

## The Scholar

The life of Thomas Huston Macbride ended quietly on March 27, 1934. As President Emeritus of the State University of Iowa, he had lived in Seattle near his daughter, Jean, and his son, Philip. His life there was active, for he had been busy with plans, books, and correspondence up to the hour of his brief, final illness. For a number of years he had returned to the campus for the June Commencement.

In 1930 he addressed the graduating classes assembled beneath the trees facing the Old Capitol. On that occasion he spoke of "Minerva's Temple", comparing the glory and wealth of Athenian culture with the treasures of knowledge and experience associated with the stately old temple on the campus. His last spoken message to the University was his "Charge to the Graduates" in June, 1933. No one present will ever forget the dignity of that scholarly benediction as the "Grand Old Man of Iowa" spoke of his own college days and of his fifty-five years' association with the University of Iowa.

Except for the few evening years, spent on the west coast, Professor Macbride's entire life was



interwoven with the development of the Interior, often less appropriately termed the Middle West. Iowa had been admitted to statehood but two years before his birth. His boyhood lay in the earlier years of our Commonwealth. He watched and shared in that transition period when the forests of eastern Iowa gave place to farms, and plows converted our prairies into fertile fields. This familiarity with the life of pioneer days and the beauty of primitive Iowa left deep impressions on his mind though it was many years before they found partial record in his book of memories, *In Cabins and Sod-Houses*.

The professional life of Professor Macbride was likewise spent in Iowa, mainly as teacher, scientist, and administrator in the service of her University. One of the early students of our flora, fauna, and formations, he was a leader not only in their scientific interpretation but also in the development of their study in the schools, their utilization by the people, and their conservation by the State. He belonged peculiarly to Iowa.

Professor Macbride's education was liberal for that time, though his college course was of the older classical type with emphasis on mathematics and language. Later a leave of absence permitted travel in Europe, study at Bonn, and introduced him to the German universities. In particular it



enabled him to work with the great botanist of that period, Professor Strasburger. While those early cultural studies gave permanent bent to a brilliant mind they did not circumscribe its interests. A precocious student and a great reader throughout his life, he gathered material at first hand and kept pace with a rapidly changing world. Being a master of several languages and a student of literature, his conversation, classroom talks, and public lectures were enriched by a wealth of happy illusion and historical illustration.

Recalling his training and the limited curricula of that period, it was only natural that Professor Macbride's earlier teaching was mainly in the languages and mathematics. Gradually scientific interests developed and their fruitage was the richer because of the classical background. While teaching at Lenox College, 1870-1878, his vacations were largely spent in the field; he took up the intensive study of plants and gradually the avocation became his vocation.

In 1878 he entered upon a service at the State University which was destined to continue without interruption for fifty-six years. During that period of rapid expansion of the institution his professional duties were exacting. Appropriations were meager, salaries were low, and outside demands increasingly heavy. Professor Macbride



always carried campus responsibilities beyond those of his department. He was secretary of the faculty for several years, and committee work, always time consuming, was especially taxing in those days.

Outside the institution he contributed his wisdom and energy in many ways. In Iowa City he was active in school, church, and civic affairs. He was adviser on trees and planting, advocate of street improvement, leader in the movement to purchase the City Park and was on the local park board for a number of years. The Iowa Academy of Science was developed and fostered by a small group of which he was an important member and later president. He contributed extensively to the work and publications of the Iowa Geological Survey. More than any other he was responsible for the early development of University Extension and lectured often in the eastern Iowa towns. He promoted the conservation movement in this State and advocated the park program in advance of any formal organization in this field. He was later appointed Chairman of the Iowa Forestry Commission and a member also of the State Conservation Commission. Dr. Macbride contributed regularly to the programs of the national scientific organizations and shared in their plans. As Chairman of Section G (Botany) he became Vice Pres-



ident of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He presided at the first national meeting the writer attended in 1904 and there won applause by his apt reading of titles in Spanish, German, and French from foreign contributors.

His interest in education led to many outside demands upon his time. A sympathetic friend of the independent college, he was sought on every campus in the State for conferences and talks; he aided in the dedication of buildings and gave Commencement addresses. A basic belief in public school education likewise tied him closely to the high schools and to the various teachers' organizations of this region.

In connection with his work on the Iowa Geological Survey, Professor Macbride was greatly impressed by the Okoboji Lakes in Dickinson County. West Okoboji Lake in particular is a beautiful body of water and nearby are forests, swamps, and prairie. Inspired by the opportunity for field work in such a region and with the memory of Agassiz's summer laboratory on Penikese Island (later to be reestablished at Woods Hole, Massachusetts), Dr. Macbride long cherished the idea of opening a summer laboratory in the Okoboji Lake region. Many years later he realized his dream. In 1909 he organized a group of



alumni and friends of the University who purchased an improved five-acre tract on Miller's Bay, West Okoboji Lake, and erected certain buildings in addition to those already on the grounds at the time of purchase. The Iowa Lakeside Laboratory became a reality and the facilities thus provided were offered to the University. Summer classes and research work have been carried out there in a limited way each year since.

The holdings were greatly extended more recently until the Laboratory owned about one hundred acres. Through a quarter of a century Professor Macbride carried the project largely on his personal initiative. His own funds entered largely into the project both for purchase of land and for the erection and repair of buildings. It is a matter of satisfaction to all his friends to know that at last the University has accepted as a gift the property and endowment fund of the Lakeside Laboratory.

Professor Macbride's scientific activities and interests gave him national recognition. His work began with the flora of this region. Iowa's plants, native and cultivated, and botanical problems relating to agriculture and plant diseases as well as the manifold duties of class room and laboratory filled the years. With little help, inadequate quarters, and relatively meager equipment he was able,



however, to build a department that attracted wide attention.

It is said that he bought with his own money one of the first microscopes in the University. And when he went abroad to study, he was surprised to discover that in laboratory technique, especially in mounting and staining microscopic plant tissues, he was not less expert than some of the best German botanists.

In addition to a survey study of general flora, and service on the Iowa Geological Survey, Professor Macbride gave special attention to the fungi. His collections and publications in this field remain an important part of American mycology. But his later work on the slime moulds, or Myxomycetes, brought widest recognition. His collections are the best on our continent and his book, *The North American Slime-Moulds*, 1899, 1922, is important to students of this group in all countries. A third revised edition, with Professor George W. Martin as co-author, was in press at the time of his death. His later years were spent primarily on the work of this revision. Other writings of a more general nature included many papers and addresses on the interpretation of science, on conservation, and the promotion of state parks and preserves. A textbook, *Lessons in Botany*, which was issued in 1895 and later in



revised form in 1900, contributed to the better teaching of his science, particularly in the secondary schools.

But it is as teacher that the name of Macbride lives in the minds of former students. Conspicuous teachers are as different as the subjects they present. But a subject is only a medium of education. Any instructor who attracts and inspires large numbers of students through successive college generations must possess certain qualities. One of these obviously is an adequate mastery of a field; this gives foundation and dignity to his class work. There must be likewise an unconscious, wholesome, constructive philosophy if the teacher makes lasting appeal; the cynic does not attract disciples. A genuine human interest in students, an appreciation of their problems, and a keen perception of their virtues as well as their limitations is essential for constructive influence. Nor is a student finally won by an instructor who is not broader than the subject he teaches. For years the registration in Professor Macbride's general course was closed when the capacity of his lecture room was reached. From such a platform he touched the lives of thousands, many of them now leaders in widely diversified fields.

Students who scheduled to take a course in botany with Macbride soon realized that the sub-



ject was far more universal than they had imagined. The professor taught them the nature and structure of plants remarkably well. His own knowledge and precision commanded admiration, for he seemed to know everything exactly. Moreover, he had an amazing faculty for making the most obtuse matter seem perfectly simple. But his botany was more than the study of plants: it was life and truth and beauty. To accept tutelage of Professor Macbride was to learn to think, to appreciate scholarship, and to comprehend the meaning of wisdom.

If further attempt should be made to interpret this wonderful teacher, it would be to refer to his personality. Those who knew him will recall his intellectual keenness, his accuracy of judgment, and his aptness of expression. But they will cherish also the memory of his unselfishness, his thoughtfulness, his unfailing courtesy, and his genuine interest in the problems and achievements of others. His kindly humor flashed constantly leaving neither pain nor scar, and lighting the way to understanding. It has been often said that Professor Macbride had more personal friends than any other person who ever lived in Iowa. Possessed of a wholesome optimism, he was temperamentally enthusiastic but nevertheless alert to difficulties and practical in his plans.



Not long ago a scientist remarked that to him one of the strongest proofs of immortality was the necessity for the completion of earthly beginnings; there should be just compensation for sacrifices and soul satisfying consummation of the proper hopes, aims, and endeavors of the human lifetime. Universal justice, he said, should grant that to all earnest men and women. If such be true for the worker, should it not also apply to the unfinished tasks left behind? May we not, then, cherish the belief that the spirit of Professor Macbride will live on, the work of his busy hands be carried forward and his dreams, so many unfulfilled, finally come true, not for himself but for his Iowa. It now remains for others to catch afresh the spirit of his hopes and plans for our Commonwealth. One likes to think also that his kindness, his intellectual honesty, his unselfishness, and his illuminating humor can not be blotted out. Rather the hope or even the belief that such a rare and happy combination of personal qualities must grow even more and more with passing years, finding, in some measure, unconscious expression in the lives of those who knew him.

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