

## Comment by the Editor

DAVID SANDS WRIGHT

*Fifty years of right living*

*Fifty years of tireless loyalty*

*Fifty years of inspirational effort . . .*

What higher tribute could be paid to any man!

As the most fitting climax to the celebration of Founder's Day at Iowa State Teachers College on December 7, 1925, the State Board of Education conferred upon Professor D. Sands Wright a super-diploma. The school was then in its fiftieth year, and during that whole half century Professor Wright had served continuously as the head of a department — first as the professor of English Language and Literature, then from 1880 to 1915 in charge of Mathematics, and afterward as the first Director of Religious Education. His tenure exactly paralleled the life of the institution, for he had taught the first class on the opening day of the Iowa State Normal School in the autumn of 1876. That his birthday should be selected as the date of Founder's Day for the commemoration of this double golden anniversary seemed altogether appropriate.

David Sands Wright was born on December 7,

1847, on a farm in Highland County, Ohio. He was the direct descendant of three generations of Quaker preachers, and he himself, a steadfast disciple in that faith, became an eloquent exponent of Christianity, preaching in many pulpits of various denominations. Educated as a boy in common country schools, he later attended the National Normal University at Lebanon, Ohio, where he received the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1871 and the Master of Arts degree in 1873.

It was in the fall of 1872 that he began his long career as a teacher of teachers in the official capacity of associate principal of Whittier College at Salem, Iowa. For four years he labored in that little Quaker academy and then, upon the solicitation of his friend, Lorenzo D. Lewelling, a member of the first board of trustees of the new State Normal School at Cedar Falls, he was chosen as one of the four teachers who composed the first faculty of that institution.

"With an earnest few," his super-diploma testified, he "laid the foundation for the *Iowa State Normal School*. With a saving sense of humor in the dark hours that followed and always with unflagging zeal" he "helped to build the superstructure of the *Iowa State Teachers College*." During the fifty-three years of his association with the school, it grew and improved, not alone because

such men as he desired "to *have* it better" but because of his "ceaseless effort to *make* it better." Not until he had passed his eightieth birthday anniversary did he retire from the service of the college, only three years before his death on October 30, 1931.

Professor Wright was a splendid teacher. Many of his students, who number in the thousands, declare that he was the best instructor they ever had. Not only was he a master of his subject, but he had that rare capacity of inspiring others to strive for similar proficiency. He made mathematics exciting. If a lull seemed imminent, he averted the dull moment with a flash of wit, or casually did tricks with chalk. Perhaps his success was partially due to his custom of devising original problems instead of using a text-book. To work those exercises in algebra and geometry was a guarantee of mathematical comprehension. Though he was rigorous in his requirements, he was most generous in explanation and encouragement. Any student who succeeded in solving one of his particularly tantalizing problems received the prize of a new lead pencil — and there are many people who still cherish those precious pencils.

Education is not entirely a process of intellectual training: physical and spiritual development

are also essential. "Complete education", declared Professor Wright in his presidential address to the State Teachers Association in 1904, "demands the education of the conscience as well as the intellect, the emotions and the will." If the curriculum of the schools is to be symmetrical, it must provide for "the harmonious development of the entire man — body, mind and soul." Of this trinity, he conceived moral education to be the most neglected, on account of the deplorable commercial spirit of the age. Money seems to be more esteemed than character.

He regarded the eradication of this pernicious influence and the substitution of an ethical standard as a more important function of the schools than "any lessons in language, history or science". Let teachers, by precept and example, instruct their pupils "in the common virtues of every day life", inspire "exalted reverence for whatsoever things are true," stimulate "sublime loyalty to whatsoever things are honest," arouse "holy love for whatsoever things are pure," and create "unyielding preference for whatsoever things are lovely and of good report".

As a tolerant and devout Christian, he believed that the principles of right living could be taught best through religion. Out of this conviction came, perhaps, his most distinctive contribution to

education in Iowa. Mainly because of his efforts, the Teachers College began to offer credit in 1915 for courses in Bible study. It was not long before high schools adopted the same policy.

His own conduct was an exposition of his ideals. In domestic felicity, in unselfish devotion to his profession, in life-long loyalty to the college, in a friendly disposition, in a gracious love for little children that won a confident response, in a subtle wit and never-failing sense of humor, in mellow wisdom and the grace of righteousness, D. Sands Wright impressed the pattern of his character upon the community in which he lived. He touched the lives of Iowa youth, and "that touch has left a vital spark, an inspiration to sane and Christian living."

J. E. B.