

In Memoriam Gustavus Hill Robinson

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IN MEMORIAM: GUSTAVUS HILL ROBINSON*

Robert York†

The committee for this memorial service has asked me to reminisce about "Robie" as a friend and as a member of an informal group that meets for lunch in the "Cage" of the Statler Rathskeller. With much humility I have accepted.

Just after his ninetieth birthday, the *Cornell Chronicle* for January 14, 1971, carried a feature article entitled, "41 Years on the Hill—Prof. Robinson Looks Back." In this article Robie laid down certain principles for our group to follow: "I eat lunch with a bunch of fellows from different disciplines, as they like to say. We never talk shop. We're dedicated to frivolity at lunch." Let me add that we sung hymns, told jokes, and exchanged stories.

What sort of a man was Robie? To describe him, we would say he had much human kindness and personal warmth, a keen and rare sense of humor, and a great deal of common sense and wisdom. He had an unbelievable memory for historical facts and could cite names, places, and dates with such accuracy that no one ever questioned him. He was a lover of good books, a great scholar, an excellent conversationalist, and a delightful story-teller.

On one occasion a member of the law faculty had been to a party in Hughes Hall and afterwards joined the Cage group for lunch. He asked Robie the name of the hymn they used to sing as a duet at such parties, whereupon the two began to sing "Blest be the Tie that Binds." With a twinkle in his eye, Robie said "Bob, you're an Episcopalian; do you know the story of that hymn?" Then he proceeded to tell about the vicar of a small country church in England who was called to serve as rector for a well known parish in London. At the farewell party, the vicar was so touched by the strong ties with the people of his country church that he decided to remain and not to go to London. Later, so the story goes, he wrote the hymn in question. Robie was such a "tie that binds," a cohesive force who held together his friends of many disciplines.

On another occasion, three members, including Robie, lifted their voices to sing the cantata, with music by Rossini:

* These remarks were delivered at a memorial service for Professor Robinson on September 22, 1972, at Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University.

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*Stabat Mater dolorosa
Juxta crucem lacrimosa
Dum pendebat filius.*

After the first stanza the words may have become wanting, but the singers were completely undaunted by the turned heads outside the Cage.

Robie was always pleased to have his fellow law professors drop in for lunch and promptly "rose to the occasion." In particular, we recall many visits from Dave Curtiss, Ray Forrester, and Bob Pasley. Little does the world outside the Cage know what great legal, political, social, and financial problems have been solved, provided, of course, the solutions weren't too serious!

I should be remiss if I did not mention that Robie's living friend of longest standing in our luncheon group is Prof. Howard Adelman. Howard is in Italy for the Galileo award and he is unable to be with us to pay our respects to his friend of over forty years.

After Robie's illness three years ago, Dr. S. B. Kingsley, better known to us as "Pete," has shown the greatest thoughtfulness in looking after Robie's well being and participation in Cornell campus life. In every way, Pete has been most kind and deserves our sincere gratitude and appreciation. When we would ask Robie if he needed a pediatrician, he would say, "Yes, yes, of course, I'm in my second childhood."

When Pete was in Boston on Monday, the 11th of September, he telephoned Dr. Richard Mason Smith, a Harvard classmate of Robie, to tell of Robie's passing. Dr. Smith said, "You know, I'm ninety-one too. I don't mourn for Robie. I mourn for those he leaves behind."

But should we mourn? Yes, perhaps we should; for as Tennyson wrote:

And the stately ships sail on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!¹

There is an empty chair at our table.

We are saddened by his absence, for no one can quite take his place within our hearts. We extend our deepest sympathy to his wife, his son, his daughter, and his grandchildren.

Yet, we have much for which to be thankful: Robie had led a full and useful life. He was a dedicated teacher, a great scholar, and a loyal friend. His death came swiftly with his devoted wife at his bedside in the house that he had built.

¹ A. TENNYSON, "Break, Break, Break," in 1 WORKS 452 (H. Tennyson ed. 1908).

For those he leaves behind, he has enriched our lives each day by his fellowship and by setting a living example of man's humanity to man.

Those of us who had the good fortune to know this kind man of great intellect will always remember him with deep affection and respect.