaching career at Oberlin to serve as U. S. Consul in Brazil (from 1863 to 1870) and as a Member of Congress (from 1871 to 1881); and he had become deeply sympathetic with efforts to link Christian convictions with the amelioration of social and economic wrongs. He gave benevolent encouragement and assistance in the early development of the social sciences at Oberlin.<sup>30</sup>

Ellis and Monroe had probably been chosen for the committee not only for their long experience at the College and their reputations for astute judgment (Monroe had been offered and declined the presidency of the College in 1866), but also because both had taught courses in English literature and, more important, in Rhetoric at Oberlin. Indeed, Ellis had succeeded Monroe as Professor of Rhetoric when Monroe had interrupted his Oberlin service to take up his duties in Rio de Janeiro. Rhetoric had been in the Oberlin College curriculum from the beginning. In 1835 James G. Birney had been elected "Professor of Law, Oratory, and Belles Lettres," but did not get around to taking up his appointment.<sup>31</sup> James A. Thome, like Birney an ardent abolitionist but unlike him a graduate of the Oberlin Theological Seminary, became Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in 1838 and held that post until 1849 when the fiscal problems of the college forced his departure.<sup>32</sup>

The task of preparing evangelical preachers and teachers for the work of saving souls, after all, entailed some training in the art of persuasion, and that was the province of Rhetoric. A fixture in education throughout Europe for two millenia, Rhetoric needed only some careful pruning to suit the peculiarly narrow aims of Oberlin and its kindred educational institutions, shaped as they were by strong doctrinal purposes. In designing its early curriculum, Oberlin's founders had at hand a ready implement in the celebrated *Elements of Rhetoric* published by Richard Whately in 1828. Whately was an Anglican, an Oxonian, and an academic reformer who was part of the ferment stirred by Newman and the Tractarians. If his religious leanings were notably at odds with the Calvinistic views of Oberlin's founders, his religious zeal was nevertheless compatible with theirs. And he believed that rhetoric was not merely the art of persuasion, but more properly the art of persuading others to accept what was true: his aim was "Persuasion, in the strict sense, i.e., the influencing of the WILL."<sup>33</sup>

If a connection between the study of literature and the study of rhetoric is not immediately obvious, nevertheless the two had become closely intertwined in the intellectual life of the eighteenth century. No one had been more influential in affirming that connection than the redoubtable Scotsman, Adam Smith. Between 1748 and 1751 Smith gave a series of lectures in Edinburgh "on the subject of English, its rhetoric

and its literature."<sup>34</sup> In his audience was Hugh Blair, who in 1760 became Professor of Rhetoric at the University of Edinburgh and two years later was named Regius Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. Both Blair and Smith recognized as their patron Henry Home, Lord Kames,<sup>35</sup> who in 1762 published a widely-admired three-volume work entitled *Elements of Criticism*.

The works by Kames and Whately were the texts in rhetoric, logic, and criticism upon which the training of students in the Oberlin Collegiate Institute (as it was first known) and subsequently Oberlin College was based for more than three decades. Whately's *Logic* and *Rhetoric* carefully circumscribed the nature of argumentation; Kames's influential text on aesthetics just as carefully circumscribed the nature and boundaries of taste. Contrary to the proverbial notion *de gustibus non disputandum est*, Kames held that there is a standard of taste common to all human beings, and that it "accounts clearly for that remarkable conception we have of a right and a wrong sense or taste in morals, and also in the fine arts."<sup>36</sup>

These eighteenth century philosopher-rhetoricians had a strong influence on the curriculum of Oberlin--as, indeed, on the curriculum of all other nineteenth century American colleges. It is significant, for example, that Harvard College had secured the funding for its prestigious Boylston Professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory in 1771,<sup>37</sup> thereby setting a curricular precedent that would be widely followed. Moreover, the pedagogic fabric woven from the work of those forceful rhetoricians would make possible and also produce a design for the emergence of English literary study.

On September 4, 1889, with its new Professor of English in attendance, the Oberlin faculty voted (1) to have a term of required English Literature "for Juniors," permitting it to displace and postpone a required course in Logic; (2) that the Professor of English "be given the Senior Rhetoricals," which entailed regular written compositions and oral presentations; and (3) that Stopford Brooke's *English Literature* be "adopted as [the] text book in Eng[lish] Lit[erature]."

These actions, recorded in the official minutes, not only reflect the intense corporate involvement of the entire faculty in curricular details. They also imply the vital connections that were presumed to hold between logic and rhetoric and literature. Furthermore, they suggest the faculty's persistent wariness about the pressure (coming primarily from their students) to include in the curriculum any courses that might be merely elective.

The selection of a text was particularly telling. Stopford Brooke's *Primer of English Literature* (to give it its full title) had first appeared in 1876. There were comparable texts available--among them an *Introduction to the Study of English Literature* (1869) by Henry Noble Day and a *Philosophy of English Literature* (1884) by John Bascom. Both Day and Bascom were Americans, and both texts had been used earlier at Oberlin. Day, indeed, was a Congregational minister who had come to Ohio to serve as a college

professor (at Western Reserve, until 1858), railroad president (the Cleveland and Pittsburgh Railroad), and ultimately President of the short-lived Ohio Female College (from 1858-64). Bascom was a prolific writer on a broad array of subjects. A graduate of Williams College and Andover Theological Seminary, in 1874 he had become president of the University of Wisconsin (where he also held a chair as Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy) after serving twenty years as Professor of Rhetoric at Williams. Like Brooke, Day and Bascom viewed literature as above all a moral force.<sup>38</sup>

Brooke, on the other hand, was English; and his *Primer* had been commended in print by Matthew Arnold. Arnold had an enormous following in America; it might even be said that he was the intellectual obstetrician at the birth of English departments in American colleges, especially evangelical colleges. With respect to religion, after all, Arnold had devised a credible way to deliver it from the terrifying warfare between Germanic biblical criticism and traditional biblical literalism. The way, remarkably enough, lay through literature--that is, through what Arnold liked to call "the best which has been thought and said in the world." That celebrated phrase, first used in his essay on *Culture and Anarchy* (and not beyond being treated after a while with some self-mocking levity by Arnold himself) began his review of Brooke's primer.<sup>39</sup>

Brooke opened his *Primer* with an Arnoldian sentence--"the History of English Literature is the story of what great English men and women thought and felt, and then wrote down in good prose and beautiful poetry in the English Language." That Brooke was trusted by the faculty to serve as a reliable moral guide for the Oberlin student may be inferred from his judgment of Milton, whose ascetic Puritanism was so consonant with the Oberlin ethos: "To the greatness of the artist Milton joined the majesty of a clear and lofty character. His poetic style was as stately as his character, and proceeded from it."<sup>40</sup>

As for Matthew Arnold, he had visited Oberlin in person during his first speaking tour of America. He gave his lecture on "Literature and Science" (one of three that he had brought with him for the tour) to an audience gathered in the First Church on January 16, 1884. In the next issue of the student newspaper after his appearance, a member of the Junior class (Olive Atwood) contributed an adoring essay about Arnold's notion of culture; and an anonymous reporter provided a generally approbative account of the lecture. The reporter was not uncritical, however: he judiciously assented to Arnold's claim for the primacy of the humanities over the physical sciences, but took issue with his preference for Greek literature and language over "modern literature and history."<sup>41</sup>

That the reporter shrewdly perceived and reprovved Arnold's skepticism about the value of studying English literature probably reflects the strong enthusiasm for such study that was already present among undergraduates at the time. Nevertheless, for a traditionalist Arnold's skepticism no doubt mitigated the threat of curricular change that his views implied, for the classic languages and literature (which Arnold

indeed venerated above the modern languages and literature)<sup>42</sup> had long been enshrined in the evangelical college curriculum.

Five years after Arnold's visit, when William Isaac Thomas began to offer courses as Oberlin's first Professor of English, an editorial in the *Review* saluted "the growth in Oberlin's curriculum," and singled out especially "Anglo-Saxon and English Literature" as "a great advance on old things."<sup>43</sup> That mention of Anglo-Saxon points toward another important force in the emergence of Oberlin's attention to English.

The interest in Anglo-Saxon noted at Oberlin and elsewhere derived ultimately not from a vision of *belles lettres*, but rather from the historical study of language generally. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, thanks to the work of amateur scholars like Rasmus Rask, Sir William Jones, and the Brothers Grimm, the phonological connections among the so-called Indo-European languages had been recognized and explored. Their labors gave rise to the discipline of philology--or, as we have come to know it, linguistics. The "academic institutionalization" of linguistic study, in turn, had (not unexpectedly) found a home in German universities "in the second decade of the nineteenth century."<sup>44</sup>

Professor Thomas had himself encountered this institutional phenomenon during his year in Germany, just before arriving at Oberlin.<sup>45</sup> He was also fascinated by and drawn to the study of folklore that he had found in Germany.<sup>46</sup> The linkage that Thomas and others discerned between literary texts and what we would call popular culture can be connected to another and equally vigorous (though extra-institutional) movement in England. There, in the second half of the nineteenth century the newly established Philological Society had set out to produce a new dictionary of the English language. The fruit of this endeavor would be the magisterial *OED*, or *Oxford English Dictionary*. As Simon Winchester suggests in his witty and informative account of this protracted adventure, however, the eminent Victorian organizers of the project wanted to record and exalt the language because it was the bearer of the "greatness and moral suasion and muscularly Christian goodness"<sup>47</sup> of imperial Britain itself.

The birth of Oberlin's English Department, then, was enabled by the propitious coincidence and mutually reinforcing nature of these historical impulses. Clinging zealously to the religious certitude that had created and shaped it, Oberlin College was nevertheless fending off the assaults of modernity. Scientific discoveries, the growing student demand for greater choice in the objects of study, and the professionalizing of the faculty: such threats to traditional Oberlin were (no doubt nervously and, for the most part, tacitly) accommodated by the hiring of William Isaac Thomas.

A few years later, Thomas would write somewhat censoriously about the college to which he had introduced the study of English language and literature.<sup>48</sup> By then he had become a full-fledged sociologist. When he first joined the Oberlin faculty, he was still relatively fresh from the Appalachian piety of his

forebears. Despite the worldly experience of his study abroad, he willingly took his turn (as every member of the faculty was expected to do) in opening meetings of the faculty with prayer and in contributing an occasional "Thursday Lecture" to the community.<sup>49</sup> He also admitted later that his relatively brief stint in Oberlin had been among the happiest experiences of his life.<sup>50</sup> His own rapid intellectual growth (fed largely, as he would recall, by his extensive reading in the work of the great social Darwinist, Herbert Spencer<sup>51</sup>) would lead him to leave Oberlin after three years to enroll as a graduate student in the new University of Chicago. But at the time of his arrival in 1889, the struggles between modernity and academic tradition, between religious truth and the rising clamor of doubt, between sacred text and profane language were engaged in a short-lived truce. And William Thomas embodied that truce as he gladly led his students by the still waters of English literature in the serene Anglican light cast by Matthew Arnold's cultural standard-bearer, the Reverend Stopford Augustus Brooke.

## II. Infancy

Almost twenty years before Oberlin acquired a Professor of English, its faculty had voted to require of undergraduate students the study of French and German,<sup>52</sup> and in 1873 James King Newton had become instructor in both languages. The introduction of study in modern languages, usually at the expense of offerings in the classical languages, had by that time become widespread in American colleges:<sup>53</sup> it reflects in them a more or less urgent but also more or less reluctant accommodation both with modernity and with demands for curricular practicality.<sup>54</sup>

Newton had been born in Wisconsin and served as a Union soldier in the Civil War.<sup>55</sup> About a year after his military service ended, he enrolled as a student at Oberlin. He remained from 1867 to 1870, but left without a degree when (and probably because) he married Frances Estabrook, who was Principal of the Ladies Department at Berea College. When he assumed his teaching duties at Oberlin, he was granted an honorary (A.M.) degree, and he was granted professorial rank after two years. Though his appointment reflected the traditional practice of cultivating homegrown talent without regard to special qualifications, he became a vigorous, active member of the faculty and of his profession. Indeed, he was elected to the Executive Committee of the youthful Modern Language Association of America at its fourth annual meeting, held in Baltimore in February, 1887.<sup>56</sup> He also wrote a pamphlet, "A Plea for a Liberal Education," which was the first publication of the Modern Language Association (MLA) in its "Modern Language Series."

The MLA, which would eventually become the professional guardian and guide of English departments in U.S. colleges and universities, had been organized at a meeting of forty persons, held at Columbia College in New York City, in 1883.<sup>57</sup> Its original purpose, as formulated by one early commentator, was to "emphasize" the "belief 'that the modern languages have an equal claim with the classics,' in modern education."<sup>58</sup> Four years later in Baltimore, Newton's heady elevation to the Executive Council was eclipsed by the election of James Russell Lowell as President of the Association, whose members took great pride in the patronage of that distinguished man of letters.

Lowell, after all, had been born to the linguistic purple. In 1855, he had succeeded a fellow-poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, as Smith Professor of Belles-Lettres and French and Spanish at Harvard. By 1887, he knew several languages, had spent the requisite year traveling and studying in Germany and Italy, had been editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *North American Review*, and had served a turn in London as



U.S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James. His leadership of the MLA, nominal though it seems to have been, presaged the rapid growth in higher education of scholarly and pedagogical attention to literature rather than language. As a biographer has said of him, "he considered it more important that his students learn to appreciate and love the elegance and grace of literature... than to become familiar with the etymology of words or the logic of grammar."<sup>59</sup> That view--and its increasing popularity--proved hospitable to the growth of English literature as an object of study, even at the expense of curricular attention to other modern languages and their literatures.

By 1889, for example, Lowell's Harvard, which had become a major university, employed ten teachers of foreign languages and thirteen teachers of English.<sup>60</sup> That, of course, was the year in which W. I. Thomas became Oberlin's first Professor of English. In the prior year, Newton's star had fallen in locally catastrophic disgrace. Notwithstanding his eminence as an articulate internationalist, he had been accused of plagiarism, was found guilty by his faculty colleagues, and was forced to resign his professorship.<sup>61</sup> His professorial duties in language instruction were carried on by able successors, but the blow to professional pride within the faculty was palpable.

Upon his arrival in Oberlin, Professor Thomas assumed responsibility for some of the instruction in rhetoric and for the required course in English Literature that had been offered for several years by the Professor of Mental Philosophy and Rhetoric, John M. Ellis (who, it will be recalled, was a member of that "Committee on the English Professorship" that had recommended his appointment). In his second year, Thomas doubled the amount of course work available in English literature. His curricular plan was explicitly approved by the faculty, and a copy of the plan in his own hand-writing was appended to the minutes of the meeting at which it was considered.<sup>62</sup> Ellis, in his single required one-term course, had dealt with the history of the English language, early English literature, Langland (the presumptive author of *Piers Plowman*), and Chaucer. With occasional help from Professor James Monroe, he had also made available two elective courses for Juniors: one dealt with "Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and Coleridge," under the rubric of "English Classics"; the other furnished more Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth, augmented by unspecified works of Spenser, Bacon, Addison, Pope, Cowper, and Scott--all under the capacious rubric of "English Literature."<sup>63</sup> From the required course, Thomas eliminated Langland and added a Shakespearean tragedy as well as works from a textbook called *Longer English Poems*. To the course on "English Classics" he added Book I of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; from it he removed Wordsworth and Coleridge so that he might include them in a new course on "Nineteenth Century Literature." Despite the title, it dealt only with poetry (including works of Byron, Shelley, Keats and Tennyson). He designed two other new courses, both of them elective: one dealt with "Old and Middle English," the other with "American Literature." For the

course on American literature, he chose a textbook in which the prolific writer and editor Horace E. Scudder had assembled poems by Longfellow, Whittier, Bryant, Holmes, Lowell, and Emerson.

Thomas's English curriculum is notable (though by no means unusual among coeval programs of study) for its attention to philology, to early writers for whom moral and historical authority could be claimed,<sup>64</sup> to poetry at the expense of prose, and to the omission of writers (like Dryden, Pope, Swift, Dr. Johnson, and even the once-vaunted Cowper) between Milton and Wordsworth. It is remarkable for its inclusion of a course on American literature, despite its narrowness--not every English department deigned to acknowledge the work of native writers at that time.<sup>65</sup>

And the course on Robert Browning was a fascinating gesture of personal diplomacy. It affirmed the new professor's independence and contemporaneity--for Browning was then a modern writer, having died only a little less than a year before Thomas proposed to devote an entire course (albeit a half-term and elective course) to him. At the same time, Browning was "one of the most famous persons in the English-speaking world."<sup>66</sup> The Rev. Stopford Brooke closed his *Primer* with an adulatory passage about Browning and Tennyson--"great poets," he wrote, "who have illuminated, impelled, adorned, and exalted the world in which we live."<sup>67</sup> A less kindly and much more recent critic disparagingly has described the "late-Victorian view of Browning as a...Christian poet...whose chief accomplishment was his vindication of the intellectual and religious adequacy of Victorian middle-class life."<sup>68</sup> No doubt for that very reason, Thomas's choice of Browning did not arouse opposition, but it hinted at the intellectual independence that would mark the young English professor's later career. Tennyson would have been a safer and more conventional subject for a course devoted to a relatively contemporary writer.<sup>69</sup>

By 1893, Thomas had induced the faculty to approve his offering a course in "Epic Poetry," including works in several classical and modern languages; and he proposed in the following year to offer a course in comparative drama.<sup>70</sup> The proposed course was never offered, however, because Thomas left Oberlin in 1893, and his successors were content with a more conventional curriculum. Indeed, by 1900, Thomas's courses in American literature, in Epic Poetry, and in Browning had been discarded. His successor briefly offered a course in Tennyson. The rest of the curriculum established by Thomas had been conventional enough to survive his departure.

When Thomas left Oberlin, he had served the institution for only four years. In April of 1893, he was dispatched to Chicago, with the blessing of the faculty, to supervise the mounting of Oberlin College's own display at the fabled World Columbian Exposition, or Chicago World's Fair.<sup>71</sup> At about the same time, he obtained a two-year leave of absence in order to pursue graduate study--not in English, but rather in Sociology--at the fledgling University of Chicago. It seems clear that he had become increasingly

uncomfortable with Oberlin's strenuous insistence on religious observances and with the conventionality of his teaching assignments. Most important, as he would later recall, he had been reading the work of Herbert Spencer and had found it more engaging than his study of philology or literary history.<sup>72</sup>

His separation from Oberlin appears to have been amicable. Indeed, President William Ballantine, in his annual reports to the Board of Trustees, twice indicated that Thomas would be away for only two of the three annual terms,<sup>73</sup> though it is not certain that he returned to Oberlin in either year. In addition, Thomas borrowed money from Oberlin College to subsidize his graduate study in Chicago, and struggled for many years following to repay the loans.<sup>74</sup>

When Thomas left for Chicago, the college reached into the ranks of its preparatory department (then called the Oberlin Academy) to replace him. The man chosen was Wilfred Wesley Cressy. Cressy, born the son of a clergyman in 1867, had moved as a boy from his birthplace in Maine to Iowa, where he remained throughout his collegiate study at Cornell College. From 1887 to 1890, he taught at a high school in Minnesota. There he met and married Lillian Fitz, a young woman from St. Paul, whereupon he promptly enrolled as a graduate student in English Literature at Harvard. Armed with his Harvard master's degree, he had been brought to Oberlin in 1892 as a tutor in English for the Academy.<sup>75</sup>

The choice of Cressy was apparently a matter of expediency. At the time, the institution was not at its most robust. Indeed, the college was undergoing considerable fiscal anguish. An economic depression had struck the nation in 1893, and its recovery was both slow and uncertain.<sup>76</sup> In the wake of that widespread dislocation, at Oberlin student enrollment fell; gift support diminished; and the financial need of the diminished student body rose. Financially, Oberlin had never been strong; but this ordeal was particularly difficult.<sup>77</sup> The college pared back expenditures, and members of the faculty even shouldered part of the burden by agreeing to forego a percentage of their incomes. An intractable and persistent budgetary deficit appears to have been a major reason for the resignation of President Ballantine in 1896.

In that same year, W. I. Thomas was awarded the Ph. D. in Sociology by the University of Chicago. Meanwhile, Wilfred Cressy labored to maintain the curriculum in English at Oberlin. Cressy was able to get a little help from a few young and transient instructors. James Watt Raine, for example, who had earned an A. B. degree from Oberlin in 1893, offered courses in rhetoric and composition as well as five literary courses during 1894-95--among them "Shakespeare," "The Old [mostly Elizabethan and Jacobean] Dramatists," and "Scottish Literature."<sup>78</sup> Raine then left Oberlin for a series of pastorates before assuming the chair of the English Department at Berea College. Frederick Monroe Tisdell, a graduate of Northwestern (1891) with a master's degree from the University of Wisconsin (1893), was hired as Associate Professor of

Rhetoric and Oratory in 1894; his primary responsibilities included courses in composition and forensics, but until his departure in 1898,<sup>79</sup> in alternate years he also offered a course in Milton and a course in Bacon.

Professor Cressy worried about the security of his position at Oberlin. This fretfulness may be inferred from a candid letter of advice that he received and kept (despite the sender's concluding injunction that he destroy it) from his immediate predecessor. Although the letter from Cressy that provoked Thomas's candor does not survive, the letter from Thomas, dated 29 February, 1896, is worth quoting at length:

My dear Mr. Cressy [writes Thomas]:--

I wish I could talk this matter over with you, it would be a good chance to see what a 'cusser' I used to be. I was in about the fix you are in now four years ago, except that there was by no means so cordial approval of me or my work as there is of you. They simply reappointed me temporarily for a year. I believe my conduct on that occasion was the correct thing, and believe you would do well to do pretty nearly the same thing. I payed [*sic*] little attention to the matter. They didn't know whether I cared or not. Your work is splendid, and you have no real occasion to be disturbed by this, unless it cuts a figure in your salary--as no doubt it does. There are two or three things pretty clear. You will eventually leave Oberlin. But you don't want to jump before you see pretty well where you are going to land. It is a long sight easier to get transferred than it is to get a new job when you are out of one. Furthermore a man will never get a job where there are not some disagreeable features--theological or other. I could to this day not say under oath to what a degree I was or was not a hypocrite in Oberlin, and I don't care a rap for the question, and never did. I simply thought it best not to run my horns into things other people loved and sweated over--it was not in my line of business. But I confess I had a sneaking feeling sometimes. The same feeling comes over you and Mosher (!) [James Mosher, Instructor in Singing from 1892 to 1902] sometimes, no doubt. But that is not important. Oberlin is a mighty good place to serve an apprenticeship in. Don't you worry, the students are thinking more of you than anybody there. So just keep your head, and hold on to your job until you are ready to throw it up.

But as to business. I should, I believe, apply for a year's leave of absence, and I believe I should spend it abroad. You know the English crowd here better than I do, and to come here at present would be advisable only with reference to getting a foot-hold. But that would not be a good plan, I think. You know more than these fellows, but if you should come and study they would regard you as a student, and if you received an appointment it would be at the end of the line, and you should have a long and dismal procession before you, and your own work would be correcting themes. Your appointment would come as a recommendation of the department, and you would be an inferior in rank. If you study abroad and then come as a professor already, your appointment will be from [President William Rainey] Harper direct, and he can put you anywhere he pleases, and you will be independent and equal in rank with the others, or at any rate not so far down the line. Remain on good terms with [Oberlin College President] Ballantine. He is a friend of Harper. I can give you a boost, too, at the proper time. While you are away, you might suggest by letter, or through some friend, that a permanent appointment would be agreeable. You might put the question direct, without any explanation, It would be taken to mean th[at] you will return if it is done. Do not give any sign that you expect to leave the place finally for good and all. If they think you are making them a stepping stone they will try to keep you down.

Now, my dear fellow, you can arrange to go abroad for two years if you want to. I went, and took a new wife, and every cent I used was borrowed money, and I hadn't a foot of real estate. I am still in debt, but who cares! I am paying it off. Moreover when you go abroad don't study your eyes out. Take some time to see the country and teach Mrs. Cressy to drink beer. If you can use part of your property to enhance your own market value you will be wiser than to keep it to breed more. There is more or less hocus-pocus in the

phrase 'graduate study abroad,' but in the year of our Lord 1896 it tips the balance. Make it two years, if you possibly can....<sup>80</sup>

Thomas was a shrewd observer of academic politics. It is clear that he understood very well the dynamics of Oberlin's strong heritage of faculty governance. He knew and instructed Cressy about the somewhat obscure way in which institutions like Oberlin used their sundry discretionary powers to send signals (in this case, apparently, a shorter than usual term of reappointment to express some degree of displeasure). Even more impressively, his advice about strategies of response to such signals reflects the temperament of a good poker player: an inscrutable public demeanor can mask intensely calculating private behavior.

Thomas's shrewdness here is especially poignant in light of his own later experience at the hands of the University of Chicago. After achieving renown as a founder of the "Chicago School" of Sociology, Thomas was arrested in 1918 (along with the wife of an American army officer) by the FBI in a local hotel and charged with violating the Mann Act. The President of the University--without any protest from the faculty--immediately fired him, and broke his contract with the university's press. The charges were thrown out of court, but Thomas remained a pariah at the University of Chicago throughout the rest of his long and impressively productive scholarly life.<sup>81</sup>

Thomas's letter to Cressy is also engagingly perceptive and aptly cynical about the professional value of study in those hallowed German universities. Moreover, it reflects his grasp of the growing role of academic departments in establishing and carrying out policies and programs. Such departments had slight formal standing at Oberlin, but they had gained a footing among universities. Cressy must have asked Thomas's advice about approaching the English Department at the University of Chicago for a job. The notion was not altogether absurd. First of all, most members of that department had come from Harvard, where Cressy had pursued graduate study. Furthermore, in 1899, he would publish a version of selections from Pope's translation of the *Iliad* for high school students, in which his co-editor was William Vaughn Moody, then a member of the English Department at Chicago (and later a well-known poet and playwright).<sup>82</sup> Departments are bureaucracies, however (as Thomas with his burgeoning interest in sociology clearly understood), and bureaucracies tend swiftly to bureaucratize their labor. In the case of teaching English, its practitioners have perennially lamented the drudgery of reading and correcting student compositions, and have found ways to inflict that drudgery disproportionately on the most junior among them. In advising Cressy, Thomas anticipated just such a purgatorial experience if he were to have the department rather than the supra-departmental university as his patron.

At the time when Thomas dispensed this advice to Cressy, the teaching of English composition had also become a mainstay of the English faculty at Oberlin. When in 1887-88 curricular offerings were first organized and presented in the annual catalogue as the "Description of Work Performed in the Several Departments of Instruction," three courses in "English Literature" were listed separately from the numerous courses in "Rhetoric and Elocution," "Rhetorical Exercises," and "Advanced Rhetorical Work." In the following year, all of those courses were listed under the departmental designation of "English Language and Literature." In 1890-91, "English Language and Literature" was again listed separately, this time from the department of "Rhetoric, Composition, and Vocal Expression." In 1893, "English Language and Literature" became merely "English." In 1894, when Frederick Tisdell arrived to teach rhetoric and oratory, several elective courses in composition were included in the list headed "English," while required courses in rhetoric (for freshmen) and composition (for sophomores and juniors) were listed separately. In 1896, Tisdell wrote in his brief annual report to the president that he and Cressy had formed a "plan to connect the work in English Composition as closely as possible with the work in English Language and Literature."<sup>83</sup> In effect, traditional instruction in rhetoric had thus been divided into composition and elocution (later to be called speech), with the composition (instruction in writing) having been wedded to philology (or instruction about written texts).<sup>84</sup>

As William Riley Parker has observed, "the teaching of freshman composition...quickly entrenched English departments in the college and university structure"<sup>85</sup> at the end of the nineteenth century. The impact of the curricular merger of composition with literature (or philology) can be felt in a striking gesture made by Oberlin's relatively new president, John Henry Barrows, in 1900. Addressing the Board of Trustees in his first annual report, he devoted a paragraph to the need for an "enlarged teaching force" before lamenting that a continuing deficit in the annual budget--the aftershock of that economic depression that had precipitated his predecessor's resignation--together with a minuscule endowment (a chronic problem then at Oberlin as elsewhere) precluded his doing anything about it. In the following paragraph, however, he asserted that whatever else could not be done for those reasons, it was "imperative" to employ "at least two men [*sic*], of the highest rank in scholarship and teaching," to provide for the "teaching of our noble English language and literature."<sup>86</sup>

Earlier in that first year of Barrows's presidency, the Department of English (such as it was) and the entire community had been twice jolted, first by Wilfred Cressy's sudden departure from Oberlin (in October, for reasons of ill health), and then a few months later (in February) by his death in New Mexico. Cressy had not taken W. I. Thomas's advice to study in Germany. Indeed, he appears to have soldiered on uncomplainingly at Oberlin. Thomas had actually written (and Cressy had again kept) a later letter in which

he reported briefly on a meeting with President Ballantine (presumably in Chicago), saying that Ballantine had identified the "opposition" to Cressy's "advancement" as based on "religious grounds," urging him to "show yourself at church oftener, at least."<sup>87</sup> Whether or not he followed that prudent advice, he served Oberlin well in the seven years that elapsed between Thomas's departure and his own untimely death.

As we have seen, he co-operated with Tisdell in merging the study of English composition with the study of English literature. He revised the curriculum, most notably by eliminating Thomas's courses in Browning and in American literature. In 1893-94, the faculty had dropped English literature as a general requirement for students, and that had led to the elimination of a broad survey course. Cressy reduced the range of courses but increased the number of courses that were offered every year. In 1888-89, students could elect from among nine courses (that is, three per term) in English literature. Four courses in Shakespeare led the others in popularity (with 74, 79, 38, and 43 students enrolled in them respectively). A course on "Prose Writers of the XVIIIth and XIXth Centuries" (which Cressy had introduced in 1892-93 and which included essayists like Addison, Steele, Swift, Johnson, Lamb, DeQuincey, Macaulay and Carlyle but also a group of novelists--Defoe, Fielding, Scott, Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot) drew 44 students, while courses in Anglo-Saxon, Early Middle English, Chaucer, and Bacon drew fewer than 20 each.<sup>88</sup>

Cressy endeared himself to President Ballantine and others in 1894 by visiting several secondary schools in Ohio. Ballantine wrote in his annual report for the year that "no doubt the large size of the present Freshman class is due in great part to the zeal and wisdom with which he performed his difficult duty."<sup>89</sup> Ballantine expressed the hope that these journeys might be continued in future years, but it is not clear that they were.

Lyman B. Hall, one of Cressy's colleagues, was keeping a journal through this period. A few of his scattered references to the young English teacher shed light on some of the difficulties that Cressy was experiencing at Oberlin, including the behavior that elicited the disapproval that Thomas reported to Cressy after his meeting with the President. For example, in an entry for February 17, 1886 (that is, just before Thomas wrote the letter that I have quoted at length), Hall noted "a five hour Faculty Meeting in which our budget was adopted and voted...to give Cressy two more years of teaching with the understanding that his training has been insufficient to make him Prof. of Literature."<sup>90</sup> The issue of "adequate training" is interesting: Cressy's only advanced degree was a master's from Harvard, but few other members of the faculty (including Hall) could boast of a doctorate. To be sure, Cressy had not spent time in Germany (as Hall and several other members of the faculty had); and that slight disadvantage may have prompted Thomas's entertaining suggestion about teaching Mrs. Cressy to drink authentic German beer. The more

important issue, as acknowledged by Ballantine in his subsequent conversation with Thomas, must have been the peculiar "religious grounds." For two years later, when Cressy was finally granted permanent appointment, Hall questioned that decision, indicating reservations (which he attributes to others but implicitly shares himself) "in view of his [Cressy's] feeling about family prayers and his critical temper upon preaching[,] missionary operations[,] church opposition to the theatre, etc."<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, during that year in which he was granted permanent appointment Cressy had undertaken additional duties as "Dean of the College Department," in which role he bore responsibility for the discipline of male students.<sup>92</sup> Such an assignment would appear to represent a sort of endorsement for his general abilities and value to the college.

After his death, Cressy's body was returned to Oberlin for burial. His funeral was held in the college chapel on February 14, 1900. According to the *Oberlin News*, Professor King "paid a beautiful tribute..., speaking of [Cressy's] devotion to his work, his faithfulness to duty and other traits of character."<sup>93</sup> Professor Hall, who attended the service, was a little more acerbic. He confided to his journal that "the attendance of students was not very large. King made the only remarks offered and they were quite brief. They seemed admirable to the members of the Faculty who knew the difficulties of the position but I hear that the students thought them quite inadequate."<sup>94</sup>

Another colleague, Edward Dickinson, then Professor of the History of Music and Pianoforte, contributed a laudatory eulogy of Cressy to the student newspaper, the *Oberlin Review*. After praising Cressy's worth as a teacher, scholar, and (presumably in his capacity as dean) disciplinarian, Dickinson offered the fascinating observation about him that "with all [his] robust, manly temper he possessed in a rare degree a certain quality which...may be called in the more general sense womanly."<sup>95</sup>

The first decade in which the teaching of English took root at Oberlin, then, produced a certain mild turbulence. Its first professor had departed for greener pastures as a sociologist in Chicago; its second, after a troubled tenure, died in harness at the age of thirty-three. But a curriculum had been put into place, students were clamoring for its courses, and as the new century opened, President Barrows was prepared to appoint two able "men" to carry the burden of its future. One of those "men" would be Alice H. Luce, who was armed with a German Ph. D.--the first, it would be said, ever to have been awarded to a woman by the University of Heidelberg.<sup>96</sup>