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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN.

THE MEMORIAL ADDRESSES

Delivered in University Hall, November 26, 1880,

AT THE

FUNERAL

OF

PROFESSOR JAMES CRAIG WATSON, PH. D., LL. D.,

Professor in the University from 1859 to 1879.

BY

ACTING PRESIDENT HENRY S. FRIEZE,
PROFESSOR CHARLES K. ADAMS,
PROFESSOR ALEXANDER WINCHELL, AND
HONORABLE THOMAS M. COOLEY.

PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY.

1882.

JUDGE COOLEY'S ADDRESS.

When a man of great eminence is suddenly cut down, and we have had time to collect our shocked and surprised senses, and to realize that the most useful life is at the mercy of the same unfriendly influences and disorders that may terminate the most unworthy and insignificant, the first thoughts are naturally of the loss in its personal and social aspects, and we do not immediately comprehend that there may be a loss greater than these, which reaches beyond individuals and family circles and the circle of personal acquaintance, and affects the whole commonwealth. This is especially true when the man's sphere of action has been apart from the noise and display of political and official life, in the comparative quiet of academic halls, or in the retired study where he could best commune with science and push his inquiries from step to step among the evidences and results of eternal law. The life we contemplate to-day was an unofficial life, but it was not the less one that concerned the whole State, and was in a true and important sense public; and considerations press upon our attention that demand the careful thoughts of all the people.

Twenty years ago James Craig Watson was called to a chair of instruction in Michigan University. It was in the first year of the law department, and I saw him

often and came to know him well. He was stout and robust in build; his physical vigor was remarkable; and his temperament was sanguine in that degree that he had but to conceive a plan and it seemed to him already half accomplished. He had been endowed in an unusual degree with the mathematical faculty, and he seemed to play with problems which taxed and wearied the energies of others. No doubt his abundant physical life and his consciousness of great powers made him somewhat wayward, and it is probable that the eminent educator who as president of the University was then busy in planting its pillars upon imperishable foundations, did not always find their relations harmonious, but the president's generous nature recognized and appreciated the powers of his subordinate, and it is well remembered that on one occasion when foolish complaint was made that the able and learned astronomer then in charge of the Observatory had little to do with instruction, the great president with something of lofty scorn for the stupidity of the complaint, and something of the pride with which the lioness in the fable points to her one whelp, retorted that true enough it was that Dr. Brunnow had spent many hours in the recitation room giving instruction to a single pupil, but that single pupil was James C. Watson. Honored pupil, blessed in receiving such instruction from such a teacher! Honored teacher to whom was given the opportunity to train for eminence such a pupil!

Of Watson's long and brilliant record as the successor of Brunnow, another has faithfully and lovingly told us. Many in other lands first learned through reports of his work that in this new State there was growing up a

University of great promise. But while he labored faithfully in his peculiar field he also performed other services which are not unworthy of being mentioned even on this solemn occasion. Few knew so well as I did the valuable service he rendered to the people in placing the great interest of life insurance upon a solid foundation. He understood thoroughly the principles of this business and was impatient that irresponsible organizations, by deceptive and fraudulent contrivances should draw money from the people under the false pretense of insuring their families against losses by death. He thought, too, that there should be home organizations whereby the vast and steady flow of money from the State should be checked and the accruing profits from insurance retained and expended among our own people. When at last such an organization for life insurance was perfected, he was invited quite unexpectedly to himself to be its actuary, and so invaluable have his services been found that his judgment has come to be accepted as law by the able business men who have been at the head of its affairs, and it would have continued to be their law had he lived until his raven locks were bleached in the frosts of old age. Some of us had personal knowledge that more than one State legislature invited his assistance in framing insurance laws, and that he had large influence in preventing crude and mischievous legislation on a subject with which the general public is unfamiliar, and concerning which those who think they know it well, are generally most profoundly ignorant. Public services like these, made no display; his name did not appear in the red books of States, or on their official rolls, but it is true in

his case as in many others, that the most useful public servant does not always wear the robes of office, or ornament his name with official titles. When the national government had labor to perform in the line of his own peculiar science, requiring close observation, nice calculation, and the most perfect accuracy, the observatory which the generosity of citizens of Detroit had planted by the Huron was remembered, and the foot-prints of his astronomical journeys may be traced in the public records from Sicily to farthest Asia, and back again to the Western Sierras.

And this is noteworthy, that in whatever quarter of the globe he held intercourse through his telescope with the heavenly bodies they had something new to commutate through him to the scientific world, and the scientific world gave credit for it to the State and to the University. Men of science everywhere recognized their kinship to him; and watched for the result of his observations as of one who was born to unlock mysteries which nature had concealed from others. As a writer and discoverer he was not long in making his own name and that of his State familiar, and it often happened to him abroad as it did when he was presented to the learned and many-sided monarch of Brazil, that he found himself at once in the presence of one who had read with interest and pleasure his contributions to the astronomical journals of Europe, and was ready to enter into discussion with him upon their leading points, and to draw further from his great stores of scientific knowledge and general information.

But it was among the stars this great man found his chief delight, and fitting it was that he should do so.

He knew the stars as one knows the faces of his friends, and when an unknown planet sailed within the sweep of his instrument, he saluted the stranger as it were instinctively, noted its shade of light and took its measure and watched with eagerness its course as it sailed away, as a youth may watch the retreating footsteps of a maiden whose beauty has captivated his affections.

It sometimes happens that great men are fond of vulgar display, as Bacon was fond of gay clothes, and Erskine of theatrical posturing in presence of the jury before the case was opened. Watson had a contempt for these things: he unostentatiously did things worthy of renown and then left his works to praise him. Some men have the art to trumpet their own achievements and are not ashamed to do so. Watson was not one of these. If the journals of the day requested information, he gave it freely; but so far as concerned his own pleasure, the same modest telegram that announced his discoveries to observers at Paris, or Greenwich, or Berlin, contented him as an announcement to the public at home. Had he pushed in legislative bodies for personal recognition, and solicited the members, and wearied them with his importunities, he might perhaps have won a vulgar success thereby; but we who meet to honor him to-day would have respected him less and mourned him less than we do now. We gratefully remember that his labors were always for the common good, and that he recognized the University as first of all entitled to the benefit of his labors. He was too busy in honoring the State with his work to be a personal supplicant for its bounty. He thought it a great mistake in the State that it did not recognize with more ample generosity the kinds of ability

that are rare, and that command the highest rewards elsewhere; but the State heard no complaint, and no incumbent of a chair in the University found Watson pushing his own claims to the detriment of others.

It is just to say for the State that Watson was without the advantages of wealth in his youth, and might elsewhere have had difficulty in obtaining an education. But he obtained one that was solid; and in obtaining it acquired a hearty and wholesome contempt for shams, and especially for all artificial shams. He would have no high sounding pretence in college work, and it was a maxim with him that the University should encourage its corps of leaders to make themselves eminent by valuable work, instead of calling in men already eminent to enjoy in comparative idleness here the honors won elsewhere.

It has often been a source of pleasure to people from this State when among learned men abroad, to find the State valued and esteemed as the commonwealth whose pioneers while yet they were busy in clearing little patches in the wilderness where they might raise the necessaries of life, turned their attention to a more thorough provision than any country in the world had theretofore made for the general and complete education of the people, and pursued their plans, when once formed, with a patience and perseverance that commanded success. Even to-day, while we are arranging for these burial ceremonies, there is laid upon our tables a leading review in which a writer in one of the most distant States appeals to the people to establish such a State University as was planted here under the advice and general direction of the man whom the writer characterizes as "the able and accomplished

Superintendent Pierce to whom chiefly Michigan owes her admirable system of public instruction." These are his words, not mine; and they make mention of an act of profound statesmanship which will be remembered to the honor of our venerable friend when measures of party politics over which leaders cross weapons, and grow furious, and stir up States and sections to animosity, have like their authors had their day and been forgotten. But Father Pierce only conceived wise plans; it fell to others to execute them; and among these the part of Watson was as faithful to the wise plans as it was brilliant. If any one should venture to say now, his services were valuable to a single institution only, not to the State, we may well turn to such a person with the old question, What constitutes a State? What was this teeming land of plenty which we call Michigan; what were its great forests and what its exhaustless mines when "the poor Indian with untutored mind," amid the unbounded wealth of nature, won a precarious subsistence by the fishing net and the arrow? And is the commonwealth proud now of what nature has done for her, or rather of the sons and daughters whose intellectual attainments and vigor, acquired in the training of her schools, have made her name a name of renown? "These constitute the State." And what glory can a State covet which would be greater than this: To hold the place of honor in public instruction, and present an example which other States delight to follow? And what state or national boundary can limit the beneficent influence of any man who has lent a helping hand in giving his State this honorable prominence?

Watson loved the State, but he went out from it. He

took pride in the name which he had inseparably associated with his achievements, but science was his mistress, and when she seemed to offer to him golden inducements elsewhere, he struck his tent and departed. Even now we sorrowfully put to ourselves the solemn question: Did the eminence he won in the service of this great and prosperous commonwealth, and whereby he conferred honor upon her name, make him so valuable to the scientific world that the State could no longer afford to retain him?

When he went out from us he still left his heart with us. A cordial welcome greeted him in the new commonwealth whose appreciative citizens had enticed him away from us; he found friends there and congenial associations; but here beneath the native oaks where he had played as a boy, and the graceful elms which he had assisted to plant, and in the shadow of buildings associated alike with his student life and his labors as a teacher, author, and discoverer; here was and always must have been his scientific home. It was the University of Michigan that he had crowned with a garland of stars, and from whose Observatory the lightning had announced his successive discoveries. This, therefore, was the field to which his thoughts and desires perpetually returned. He admired and had a strong and abiding attachment for the President of the University, who fully appreciated his genius and his value, and whose whole household will bow their heads in sorrow when the intelligence of his death shall reach that far country where people representing the oldest civilization on the globe, once watched with curious eyes this young savant from the new world, while he planted his

instruments of observation in sight of their capitol, that he might learn secrets of the heavens which the observations of thousands of years had never disclosed to their learned men. But Watson had strong attachments, too, for the men who had been associated with him here, and who had won distinction in other fields of research; peculiarly strong, as I think, for those who had been pupils in the same halls, and had been advanced, as he had, to seats of honor as instructors; he made generous acknowledgment of their achievements, and took pleasure in them as they did in his. He went out from us full of hope, but he has fallen speedily, with his manhood still vigorous in him and his brain still powerful; has fallen with his hands still warm from our parting embrace; but we feel and we know that however long his life might have been spared, no other field of labor could have offered attractions that would have diminished his affection for this; he would still have turned his thoughts, and often his footsteps, to the academic home of his youth and his manhood; and whenever he came he would have been welcomed by those who remained, as the family circle in the old homestead welcomes the returning son and brother when from distant fields of labor and renown he comes back with affection undiminished by his honors, to enjoy once more the old, endearing associations. And as often as he came there would have arisen in the innermost chambers of many a heart the earnest question whether losses like this to the State are inevitable. Even now we hear about us the inquiry, whether into this beloved State, seated in such majesty and beauty at the head of the great lakes, rich in the cattle of a thousand hills, and in

the corn garnered from unnumbered fields, and in boundless forests "tall as the mast of some high admiral," and in exhaustless mines stored full from the beginning of time for her endowment — into this State which so early promised to be the patron of letters, it must be that the stranger shall come and select for adoption and bear away from unfinished labors the brightest and most promising among her children; selecting them and bearing them off because they have done and are doing grand work to make her name a name of praise, and have added and are adding to her wealth of forest and field, of flocks and herds, of inland seas and running waters, the great and lasting endowment of an honorable name in the world of letters. Surely this was not what the fathers of the Republic intended when in the immortal ordinance of '87 they bound the people of the territory by the unalterable law, that "*Religion, Morality, and Knowledge, being necessary to Good Government and the happiness of Mankind, Schools and the means of Education shall forever be encouraged.*"