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ALFRED JOHN PEARSON, AN APPRECIATION

Professor of German Language and Literature

Drake University

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by

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Professor in Drake University

In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength

Isaiah XXX:15

In many ways Dr. Pearson's life was an American Saga of our recent past, a Saga with a truly Scandinavian tune.

Born in Landskrona, Sweden, September 29, 1869, Dr. Alfred J. Pearson died in Des Moines, Iowa, August 10, 1939. While an infant in arms his parents came to the United States, and then, after a sojourn in Illinois, settled in Kansas in 1875. An alumnus of Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas, A. B. in 1893, and M. A. in 1896, Pearson received his Ph.D. from Yale University in 1896. He was an instructor in German in Upsala College in Kennilworth, New Jersey, 1896-98, and Professor of English and German in Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peters, Minnesota, 1898-1907. From 1907 to the day of his death he was Professor of German Language and Literature in Drake University. Between 1924 and 1930 he was absent on leave in the nation's diplomatic service, first as Minister to Poland, 1924-25, and then to Finland, 1925-1930. He was Dean of the College of Liberal Arts of Drake University from 1930 to his death in 1939.¹

¹What follows was an address delivered on the morning of Thursday, October 19, 1939 in the auditorium of Drake University in the Memorial services for Dr. Pearson. Section III and extended portions of the letters quoted were omitted in the reading.

It is not easy to focus the memories of thirty-two years association with a team-mate in our University complex. Life is a kaleidescope of incessantly changing and infinitely varicolored relationships—and withal a paradox wherein character, law and order control its infinite variety.

The character and course of Dean Pearson's life among us was notable first as a member of the instructional staff, then as a colleague in the administration of the common affairs of the University, and latterly as Dean of the College—How aptly that character and that career is described in the luminous line of the Hebrew seer, Isaiah, given above, those who knew him know well.

I

In the first years of his service as Professor of German Language and Literature in Drake, Dr. Pearson was not much given in sessions of the Faculty to frequent expression of his views or feelings on controverted matters. He was regular in attendance on committees and at faculty meetings, but he was not forward or effusive in speech, speaking seldom—but his silence was not due to inertia or indifference, for he was alert and keenly observant of the course of discussion and of the significance of proposals and actions. When he did express his views, he was pointed and pithy, hitting the nail and nothing else.

In the ordinary camaraderie of the campus, or corridor or conference room, he was equally reserved, indeed reticent, about his personal interests—be it his business affairs, his family, or his health. Since his death, we have learned that as early as 1934 he was aware of the danger to his health which finally struck him down. But he gave us no hint of its seriousness. He was not one of the social bores or pests who enjoy ill-health and are adepts in publicizing their aches and ailments, seeking sympathy wherewith to feed and sustain an ailing ego. Up to the evening before the ruthless reaper came upon him, he seemed to us a picture of evenly balanced health and vigor and uniform optimism. We so certified our confident opinion of this to the Board of Trustees on April

5, 1939, in a petition signed by the entire instructional staff of our college, asking that he be continued in the office of Dean after his retirement on part time.

In the technique or procedure of education, Dean Pearson was a "conservative" to use the jargon of these days. At least he was not an academic agitator or "reformer" in the latter-day use of such epithets. I never heard him insist on amending the Ten Commandments or suggest the abolishment of the law of gravitation for which some peripatetic pedagogues are predisposed to attempt.

Indeed he was loath to change; and doubted the wisdom of much of present day programs which enforce radical changes or suggest revolutionary procedure. The basic maxims, principles and the *modus operandi* of man's education have changed but little, if at all, since Socrates and Plato taught the youth of Athens 'neath the trees of *Academia*.

On the other hand he was neither arrogant in opposition, nor resentful of advice or pleas for change if some of us would point out defects or defaults in our local practice and would concur without cynical comments or obstructive tactics in reasonable changes in the rules governing administration.

He believed, as all experienced teachers know, that while rules and regulations, and elaborate curricula and complicated programs are more or less necessary when and where numbers are large, success in primary, secondary, and higher education is achieved in essence and efficiency in the personal relations of teachers and students in classroom or laboratory. He knew, too, with Plato of old that numbers and noise are neither the *sine qua non* nor the sign posts of success.

But while reserved and refraining from ostentatious and all vociferous demonstration, Dr. Pearson was always certain to let us know what his feelings and opinions were if he felt that the primary ethics or basic rules of educational discipline were infringed or the good name of the college or the university endangered by dubious or objectionable procedure or policies.

A man's character and courage are always tested when matters go awry, when interests and opinions are in a sorry criss-cross—and danger looms. If he is concerned with the general



ALFRED J. PEARSON
TEACHER, SCHOLAR, AND DIPLOMAT

welfare and seeks the right and stands forth in advocacy of betterment, then he is the sort of man of which strong states are builded and a better society insured. In such tests Pearson was found true and steady when tried by the strongest fires. Once, on an occasion still fresh in the memory of some of his colleagues of twenty years association, when sore perplexity and trials distressed us, he stood forth staunchly and, with team-mates, insisted on a better ordering of our common life. There was no dodging or hedging, no tergiversation or vacillation.

Sir Francis Bacon informs us that "small matters win great commendation" in the ceremonial relations of mankind. The nature and manner of a colleague are displayed as much by the little things in the daily routine as by his notable, major doings. "Trifles light as air" are significant. In his relations with colleagues and students there is one memory each and all have—his constant courtesy in casual meetings or interview, in conference or in council. The private secretary of his predecessor in the office of Dean thirty years ago thus records her recollection:

. . . I was timid about approaching the professors to deliver messages, arrange meetings, call students from their classes, etc., and I sometimes felt very much like the proverbial football, as I was shunted from the Dean to the Registrar, to the President and back to the Dean.

Dr. Pearson's fine old-country courtesy was always refreshing and encouraging and I appreciated it more than I can say. It has been twenty-eight years since I graduated . . . but I do recall the glow with which his courtly manners always enveloped me.²

At first glance the Dean's countenance and conduct gave one the impression of imperturbable seriousness, not to say solemnity. Serious he always was in his ordinary talk and procedure. But ever and anon his colleagues in conferences or in committee sessions would find the solemnities split by a flash of humor or the absurdities involved in a complication sundered by a witty comment that pierced like a rapier thrust. Two incidents which remain vividly in my memory will suffice to illustrate the quality of his dry sober humor—

²Mrs. Geo. D. (Josephine Baily) Serrill (1911), Spencer, Iowa, October 2, 1939.

one was exhibited in the flash of his eyes, the other in a sudden rejoinder.

One day in committee a colleague who was possessed of a lusty ego with an energetic tendency to egotistic self-expression was frankly and blandly telling us that his subject "was really the most important subject in the curriculum" and should be given preference in registering students. Dean Pearson was giving him the courtesy of rapt attention, gazing at him most intently without a glimmer of a sign of dissent or distaste. Suddenly the humor of the situation was too much for him. His eyes flashed his appreciation to the rest of us in a sweeping glance which made it hard to repress our risibles. When the colleague left the room, he solemnly asked "Can you beat it!!"

On the other occasion, many years ago, a group of colleagues were chatting in the lobby of the Carnegie Library. A rumor was current to the effect that the faculty was ordered to attend a funeral of a certain notable not in high favor with us. In the midst of our conversation a colleague came in the front door. As soon as he saw us he pulled out a note book with not a little ostentation and announced: "I am taking the names of all those who are going to attend the funeral, and especially those who are *not going*."

Without any disagreement each of us, save one, quietly responded that various circumstances, other engagements, etc., prevented our attending. Dr. Pearson, however, without the slightest sign of adverse significance seriously said: "Well, I know of no place where I would rather go than to that man's funeral." Although the rest of us went off in a gale of laughter, his face continued serious to the point of sternness—except that a knitting of his eyebrows and a glint of his eyes indicated that he sensed the impropriety of our expression but appreciated the reason.

II

The members of the faculty learned to know the facets of Dr. Pearson's personality more intimately when he became Dean of the College of Liberal Arts in 1930. In the nature of his office we had to meet him more or less daily in the

ordinary routine—in interviews about students, in conferences before and during meetings of committees of which he was *ex officio* a member, in regular monthly meetings of the faculty, and in the administrative council of the University.

Seen thus at close range we found Dean Pearson congenial and considerate. He was ready of access, open-minded in discussion, willing to listen to any and all parties in interest, and clear as to fundamentals. He was cautious and discrete in comment and criticism, and always mindful of the larger good in reaching conclusions, no matter whether it was the treatment of a student in default or a rule and its administration. If occasion demanded he could be blunt, direct, and unequivocal in expressing his views in dissent.

One of the most trying—perhaps the most taxing—functions of a Dean is dealing with complaints and criticisms about the work of instructors which come into his office from students (or their fond and irate parents) or from the members of the governing boards or the many-headed beast we call “the public.” Members of the faculty have some grateful memories of his consideration and sense of justice in such circumstances. He did not instantly assume that such complaints were necessarily valid and act adversely without canvassing their *pros* and *cons*. He stood between his staff and contentious critics and insisted on justice and equity for them. If perchance he found that the complaints were more or less well founded, he conferred with the instructor in question and sought in a frank but kindly way to correct the trouble, and thus protect both the class and the instructor. He was not an arbitrary boss, a heartless or ruthless autocrat. He was a colleague in a common task.

Another trait was notable. If the members of the faculty found themselves at loggerheads in controversy anent proposed changes in the curriculum, or heat developed over the interpretation of some rule for its administration, Dean Pearson preferred compromise to insistence upon either his or that advocate's particular proposal. Opponents were often irritated and cynical; but human life, and social progress have all gone forward by intermittent compromises between clashing “bitter-enders.”

As a presiding officer of our faculty, Dean Pearson was scrupulously observant of academic and parliamentary proprieties and called us quickly to account if we either neglected or ignored their observance. I have a lively memory of my default on one occasion and his instant and pointed exception—and, I deserved the reprimand.

We could differ with Dean Pearson in matters of policy and procedure, and anon clash sharply without discomfort or dread of consequences. He was not one to look upon such dissent as disloyalty or treason, or opposition as *lese majesty*. Members of the executive committee of our college recall with no little amusement and gratitude the frequent breaking of lances in our vigorous discussions of matters in controversy. But no matter how frank or forceful our debates might be we severally could go back to him the next day without any fear that we would encounter frowns and a repellent manner. This is the manner and mode of men of character and a fine sense of the fitness of things.

A few days after his death one of my colleagues of thirty-five years, Dr. Sherman Kirk, Professor of Classical Language and Literature, commenting on Dean Pearson's character and life among us as a fellow collegian quietly observed: "Dean Pearson was always very much of a gentleman."

The severest acid test to which we are subject in the day's work is the judgment of official subordinates who work under constant direction. A cynic has told us that notables are seldom heroes to their valets. But such was not true in Dean Pearson's case. The alert and gracious lady who for seven years, 1930-1937, was his efficient *alter ego* thus records her memories.

"I feel the Dean's loss very keenly. It is hard to realize that such a stalwart person could be taken so suddenly. . . . In the more than seven years of close association with him in the office I never knew him to be unkind, critical, sarcastic or ill-natured. He was . . . a gentleman in every sense of the word."²

". . . The Dean had so many outstanding characteristics that one could write at great length concerning them, but of

²Mrs. S. H. (Mayflower Van Horn) Wells (1925), Des Moines, Iowa, August 13, 1939.

course what I shall remember him for more than anything else was the fact that he was such an agreeable person to work for, always considerate and always appreciative of every little service.

“Kindness to me, to students and to faculty members, and consideration for everyone: The Dean was never too busy to be kind. Whether in deep study over matters pertaining to university work or in the preparation of a speech to be given before some prominent organization, Dean Pearson was never too busy to listen to the troubles and problems of others, to talk the matter over at length and to suggest possible solutions. It was often necessary for me to interrupt him in his studies, he would always turn willingly to give the matter at hand his undivided attention and was never unkind. Students, reporting to him on account of excessive absences, low grade cards or unpaid tuition, were greeted kindly and if after hearing the student's story, Dean Pearson felt him to be in earnest in his efforts, the Dean would spare nothing in order to help him. I recall one particular incident when a student reported to him regarding absences and unpaid tuition. After an interview, the young man was sent to the Pearson home to be outfitted with some clothing which would enable him to appear in class and to apply for student work without loss of self-respect—even on washday. I remember one or more instances wherein faculty members were benefited by his kindly help and advice, without which consideration they might not be on the faculty today.

“Honesty: Dean Pearson was conservative and careful in his business deals but he never resorted to dishonesty or to deceitfulness. Each and every debt was paid promptly. An error on a statement of account to him was just as serious regardless of whether he or the debtor might benefit thereby, and such an error was always corrected before or at the time of payment. An illustration of his honesty even in the matter of postage stamps: He kept stamps for personal correspondence in his desk and I was instructed to use them on all of his personal letters. On one occasion he dictated a letter which I considered as pertaining to university business and therefore used university postage on it. A few days after the letter was

mailed, Dean Pearson inquired as to whether or not his postage had been used on the letter. When I informed him that university postage had been used, he refunded the stamp with the remark that since the letter contained a personal element, he thought it really should have been mailed with his own postage.

“Modesty: He would not display his diplomas, degrees or other evidences of honor received from various institutions and organizations. He disliked the wearing of pins, badges or any form of insignia. Quite by accident I opened a large package of his which contained a number of medals won in Europe, fraternity emblems, etc., which he explained to me with a smile that he always kept properly hidden away where no one would see them. I believe that the only “decoration” I ever saw him wear was his Phi Beta Kappa key. He said he didn’t care to be a sign board.

“Generosity: No student activity or any other project pertaining to the university or city failed to receive his financial support if solicited. I have sometimes approached him reluctantly at the urgent request of students, faculty members or alumni, to ask if he cared to contribute to this or that project or to buy this or that article (which perhaps seemed unnecessary to me) but the Dean would always smile and hand me the amount of money solicited, making some remark to the effect that “That’s what keeps everything going as it should.”⁴

III

Although primarily an appreciation of Alfred Pearson as a teacher and educator, it is not inappropriate here to indicate some memories of Dr. Pearson’s entry into the nation’s foreign service, as it was the traits of his ability and character displayed on the Drake University campus in our intramural associations that were the premises of the writer’s assurances to President Harding which lead to his appointment as our nation’s Minister, first to Poland, and later to Finland. In addition, however, Pearson had two other valuable experiences, apart from his university background, which especially prepared him for the missions he was to fulfill.

⁴ *Ibid.*, October 15, 1939.

In 1911 he was given a commission by Governor B. F. Carroll of Iowa to make a study of the public school system of Germany. The privileges accorded him in the Kaiser's dominion in consequence of the Governor's mandate, gave him opportunities for acquiring not merely first hand, but intimate knowledge of the background and premises of the *esprit de corps* of the German people in that fatal year of the Moroccan crisis which so affected German pride, an *esprit de corps* compounded of Bismarck's political philosophy of "Blood and Iron," of Treitschke's ruthless *Kultur*, of Nietzsche's *Uebermensch*, and Bernhardi's worship of the War Gods, which soon thereafter swept over Europe with such devastating fury.

Eleven years later, 1918-1919, Dr. Pearson was one of the Directors of the overseas service of our American Young Men's Christian Association in France, and, after the Armistice, directed the "Y" work in the occupied sections of Germany, pending the negotiations for peace at Versailles. During his directorship he gave popular lectures to our soldiers upon the interesting phases of the history and traditions of the regions then occupied by our troops. They were so well received that they were reprinted in 1919 in two brochures entitled: *The Rhine and its Legends*, and *The Moselle in History*, 100,000 of the former and 10,000 of the latter were printed. He made his hearers appreciate the myths and romances clustering about the old castles whose frowning battlements greeted the eye in so many mountain fastnesses or jutted up against the sky line in so many of the picturesque vallies of those two noted rivers.

His success with the Third Army was such that Mr. W. H. Holmes, Field Adviser, asked to have him transferred to another Division; but counter appeals enabled him to remain with the Third until May, 1919. On his transfer to Paris Dr. Sidney B. Snow, of King's Chapel, Boston, then with the Third Army, said of his work: ". . . it would be hard to exaggerate the value of his service . . . Men of the Third Army owe much to the labors of Dr. Pearson for their understanding of the rich historic significance of the Rhine Valley . . ." Pearson was also asked to head a Committee of Eight research

workers to compile and edit the volume of 700 pages containing the official history of the "Y" work with the Third Army.

It was not surprising, therefore, that in 1921 his personal and political friends began urging him as worthy of representing us at the royal court of his native Sweden. I was asked to prepare an appreciation of his career, character and qualifications which fitted him for the appointment sought, and was in the midst of it when, by reason of the illness in the family of Judge Eskill Carlson, I was suddenly drafted, March 9, 1922, to go to Washington with Mr. Charles J. Engleen, then President of the John Erickson League, to present Dr. Pearson's candidacy to the President.

Before going to the White House I had naively assumed that Senator A. B. Cummins of Iowa would take the major role in the conference with the President, but my more shrewd associate, Mr. Engleen, warned me that I might be called on and to be prepared. The conferees (March 21, 1922) consisted of Senators Wm. B. McKinley of Illinois, Cummins and C. A. Rawson of Iowa, and Messrs. C. C. Dowell of Des Moines and Burton E. Sweet of Waterloo, Representatives from Iowa. After the usual informal greetings and pleasantries, Senator Cummins, to my astonishment, with no preliminary or introduction said: "Mr. President, we have asked for this interview to enable Professor Herriott to present to you the qualifications of Dr. Alfred J. Pearson for the Swedish Mission." I was surprised but being forewarned I proceeded in a very informal manner to set forth our reasons for urging Professor Pearson as a fit and worthy diplomatic representative of our nation at Stockholm. In brief they were:

First, his ancestral inheritance and intimate knowledge of the history and literature of Sweden and Scandinavian countries and mastery of their language made his appointment eminently appropriate, for it would insure an alert, sympathetic interest in the life of the sturdy folk of that land of long days and long nights and an able representative of our national interests which would enhance our common welfare.

Second, Dr. Pearson spoke six languages easily—Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, English, French and German. Be-

sides his varied knowledge of the history and literature of the peoples of northern Europe he had had various experiences which enhanced his fitness for the diplomatic post sought. He had close and wide connections with the Lutheran churches in the midwest and had lectured extensively in Scandinavian centers. He was Instructor of the officers in Camp Dodge in French during the first World War; and was active in promoting the work of the John Erickson League and the Liberty Loan drives. All these enhanced his qualifications.

Third, Dr. Pearson was not a "mere college professor" as the public cynics frequently designated such academicians. He was familiar with farm life and modern industrial and financial institutions and his mind had been disciplined by their relentless exactions which insured balanced judgments and considerate decisions in dealing with conflicting or general interests.

Fourth, I could assure the President that after fourteen years of intra-mural association with Dr. Pearson, I knew he was not only alert mentally and learned in both English and Scandinavian cultures, but he was keen in his observations and considerate of the niceties in human relations—and if need be outspoken and decisive in action and speech.

Fifth, and finally, while cautious and considerate in speech, Dr. Pearson was congenial and gracious without effusiveness. He would enhance good will and easily promote our national interests without friction.

Two facetious but friendly interruptions by President Harding, referring to his predecessor, the Academician of Princeton, added spice to the occasion without disconcerting me, or indicating an adverse attitude towards our presentation.

Our immediate objective at Washington, namely the Swedish Embassy, was not achieved, because Dr. Pearson was born in Sweden, and that fact under our diplomatic practice barred his appointment to that post; but President Calvin Coolidge sent him to Poland, 1924-1925, and to Finland, 1925-1930.

While this is not the place to set forth the important events in his diplomatic career, somewhat of his success may be inferred from two letters and two incidents which follow. The

first letter was written by a one-time colleague on Drake's instructional staff, and intimately concerned with his appointment—Dr. Stephen P. Mizwa, later Executor Director of "The Kosciuszko Foundation" of New York, established largely on his initiative, to encourage the exchange of scholars between Poland and the United States.

I could not tell you how happy I was in the Spring of 1924 when I heard in a confidential manner from the Polish Ambassador in Washington that Professor Pearson was being considered as the American Minister to Poland. At the same time I was asked confidentially to give my own report of what I knew of Professor Pearson. Needless to say, my report was as genuinely enthusiastic as my admiration for him has always been.

When I made my first visit to Poland in 1930, and although at that time Dean Pearson had been transferred to Helsingfors some five years back, I heard in high official circles only superlative remarks about the sincere and dignified manner in which Dean Pearson represented his country in Warsaw.⁵

The next letter is from one of his students, and sometime Surgeon on the Swedish Ship, *Scanyork*, Dr. Everett M. George, now of Des Moines, Iowa.

While serving as a ship surgeon on the S. S. *Scanyork* in 1933, an opportunity was afforded for several visits to Poland and Finland. It was most gratifying to hear on numerous occasions some very flattering remarks regarding Dean Pearson with respect to his services as U. S. Minister to both countries. These remarks were usually voluntarily offered after it had been ascertained that I was acquainted with Dean Pearson.

Prince Sapiha, at that time financial advisor to the Polish Government and stationed in Washington, D. C., was particularly impressed with the natural diplomacy of Dean Pearson. He stated that the pleasant relations between the two governments had been stimulated to a large extent through Dean Pearson's efforts.

During several visits to Helsingfors, Finland, a similar flow of laudatory comments regarding Dean Pearson's work was forthcoming. Special mention was made of the absence of any disagreeable incidents in his professional and personal life, which was in contrast to that of

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Dean Pearson's sphere of influence extended throughout Scandinavia. In Copenhagen, Denmark, both Prince and Princess Viggo were acquainted with Dean Pearson and his son, Paul, of whom

⁵Dr. Stephen P. Mizwa, New York City, October 14, 1939.

both were held in high respect by all the members of the royal family.⁶

Signal and unusual honor was conferred on Dr. Pearson during his Polish mission when two formal state dinners were accorded him at Warsaw by the Prime Minister, at which state dinners the high dignitaries of the government were present as a token of their appreciation of his decisive part in forwarding the industrial recovery of Poland and enhancing better international relations with the United States. Needless to say, such special consideration is seldom indicated within diplomatic circles.^{6a}

At the conclusion of his two missions Dr. Pearson was accorded honors which signalized the high esteem in which he was held by the Presidents and parliaments of the States to which he was accredited by our government. Poland, in 1925, bestowed upon him the Order of *Polonia Restituta*; and Finland, in 1930, the *Order of The White Rose*:—which reflected the friendship and good will created by his ministry reported by the two correspondents just cited.

After his return from his diplomatic missions he was a frequent contributor to the columns of the *Des Moines Register*. His articles gave its readers illuminating accounts of the culture, institutions and social programs of the Scandinavian countries. There was no insidious propaganda lurking in them—merely the simple purpose of letting the public know that the peaceful folk of those lands were enjoying a marked degree of prosperity and contentment which we might enjoy if we cared to study their life and ways. Dr. Pearson was appointed by the Mayor of Des Moines, Chairman of the Municipal Housing Commission for the City. His influence among his Swedish compatriots was signalized by his appointment as President of the Swedish-American Tercentenary Commission for Iowa in 1937.

⁶Dr. Everett M. George, Des Moines, Iowa, October 14, 1939, with a supplemental postscript.

Dr. Pearson's son, Paul H., referred to by Dr. George, is an alumnus of the College of Liberal Arts of Drake (1926) and also of the Law School (1927). He qualified for service in 1927, becoming first, Clerk in the American Consulate in Helsingfors, Finland, 1927-28; second, Clerk to the Trade Commissioner at Hamburg, Germany, 1928-29; third, appointed Assistant Trade Commissioner at Hamburg, July 1, 1929; fourth, Trade Commissioner at Copenhagen, August 1 and continuing until June 16, 1939; and fifth, Trade Commissioner in the American Embassy, Berlin, since June 16, 1939. He has ranked in Class eight of the Foreign Service since July 1, 1939.

^{6a}A. J. Pearson, *Ms. Diary*.

His sudden passing gives one cause for thankfulness; Dr. Pearson has been spared the distress he would have suffered in reading of the dire fate which has been inflicted on Poland by Hitler's brutal ultimatum to the Polish government and his ruthless invasion and destruction of her cities and slaughter of her helpless population. One cannot but wonder whether or not mankind is reverting to barbarism and savagery.

IV

But, it was not in the pomp and circumstance of high office, I venture to assert, that Alfred J. Pearson had his greatest delight and influence. It was in his classroom. There, as a teacher, he was a beneficent autocrat who ruled without any formal exercise of his authority but simply by the cosmic law of attraction.

In these crowding days, "extra-curricular activities" seem to have the right of way in public interest and in academic concern if we may safely infer the truth from the columns of the metropolitan press. But I need not tell academicians that the secrets of Nature and her laws, and the lessons of man's progress up from barbarism, which must and should control us in this vale of tears, if our civilization is not to conclude in chaos and cinder heaps, are not learned in the market place or in the public forum, or in the raucus shouts of the heedless crowds of the city streets or in the stadium. Moreover, after

The tumult and the shouting dies,
The captains and the kings depart

there stands the teacher. He must precede and he must follow, guiding the youth in the ways of culture and science, in constitutional law and order, if the torch bearers of sweetness and light are to carry on.

There are all sorts of instructors. Some are martinets and enforce discipline and instruction by what are almost terroristic methods. Some are of the card index sort who keep a close tab on each breath a student draws and meticulously notes down each particular boggle or failure and split decimals in grading.

Some teachers dwell upon the minutia of their subjects to the exclusion of the general, the major and the universal; they see the skeleton and muscles and not the organism and its

relation to its environment; or they split hairs north by northwest; or they dig roots simply and harp on cases and declensions and forget the beauties and significance of the drama or poem and see not their connection with life and nature at large. They seldom see the forest for the trees. Your true teacher, however, should

see life steadily and see it whole.

Here I cannot speak from personal knowledge of Dr. Pearson as a teacher; but what is much better, I give some of the memories of a score of his students whose letters I have in my possession. They are shot through with many golden threads.

If the limits of space did not prohibit I would like to quote at length from all of the letters, for they display such a remarkable definiteness and unanimity of happy memories of his notable ability as a teacher and of the beneficent effects of his character and influence in the class room and in his relations with students outside the class routine. While there is a similarity in their memories and comments, yet almost every one recalls different facets of his character and personality, or relates a different type of incident, therefore I venture to quote rather generously:—for they afford conclusive evidence of an extraordinarily effective teacher who left a lasting impress on the minds of his students:—which is always the ambition and earnest hope of your honest-to-goodness teacher.

First I give you a summary of excerpts which suggest his class-room routine and technique. The years following each one quoted signifies the year of his or her graduation from the College of Liberal Arts of Drake University.

Writing from Long Island, New York, a member of the class of 1909 tells of his keen observations and humor which “made the dullest text intensely human” and gave the class “an insight into forces beyond the text. The atmosphere was an ideal combination of mutual interest in the work and each other. I realize that only an extraordinary personality can create that class room feeling.”⁷

⁷Mrs. J. M. (Ida De Nelsky) Frankel, Great Neck, Long Island, N. Y., October 12, 1939.

In "Professor Pearson," writes an alumna of 1910 from Los Angeles, "there was no ridicule or scoffing at the beginner's poor attempts to use the correct accent, or the proper selection of words, only kindly and painstaking explanation"⁸

A prominent alumnus of the class of 1913, a resident in Des Moines, relates the potent influence of his courtesy and confidence.

As a Freshman I had come to Drake University from a high school where a certain amount of cheating in examinations was looked upon as an accomplishment. It happened that on account of illness I was unable to take one examination with the class under Dean Pearson. When I went to him to take the examination he handed me the questions with books in the room that had all the answers, told me to leave my paper on the desk when I was through, walked out of the room and shut the door. Needless to say, he cured me of all desire to cheat in examinations.⁹

One of the Class of 1914, in Quincy, Illinois, recalls that Dr. Pearson's class room procedure was "unusual in that there was no apparent effort to catch the interest of the students by any particular method—but rather the assumption of the seriousness of purpose of anyone who might be in his class."¹⁰

Four members of the class of 1915 have clear cut memories. A member of the professorial staff of Cornell College at Mt. Vernon, Iowa, recalls his "infinite kindness and patience" which he accorded her.¹¹ From Massachusetts another writes, "In all my associations with Professor Pearson, I never heard an angry word toward any one. He was always ready to help and suggest. Indeed one felt free to approach Professor Pearson at all times. He always gave the student the benefit of the doubt. He never made his students feel he was above them, but one of them."¹²

A member, now on the teaching staff of the Christian Fenger Senior High School of Chicago remembers that

Dean Pearson's was a dynamic personality, one that left a vivid imprint upon his students. He embodied in himself the thing he

⁸Mrs. Boyd E. (Grace Stentz) Ruby, Los Angeles, Calif., October 10, 1939.

⁹Mr. Don E. Neiman, Secretary of the Des Moines Credit Men's Association, Des Moines, Iowa, Oct. 5, 1939.

¹⁰Mrs. Nathan (Laura McClary) Mack, Quincy, Ill., October 12, 1939.

¹¹Professor Alberta Munkress of Cornell College, Mt. Vernon, Iowa, October 9, 1939.

¹²Mrs. Edw. (Gertrude Yerovitch) Ferestein, Mansfield, Mass., October 7, 1939.

was teaching. I remember particularly his course in the "Life and Customs of the German People" how very *real* he made them—as if you were living with these people, not studying about them. Always a delight to his students was his radiant humor.

But Dean Pearson taught more than his subject. His outstanding character, culture and attainments emerged as the things his students would like to emulate. . . .¹³

Another of that class—a sometime Associate Professor of Home Economics in Kansas State College and later in the University of Kentucky, now resident of West Fayette, Indiana, records:

. . . . You ask for memories of Dean Pearson and I think I shall mention things that come to mind as I first read your letter. His utter fairness in dealing with students I think of first. He required plenty of work in his classes and if you gave it, he gave you credit for it, unflinchingly.

He was so thorough in his everyday classwork and in his examinations. Every course I had with him was carefully and completely planned and the plan was always followed.

* * * * *

It always seemed to me that you could be sure that in his dealings with people no matter who they were, he would always have that same fairness, quiet dignity, and sane reserve that I remember as his student.

In him, I think Drake had one of her finest teachers. I did not know him as Dean, but there again, it seems to me, students and faculty would appreciate that thoroughness and fairness he always showed as a teacher. . . .¹⁴

And this Alumna, now a Critic Teacher of the State Normal College of Wisconsin at La Crosse, thus recalls her instructor in German:

Reading of Dr. Pearson's death was a real shock to me. I suppose he never knew how much Drake Students all thought of him and admired him. That is too bad, isn't it? We might have said a word while he was living rather than to wait for a memorial service.

I think Dr. Pearson missed few if any of the meetings of our Literature Club when he was sponsor. Whether it was a study evening, a picnic, or an out of town outing, he always seemed to find time to attend. He became one of us. Pictures I have of the group show him participating in our fun and studies. He made us think he enjoyed it all. I still think he did, but still—I can

¹³Mrs. F. O. (Opal Daniels) Johnston, Chicago, Ill., October, 1939.

¹⁴Mrs. Jno. F. (Pearle Ruby) Bullard, West Fayette, Ind., Oct. 15, 1939.

realize now how much it must have meant for him, at times, to be there. I feel sincerely that Dr. Pearson made an outstanding contribution to Drake students. . . .¹⁵

A member of the last class he conducted, in summer school of 1939, at the time of his death recalls vividly his personality and considerate treatment of students:

Dean Pearson was a congenial person with an attractive personality, radiating friendliness, causing all who met him to wish to know him better. He was the type of individual that it takes to make an institution of learning a great success.

* * * * *

To add a personal touch, may I mention the many invitations that were given during our class sessions to come to his office, "The clinic for all dramatic ills" as he spoke of it. This particular ill being Modern European Drama. Dean Pearson was never too busy to meet all who entered his clinic. . . .¹⁶

Others were impressed by his dignity, his constant serenity, his seriousness, and his astonishing acquaintance with the literature of other races, of the Greeks and the Romans, of the French, Spanish, Italian and Scandinavian countries. Goethe and Schiller were compared with Ibsen and Shakespeare, Moliere, and Racine; and all with no ostentatious display of erudition. An alumnus of 1938, now a Fellow in German in Northwestern University says that "as a scholar the Dean was profound but in no sense pedantic." His letter continues with the following interesting recollections:

His complete composure was well illustrated by an incident which occurred a few years ago. Behind his desk were hung three heavy and rather unsightly charts, which gave the corresponding English phonetic equivalents of the German alphabet. Whenever a student made an error in pronunciation, it was the Dean's custom to refer to the charts. One spring day one of the charts came loose and plunged to the floor, missing the Dean's head by fractions of an inch. Without hesitating the Dean remarked, "Those charts will make an impression on someone yet!"

Dr. Pearson's attitude toward his work was very serious, and he expected the same from his students. The flippant person was not welcome in his classes, and this type usually had the good sense to avoid them. The serious student, however, found the Dean's patience boundless, however much a plodder he might be. The Dean's sympathy was also quickly enlisted by worthy students who

¹⁵Miss Grace Tripp, La Crosse, Wis., Oct. 14, 1939.

¹⁶Mrs. Marie Grauel, Fairfield, Iowa, Oct. 14, 1939.

were pursuing their studies under difficulties. I recall one student, whose fate it was to work the greater part of each night. He usually slept through the Dean's class, and his efforts at preparation were exceedingly feeble although serious. Through the saving graces of an incomplete, he was eventually allowed his credit. We can in contrast imagine his fate at one of our larger institutions.

Because of his perfect dignity and his dislike of betraying emotion, the Dean was considered by most students to be cold and unapproachable. He had, on the contrary, a very real interest in people and would devote hours to untangling the intricacies and petty details which perplexed Drake Students. He had a very real talent for the practical and could be relied on to direct any discussion away from the trivial to a constructive conclusion.¹⁷

After his return from his diplomatic service in 1930, Dean Pearson had much in his recollections wherewith to illustrate the meaning of countless passages in the classic and modern literature of Europe. He had a very retentive memory of both poetical lines and of anecdotes and incidents, and the students were not ill disposed to draw him out. His reminiscences of his diplomatic experiences illumined many a passage in the text in hand or afforded a delightful diversion from the routine. One of his students will long recall a railroad journey as his seatmate when the hours passed rapidly in listening to some of his stories of life in Warsaw and Helsingfors.¹⁸ His assistants have the happiest recollections of their work with him. One of his "star" students was his assistant and Reader for three years, 1911-1914, and her memories are happy and vivid ones:

"My most lasting impression, however, comes neither from class-room procedure nor from "Die Deutsche Ecke" which came into being during my day,—but from the many, many hours spent as assistant in the little German office. Zola Graham, and then later Olive Johnson and I served there on scholarships,—our work being largely the meticulous correcting of composition papers for the more elementary students,—with occasional joyous periods of substituting for the honored professor in classwork during a brief absence. Our space was small; we were crowded; the bulk of material was considerable,—yet everything moved along with quiet smooth-

¹⁷Mr. Edward C. Breitenkamp, Evanston, Ill., Sept. 7, 1939.

¹⁸Miss Margaret Woodrow, (1939) Ames, Iowa, Oct. 18, 1939.

ness which I much admired. Professor Pearson's own intense studiousness inspired work in others—he never loafed or idled there. Perhaps he was studying another foreign language adding it to his long list of acquired tongues; perhaps he was memorizing some English gem,—and then, with a sparkle, would turn and recite it to us; perhaps he was outlining an address. Always,—in my memory he was busy. Likewise, always he was unhurried, and even in his movements, physical and mental, reflected an occupied leisure.

“One of my distinct impressions of Professor Pearson is a purely visual one,—of his walking back and forth, up and down the narrow office, as he committed something to memory, his lips sometimes moving half-audibly as he strode firmly up and down.

“Students on the campus,—back in those distant days, thought it was great fun to meet Dr. Pearson on the campus, in order to witness and share in the stately, somewhat European doffing of his hat and bowing of his figure as he met them on the walks. There was an innate ceremonious courtesy which we liked, because it was so inseparable from him, and so genuine an expression of himself.

“I shall always treasure the memory of his kindness and fun, his hearty ringing laugh, his love of a good story. Three years of intimate association failed to expose to me any of the less fine things which might linger in one's mind; there was such fine control, such appreciation of other people, such lack of carping or fault finding or gossip. . . .”¹⁰

Soon after our country entered the World War in 1917 the Chief of the Intelligence Department at Washington asked the head of the graduate department of German at the University of Chicago to commend an adept in German to him who was not a German but who could read and write and speak and dream in German. The writer of the foregoing letter was then a graduate student in the University on the Lake. She was Scotch-Irish and eligible, was commended to Washington, and responded to the summons which immediately ensued. For a year and more she was employed “far from the madding crowd” in that department interpreting Ger-

¹⁰Mrs. Nathan Mack, *Op. Cit.*

man documents and messages either captured on the battle fields of Europe or messages of the Germans caught *via* radio or wireless;—work not given to heedless ill-prepared or irresponsible persons.

V

Dean Pearson's technique in conducting his classes has been incidentally indicated in the preceding section but the excerpts from the letters and interview which follow display it more sharply. The first two are from letters of members of the class of 1917 and the third and fourth are from members of his last classes in 1938-1939.

From Seattle, Washington came the following cluster of memories:

. . . . Under his skillful guidance, the period assigned for learning a new language became instead an opportunity for exploring literature in a different tongue. "Wilhelm Tell"—"Die Jungfrau von Orleans"—"Faust"—were *read* not translated. Everyone of the books associated with these reading courses is still in my library, even though refunds from textbooks were always welcome diversions.

When our German Professor became Class Father of the Class of '17, we found that the twinkle-of-the-eye we had detected in the classroom had not been misleading. Professor Pearson entered into our fun as wholeheartedly as he shared our problems. His home was opened to us as freely as his office door had been opened to his students.

His office door opened with a special meaning for me when I was privileged to serve as a reader in his department. With quiet, efficient manner he supervised the routine of his office; but he brought to that atmosphere a keen sense of humor, a kindly appreciation for the problems of individual students, and a sincere regard for the strength and beauty of language that was an inspiration to all who worked with him. Our conversation was carried on in German, for always it was a language to be spoken, not just to be read from a book. In this environment, recording the secretary's minutes for *Die Deutsche Ecke* seemed a logical proceeding.

The unobtrusiveness of Professor Pearson's methods defies detection and analysis, but the inspiration of his teaching is an influence which I gratefully acknowledge.²⁰

Could any instructor ask for a finer tribute to his teaching procedure and its effectiveness that is recorded in the follow-

²⁰Miss Mary Ethel Dixon, Seattle, Wash., Oct. 10, 1939.

ing letter from an alumna, (1917), then a Fellow in the University of Chicago:

“Professor Pearson began to teach me German when I was still in high school. I think the first lesson I had was while walking along University Avenue with him, and I mentioned that I hoped to be in his classes when I went to college. So he began right then and there and made me tell him about “Mary and her little Lamb!” When I found that I could say most of the nursery rhymes in German, then he began on Fairy tales that were already well known, such as Puss in Boots, and on and on, until I lost the fear of trying to express myself in German. In college, he let me come in his advanced German courses, and there I learned how to read. He would assign a 300-page novel for a lesson, and simply forced us to learn to read by the page, rather than by a paragraph, or a sentence or a word. We would abstract that novel as briefly as possible and I found that I had learned to read German faster than English, and could write it on the typewriter equally fast. In class, one of his pet practices, was handing out a new novel or recent article in German, and we would go around the class, summarizing the thought page by page, from person to person. That meant quickly grasping the sense of the page, while the person next to you was reciting, and then phrasing it in good German.

“From 1917 to 1929 is quite a while, and I doubt if I so much as read more than an occasional bit of German, or at the most not more than one or two books a year in that language. I went brazenly into the Graduate School at Yale, and since I was up for my Master’s degree, told the Professor that I would take my German language requirement examination any time. He pulled out a book at random from the shelf and I read, translating freely, from a book on nutrition by Von Pirquet, I think it was. Then the following year in Europe, I was in Vienna for a period, and found that I could understand people readily enough, but was tongue-tied about making conversation. After two weeks of silence, either it was too much for me (being a woman) to endure, or else something started the wheels rolling, and I found that I could talk along perfectly easily, only displaying a somewhat re-

served style of conversation, which is a bit unnatural for me. But I will never forget the last night, leaving Vienna for Venice. I decided to stretch my dollars as far as possible, and sat up in a coach all night on the train. In the compartment were four German students, and we all got to talking and laughing and telling stories, and suddenly I realized that they were laughing at my stories, and then I thought of how I began to tell stories in German with "Mary had a little lamb." I wished then, that Professor Pearson could have been with us in that car that night. He would have enjoyed the hilarity. I always thought of that night as passing my final examination in German."²¹

If such was Dr. Pearson's *modus operandi* in his class work when in the prime of his strength, did he continue to maintain the high level of his effectiveness when he was approaching the date line of his three score and ten? A letter from a member of his classes in 1938-39, now a Lydia Roberts Fellow in Columbia University, will abolish even the shadow of a doubt.

. . . I do have many vivid recollections of Dean Pearson in his classroom. I shall never forget those delightful hours which always passed all too quickly. It is, however, hard to explain in a few words what made his classes so unique. I only know that I never learned a subject so easily, with so much pleasure, as I did the German language.

Dean Pearson always took time to bring the whole realm of learning and culture into his class discussions. Perhaps some phrase in our story would recall a passage from some great master, and he would turn his book upside down on his desk and recite a long passage from memory. We might find ourselves in a few minutes discussing Polonius, Hamlet, or the gravediggers, or the weakness of Macbeth. Perhaps we would be off to Cairo, to Hamlet's grave, to southern France, or floating on the Rhine. We always loved to hear about state dinners and the diplomatic world. Many times Dean would tell a joke in German, and then laugh when we couldn't get the point.

I have wished many times that Dean Pearson could have written a book to tell his principles of teaching. He told us one day that he felt his position was one of great responsibility and that he always felt that he was to blame if one of his pupils did not succeed.

²¹Miss Virginia Kirk, Green Hall, University of Chicago, October 16, 1929.

He was sympathetic and kind, never making a student ill at ease. He was a great teacher.

I was always impressed by his deep love and understanding of all people all over the world. One cannot help but wish there were more such men of intelligence and understanding in the world today. Surely his students will have been inspired by his personality and character, and will become better world-citizens because of his great influence upon their lives.

As for myself, I shall never forget Dean Pearson. I know that years from now I will still remember his kindly smile, his courtesy, his love of everything worth-while. I shall always be grateful that I had the opportunity of studying under such a great teacher.

A friend of mine expressed all of this in one sentence better than I have in a whole page when he said: "Dean Pearson was a gentleman, a scholar, and a citizen."²²

The modern collegians in residence are wont to be frank in expressing their dislikes about those in authority, and about their instructors. The observations of a sophomore of the class of 1942 in an interview add to and enhance what the preceding excerpts demonstrate.

"It was not a task nor a dismal undertaking, to learn the German language under his guidance.

"One fact was noticeable. He was very ready in quoting verbatim from poems and would turn from German to French or English without any difficulty, showing the difference in the form of expressions.

"Students would go to him with their troubles without hesitation. He knew more, probably, about their troubles than their own family.

"Dean Pearson never spoke above or below the students interests and ability. He seemed to discover or discern the level of our interest and addressed himself easily along those lines. He never ridiculed or made fun of a student in his awkward attempts either to speak or to write the German language. In his classes we had to speak in German and even though we did not make much headway, he would not allow us to use English. In the Conversational German, he had a clever way of drawing us out and getting us into lively discussions. One day he asked the young ladies to tell why they did or did not smoke cigarettes and then he asked the

²²Miss Barbara Bitting, Des Moines, Iowa, Oct. 6, 1939.

young men to say whether they approved of girls smoking and whether they would marry a girl who did smoke. There developed a very lively conversation all in German.

“He was always very reasonable with students who were employed with outside work. He was lenient if they were ill but he wanted them to tell him before the class rather than to let him discover they were not prepared after the class began. Sometimes because of illness, or other accidental causes, the number of the class would be small and he would not go on with the regular recitation, but would go on and tell of his travels and interesting poems or literature and at the next recitation would proceed with the regular lesson previously given. He did this so that all the members of the class would go forward at the same time. We used to like to meet in his office and frequently did with a small class. He would illustrate or make points by taking down from the shelves some new book and talk to us about its author or its contents and thus vary the ordinary routine.

“He was always good natured and I know of no students that dreaded his classroom or disliked the subject after they got started. Frequently I would walk out University Avenue with him as my home was not far from his, and we invariably talked in German. I owe a good deal to him, because even though I talked German at home, I learned the history and significance of words and the German literature in a way that I could not have done reading by myself.”²³

But some sceptical folk may suspect that such favorable judgments are the products of the prejudice of familiars in a quasi family circle which naturally induces generous over-emphasis, if not exaggeration, of the virtues of esteemed instructors when ardent collegians indulge in public expression anent their *Alma Mater*:—and there is always this adverse presumption to guard against. But I may cite the testimony of one not to Drake's Manor born.

In 1923 there was on the teaching staff of Drake a brilliant young Assistant Professor of Economics. He was a native of Poland who came to this country when he was fourteen years

²³Miss Margaret Kregel, Des Moines, Interview Oct. 12, 1939.

of age. By the time he was twenty-one he had obtained his A. B. with a Phi Beta Kappa key from Amherst, and the next year his Master's degree from Harvard. In preparation for meeting his language requirement for his Doctorate at Harvard he entered Dr. Pearson's class in German. One day in mid-semester he said to me in my office with marked emphasis: "That man Pearson is the best teacher I have ever been under—any place."²⁴

VII

All through the letters previously quoted one senses an aura of subtle beneficent influences which kept the admiration of his students easily in thrall, and which linger in their recollections as blessed memories. I close with some extracts which indicate that Dr. Pearson's character and conduct in his classroom became radiant lights ahead to his students on their Pathway.

An alumnus, resident in Nevada, of the class of 1917, who left Dr. Pearson's classroom to enter the nation's air service in the World War, writes: "Through the past generation I have felt the effects of association with such fine men as Dean Pearson. . . . I have wished to be and live like them."²⁵ From a sometime Fellow in History in the University of Illinois, resident in Minneapolis (Class of 1911), her letter concludes: "For twenty-five years Dean Pearson and a few more of you have meant "Drake" to me—service, loyalty, purpose, friendliness, achievement!—Things of the Spirit which never die."²⁶

A Fellow in the University of Chicago ends her letter with: "Professor Pearson may have departed from this earth, but to his students, he will always remain a living joyous memory."²⁷ One who was in his class last summer (1939) quotes from a graduate of 1913: "A degree at Drake University without at least one course under Dean Pearson is like an unfinished symphony."²⁸

²⁴Dr. Stephen P. Mizwa, *Op. Cit.*

²⁵Mr. Paul K. Gardner, Editor of the *Review Miner* of Lovelock, Nev., Oct. 7, 1939.

²⁶Mrs. Trafford N. (Inez Downing) Jayne, Director of Weekly Church, Minneapolis, Minn., Oct. 18, 1939.

²⁷Miss Virginia Kirk, *Op. Cit.*

²⁸Miss Ira B. Gantz quoted in letter of Mrs. Grauel, *Op. Cit.*

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