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EDWIN H. WOODRUFF, TEACHER

WILLIAM H. FARNHAM*

While the appointment by the University Trustees of Edwin H. Woodruff at his request as Professor Emeritus has made appropriate an expression on behalf of his former students of their appreciation of his invaluable work as a teacher, it has most regrettably dispelled a universally cherished hope that he would, after recovery from a recent illness, resume his teaching. By all Cornellians, and by Dean Woodruff's former law students in particular, the news of his retirement will be received with the deepest disappointment, and with a keen sense of irretrievable loss. Their only consolation lies in the knowledge that the Law School, while deprived of his services in the classroom, will still have the inestimable benefit of his devoted interest and sage counsel.

Dean Woodruff began his teaching at Cornell in the days when the maintenance of discipline in college classrooms was almost as large a part of the professorial duties as the dissemination of knowledge to the students. While the present-day college teacher has his problems to be sure, he finds that even what few vexatious students he has are on the whole reasonably disciplined and tolerably courteous. He does not have to meet active disturbance, practical joking and malicious obstruction. Dean Woodruff faced these difficulties "in the good old days," and it is asserted by the older alumni, familiar with the circumstances, overcame them with an ease and sangfroid that won the admiration of the students and the envy of his fellow faculty. While Dean Woodruff was born for conflict, and rejoiced in battle, he made friends rather than enemies in these early classroom encounters, for he was generous in victory and never bore malice.

While his penetrating acumen and shrewd wit could be devastating weapons when he chose, they were always wielded with discrimination. No conscientious, struggling but dull-witted student, no matter how exasperating his clumsy efforts, ever left the Dean's class with his pride in tatters and his self-respect destroyed. Dean Woodruff never took satisfaction in lashing out in sarcasm for the amusement of himself or of the class at some unfortunate plodder. His patience was infinite, his serenity unshakable. The vials of his wrath were never poured forth upon the unconsciously offending. But woe to the student whose derelictions were careless or premed-

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When Dean Woodruff had dealt with such an one, there was never need for a repetition of the reproof!

Dean Woodruff had to a marked degree the rare faculty of being easy and familiar in his personal relations with his students, without losing one iota of the respect which was due his character and attainments. The affectionate appellation, "Dean Woody," was used by his students in a way which connoted the filial respect of devoted sons. Even those most prone to think of him as a "good fellow," were always filled with the quiet amazement that is ever aroused by contact with the unfortunately all too infrequent union of lofty wisdom with a winsome and graceful personality.

Dean Woodruff delighted in teaching, and he conceived of teaching as the imparting of knowledge to his entire class. It was not his custom to teach for the gifted few, leaving the great body of grade C students to flounder along behind as best they could. He taught for the many and the difficulty of the task, which has discouraged other teachers less persistent and courageous, if not less able, served but to wed the Dean more closely to it. In the attainment of his end, he displayed not only patience and perseverance, but great skill and notable ingenuity. He would present a problem to his class in one aspect, and yet another, until the faces before him mirrored his own clear comprehension of the question in hand. Yet, if his classes were primarily for the average student, the A's, the B's and the D's were not neglected. Dean Woodruff gave prodigally of his time for personal conferences, both with those whose capacity warranted the most scholarly discussion of a subject, and with those whose incapacity made necessary an elementary treatment and a frequent helping hand. Dean Woodruff acted upon the assumption that the acceptance of a student as a candidate for a law degree was the undertaking of a definite responsibility to prepare that student to receive that degree if the task were possible of accomplishment. He conducted no seminar courses as such, but all his waking hours were a seminar in which all could enroll, and which all with serious purpose might attend to their profit.

The result of this painstaking classroom presentation, which he varied to meet the particular needs of each successive group of students, was that he imparted to them not only a knowledge of legal principles, but no small measure of his own remarkable reasoning ability and analytical power. His pupils also had indelibly impressed upon them by his method of instruction, the tremendous importance of thoroughly understanding the exact fact situation, and the more or less imponderable but nevertheless persuasive equities arising
therefrom, in any given case. Law was never to him merely an im-
personal code of generalities, but a sacred instrument for the ad-
justment of difficulties between living people, whose customs, manner 
of thought, hopes and passions were ever to be taken into account. 
The litigants in bygone cases were made by him to live again and 
plead their causes as human individuals before his students, so that 
they might learn to avoid the snares always ready to trap the feet 
of those whose appreciation of logical abstractions tends to cause them 
to lose sight of the fundamental if frequently perplexing and para-
doical realities.

Dean Woodruff understood and made due allowance for student 
frailties. He knew when to drive and when to tarry. He could 
gauge the receptive power of his class on any given morning as accu-
rately and swiftly as mercury responds to temperature. If his class 
began to show signs of weariness or strain, he would by use of a well 
chosen anecdote, or a bit of delicious humour, lighten the tension for 
a moment, leading it back refreshed after such brief digression to the 
serious business immediately in hand. Did the class, however, ex-
hibit apathy rather than honest fatigue, he seldom resorted to re-
proach or direct exhortation, but spurred them into activity with 
a surge of sparkling eloquence that made law of all things in heaven 
and earth the most important for that hour. He could entice, cajole, 
compel, inspire—but always in proper season. And all this was 
done with a minimum expenditure of time, and without sacrifice 
in the long run of his primary purpose. In the use of classroom 
hours, and in the selection of the essential, he was past master. His 
classes were never hurried at the end of a course through a mass of 
material which, for lack of proper employment of mid-term time, 
is by the less skilful teacher left to the last for a hurried and super-
ficial presentation.

Dean Woodruff's interest in students was by no means confined 
to those registered, or contemplating future registration in the Law 
School. Students from every college in the University came to him 
for and received that sound counsel which Dean Woodruff's all-
embracing knowledge of University affairs, student life and student 
problems, of which President Farrand so appropriately spoke in his 
tribute to Dean Woodruff, printed elsewhere in this number, pe-
culiarly fitted him to give.

Nor did Dean Woodruff's interest in his students and his power 
to draw them to him cease with their graduation. No former law 
student's visit to Ithaca is complete, be he law clerk, leader of the 
bar, or adornment to the bench, without at least a call upon "Dean
EDWIN H. WOODRUFF, TEACHER

Woody." During these visits, he has laid before him, not only professional problems, but vexing questions of a business and even personal nature, with the result that many a man remembers him as a philosopher and sage, as well as an unfailing legal oracle.

It has been said of the ideal teacher that he should be one who must be more content than the man of talent generally is to work in comparative obscurity, and to be quickly forgotten by those who have most benefitted by his efforts. Whether or not Dean Woodruff is such a man will never be other than an academic question. He has for so many years been actively serving the Cornell Law School that in the eyes of his former students, the Law School and he have become one personality. To think of the School apart from him or of him apart from the School, is for them equally impossible. And the mere fact of his retirement from active teaching will not make such dissociation any the more possible. Dean Woodruff will not be forgotten until the Cornell Law School itself fades from the memories of her alumni. But Dean Woodruff would be remembered had he never been the invaluable leader of any particular institution, for he had the gift of gifts, which enshrines all its possessors eternally in the hearts of man, a capacity for genuine and spontaneous interest in and love for all mankind.

To those readers of this tribute who may never have known Dean Woodruff, and to whom its pitch may therefore seem superlative, it can only be said that to see is to believe, to hear is to understand, and to know is to appreciate.