

## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### THE MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE AND DR. WILLIAM W. FOLWELL

On Thursday, March 19, 1925, the Minnesota legislature paused in its busy legislative work to pay tribute to the character and services of Dr. William W. Folwell, president of the Minnesota Historical Society and president emeritus of the University of Minnesota. The proceedings included an address by Dr. Lotus D. Coffman, president of the University of Minnesota, a memorial prepared by the Reverend Richard S. Reed, chaplain of the Senate, and a response by Dr. Folwell, all of which by unanimous vote were "made a part of the permanent records of the State of Minnesota and spread upon the pages of the Senate Journal." A full record of this interesting ceremony is printed in the *Senate Journal* for March 19 (p. 19-23), but no apology is made for publishing the addresses and the memorial in this magazine.

#### ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR. LOTUS D. COFFMAN, PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

The American people have been engaged in such a heroic struggle to conquer nature and to develop industry that they have had little time to become patrons of art or the benefactors of science. The supreme importance of encouraging and developing art and science has been recognized almost from the days of the hardy pioneers who settled on the rockbound coasts of New England. Schools have been fostered and colleges have been maintained. Even though the sums spent for education have been large, they have been relatively insignificant in comparison with the sums spent for commerce and industry. Controlled by the insistent urge and universal desire to accumulate wealth and to increase material property, we have exalted the daring pioneer and plainsman who destroyed the game and slew the Indians, the woodsman who felled the forests, the miner who wasted ore, and the large landowner who exhausted the soil. Then came the

day when we paid our respects to the lumberman, the railroad builder, the manufacturer, the merchant, and the politician. We intend no criticism upon our forefathers nor are we blind to the necessary and enormously important contributions they have made to the material development of America. It is they who have made it possible for us to boast of America as the richest country in the world. The riches, to be sure, were latent in our natural resources, but they required the genius of our forefathers to develop them.

But life is not all mines, timber, insurance companies, banks, rural credits, road building, business; now and then something happens — something that brings us to a sudden halt and forces us to recall that these things are the things that pass away. They represent the fleeting achievements of mankind. Many of them actually perish with us individually or with our generation. When the legislature of a great state pauses in the midst of its busiest season to pay its respects to a man who never won distinction in legislative halls, in politics, or in any form of business, a man whose merit and chief claim to distinction rests upon his work in the classroom and in the library, when an event like this occurs and we are assembled in high conclave to pay tribute to such a man, we take heart anew. Even though we meet thus for but a brief moment we are in effect saying to ourselves that mind is more important than matter, and that the spirit shall be exalted over the flesh. No one can contemplate the meaning of this event without being a better man tomorrow and no state can pay such recognition to a man without being a greater state in the future.

William Watts Folwell is more truly a Minnesotan than most of us. He has lived here longer. He came in the youth of the state to help build the school system and the university. He was the first president of the University of Minnesota, when it opened its doors in 1869. Even in those meager days, inflamed by the spirit of the founders of this commonwealth and stirred by his prophetic imagination, he had a vision for the development of a great state university which has not yet become fully realized. His thought has always been in advance of the present. His gaze has never been turned to the past. He told the sturdy

pioneers of early statehood days that the future strength, happiness, and prosperity, both material and spiritual, of their commonwealth, rested upon maintaining a great university. He pleaded for classrooms, laboratories, and libraries where the youth might be taught and the scholar might study; for dormitories where the students might decently and properly be housed, and above all for a faculty composed of persons of distinguished ability. He declared that a paramount consideration for the state in realizing her ambition was to think in terms of the million as her unit in the support of the university. His fifteen years as president of this struggling institution were marked by devotion, scholarly attainment, and instructional skill, seldom equalled in any generation of schoolmasters.

When he relinquished the administrative affairs of the university, he did so to become a professor in the institution in order that he might dedicate his talents to those fields of learning in which he was most interested. For twenty-three years he was a faithful coworker and a genuinely sincere and ardent supporter of Dr. Northrop. But during this period he was constantly engaged with unremitting zeal in studying and in preparing for his daily classes. Thousands of students came under the spell of the master teacher.

There is an ancient allegory that a tribunal once set out to determine who among us had done the most good for humanity. Representative after representative of the various professions — lawyer, doctor, journalist, preacher — appeared before the tribunal and each explained what great good his profession had done for humanity. Then appeared one, a little older than the rest, whom they did not at first recognize but who, upon inquiry, proved to be the teacher of all the others. With one acclaim they shouted, "Crown him! Crown him! For it is he who has done the most good for humanity." So we here today pay our tribute to the man who gathered wisdom with his years and whose teachings have secured for him an immortality in the hearts of his students and of their fellowmen that is as enduring as the state itself.

Following his career as teacher he became professor emeritus in 1907. Since then he has spent his time in study and in

writing. Having now, for the first time, the leisure which should be every scholar's and every scientist's in his search for truth, he took up the task of writing Minnesota's history. These volumes are appearing from the press. We know how well the work is being done. We know little, however, of the hours of painstaking search, of the drudgery in hunting for authentic information, of the manuscripts, books, newspapers, letters that have been read, and of the interminable writing and revision that has been required in the preparation of these books. Only the scholar knows that; none of the rest of us can ever adequately appreciate it. When these books are completed no state will have a more authentic or finer written history of its evolution than Minnesota will have.

And now the legislature, recognizing the importance of these superior qualities in the man and of what they mean to the state, lays aside its urgent tasks to pay honor to him. What finer thing could happen to any one! What nobler thing could a state do than to pause in the midst of its duties to consider what the great educational administrator, the master teacher, and the indefatigable scholar has meant to it. It is done out of sheer respect and in acknowledgment of genuine worth, not because we believe that Dr. Folwell's work is ended. He is still the youngest one among us in disposition, in vision, and in his ardent search for truth. That his pleasant labors may be continued for many years to come is our most earnest hope and wish. When a state drops for the moment the consideration of the political, commercial, and industrial affairs to do honor to a man whose whole career exemplifies and exalts the spiritual possessions of life, it stirs the imagination and warms the heart of every one of us. Dr. Folwell, we respect you for what you are, we honor you for what you have accomplished, we love you for the ideals you have maintained.

MEMORIAL TO DR. WILLIAM WATTS FOLWELL, DELIVERED BY THE  
REVEREND RICHARD S. REED, CHAPLAIN OF THE SENATE

In token of a grateful remembrance the state of Minnesota records the work and life of Dr. William Watts Folwell. The legislature of this commonwealth, with the Governor, pays tribute to his nobility of character, his singleness of purpose, and the

splendor of the leadership and statesmanship that has always been his to command. We love and cherish his Christian character, his splendid scholarship that adds luster to the history of Minnesota. The service he rendered as an officer in the Civil War endears him to every state in the Union. The finest fruit earth holds is a man, and to ripen, develop, lift up, and educate a man has made him a conspicuous figure in the educational world. In his fifty-six years of service he has studied the needs of education and given a better system through his wealth of knowledge and rich experience. He has always respected in others the qualities which he possessed — sincerity of conviction and frankness of expression, which has never been used by others to promote selfish ends.

For his clarity of vision, and as the first president of the University of Minnesota his services attest his greatness. Modest, firm, simple, and a true gentleman he stands on the highest pinnacle of human endeavor. His fame is established not alone by the charm of his personality and verbal utterance, but by the lavish contribution he has given posterity in *A History of Minnesota* in four volumes and in the Minnesota volume for the *American Commonwealths* series of state histories. His master mind and untiring devotion has stamped his official career one of unselfish service. His eager search for truth, his passion for education, for the fine arts, and public parks are an inspiration for generations yet unborn. His life is made glorious by noble achievements, marching to final victory with the God he loves. His name is a new star in the galaxy of history.

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR. WILLIAM WATTS FOLWELL, PRESIDENT EMERITUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

It lies not with me to suggest that the Senate is without justification for this unusual episode in its proceedings. It would be an absurd affectation for me to pretend that I am all unworthy, or greatly unworthy, of the implied distinction; of the honor conferred by your memorial and this demonstration. These will be a delight to myself and my home circle so long as our lives shall last.

In regard to the activities of a long and somewhat diversified career, and the indulgent compliments thereon in your memorial,

I am rather disposed to plead guilty than to take the risk of discordant revelations on a cross-examination. I pass them by except two instances not stated, for which I will claim eminent approval.

The first is the discovery of Maria Sanford; lover of her kind and country, she not only instructed her pupils, but inspired them. By example as by precept she showed them that life is worth living if lived well, and good work its own reward.

The other instance is my exchange of the presidency of the university for a congenial professorship making way for the coming of Cyrus Northrop to Minnesota; Cyrus Northrop, sane, sagacious, tolerant, magnanimous, under whose leadership the university grew from a small college to a rank beside old and great American universities. Cyrus Northrop—he needs no statue of bronze or marble. His image is graven on the hearts of the thousands who saw his gracious face and heard his kindly voice. His influence for whatever is noble, just, and holy, descending in ever-widening circles will affect multitudes of other souls to a time whereof the imagination of men cannot run to the contrary.

Kind reference is made in your memorial to my work as a historian of Minnesota. Praise for that is most grateful. Led into it fortuitously, it became my passion and ten years have been given to it. My guiding principle has been to find the truth and record it. Was this labor worth while? Yes, I say, if the state of Minnesota is worth while.

In the course of a century a handful of fur-traders and missionaries has grown to a host of near three millions. I like to fancy that Sibley, who had a strain of poetry in his make-up, had a vision of a million of happy people in a land of plenty when he chose out of a long list the Dunraven motto for the seal of the territory of Minnesota. *Quae sursum volo videre*, it runs in Latin; in English, reduced to lower terms—"I will read the future." Honored and revered, Sibley lived to see his vision realized. When the number of our population to the square mile, now about 30, reaches—and it may not be unreasonable to expect it—that of Illinois, 115.7, the host will swell to ten millions.

These millions, whether few or many, will not be a horde of nomads nor a mere casual concourse of human beings, but a unified social body—a community resident on an ascertained domain, their homeland not for a year and a day but forever and a day. Organized as a body politic, this commonwealth—a wedlock of people and land—this state is an eternal society; it has no term.

The state in the language of Burke, is “an everlasting partnership in all science, a partnership in all art, a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection.” It is to such a state that you, Conscript Fathers of the Senate, have pledged and will render your devoted service.

The people of our, of any generation are custodians and trustees of the traditions, the institutions, the learning, the arts, and the faiths of the past to hand them on to their children, not merely undiminished, but so enhanced, so enriched, as to deserve the gratitude of posterity. To meet this duty we must know our state—what she has been and what she has done. We must know her faults and mistakes as well as her finest achievements. It is the part of the historian to read her records of the past and interpret them justly and impartially according to his conscience and ability.



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