PROFESSOR THEODORE W. DWIGHT.

BY PROF. GEORGE CHASE.

The news of Professor Dwight's death in June last came with a sudden and startling shock to his former students and friends, who had hoped for him many years of life in which to enjoy his well-earned rest. Only a short time before, the Dwight Alumni Association, an organization of lawyers who had been graduated under him, had held its first meeting, and he had been expected to be present and deliver an address, reviewing his life-work and experiences as an instructor and as a lawyer. He had unfortunately been obliged at the last moment to send a letter of declination on account of illness, but neither he nor his family believed this illness to be especially serious nor otherwise than temporary. Shortly afterwards he left the city for his country home in Clinton, N. Y., and it was understood that he was slowly progressing towards recovery, when suddenly the sad tidings came of his death. As I met, in the days following this announcement, men who had been his pupils at Columbia College Law School, it seemed as if the same remark rose spontaneously to the lips of each. One after another kept saying: "It seems as if some dear one from my own family had been taken away." Nothing could more truly have testified the deep and abiding affection in which he was held by his students. And not only was such witness borne by those who had been members of his latest classes and had therefore been most recently in personal association with him, but also by men who years before had sat under his instruction and whose absorption in the labors and cares of active life might have dulled the sense of that warm personal attachment by which in their school days they had been drawn towards their teacher. Never, I believe, did a teacher more endear himself to his students than did Professor Dwight to the thousands who, during the many years in which he occupied the professor's chair, passed under his instruction. Never was the value of a teacher's instruction more heartily appreciated. It is not uncommon to hear graduates of colleges—even of the best institutions in the land—lament that the instruction they received during their college days, was not more valuable, more impressive, more inspiring. The studies and the experiences of later life have made them vividly realize the deficiencies of the college teaching. But the graduates under Professor Dwight's legal instruction, from the very time their law school days ended, had to put their legal learning to the immediate test of practical experience. Their subsequent life, day by day and year by year, has been such as to make them realize to the full whether the foundation they laid while under his charge was solid and durable or, on the contrary, unstable and needing to be replaced.

The fact that older as well as younger graduates are glad to testify to the substantial worth of the instruction they received, and that their initiation into the
mysteries of the law has ever seemed to them among the most enjoyable, fruitful and satisfying experiences of their lives, and that they were thus enabled to enter, from the start, upon their legal practice with success and with enthusiasm, speaks in the loudest tones of Professor Dwight's inspiring power as a teacher, and of his success in imparting knowledge so as to make it an intellectual delight and a permanent acquisition.

Professor Dwight's distinguished appearance and bearing was ever noteworthy and made him the subject of inquiry and appreciative remark, in whatever assemblage he might be seen; nor did this distinction in outward form and manner belie the innate distinction of his mind. The genial smile that ever seemed to hover over his features, again and again lightened his face with its winning attractiveness; nor did this charm of face and look belie the true warmth and geniality of his nature. His rare clearness of intellect, which made it necessary for his own mental satisfaction that he should see things clearly and set them forth clearly before the minds of others, would in itself have made his teaching of great value, and students would doubtless have come to him for this reason alone. Lucidity of thought and the power to make men understand plainly what is taught them are in themselves qualities in a teacher, well worth the seeking and well deserving praise. But had there been only these, the teaching would have been clear-cut but cold, and there would have been little to awaken zeal and earnestness, except for the most ambitious intellects. When therefore to these qualities was added a warmth of personal attraction, drawing students to the man himself as a man, and awaken-
ing their admiration and affection, the union of qualities was manifest that make the great teacher. The glow of the teacher's own earnestness kindled a like spirit in those who came to hear him. His profound interest in the subject of his teachings fastened the student's attention, even if he was at first indifferent, and rarely failed to arouse a responsive interest, that brought teacher and pupil more closely together in intellectual sympathy. So the student's mental energies were most quickly concentrated in the right direction, and all his work was in the line of sure and steady progress. And again, the breadth and expansion of the teacher's mental vision served, even if insensibly, to widen in like manner the horizon of all who from day to day came under his influence. The silent subtle influence that a teacher exerts through his personality and his character are too little appreciated by the world; but if their power and extent could, by any possibility, be measured, it is probable that they would be found oftentimes more effective, more influential for good, than the direct teachings spoken daily by word of mouth. College graduates are sometimes heard to say that they have forgotten their Latin and Greek, their physics and mathematics, but they have never escaped the impress their college president or some admired professor left upon them. Emerson says: "I have read that those who listened to Lord Chatham felt that there was something finer in the man than anything which he said. * * * This is what we call Character,—a reserved force which acts directly by presence and without means." Professor Dwight's personality was of this impressive nature. The sphere of influence which was thus cast about
him made unnecessary those rules and regulations which generally in schools and colleges are relied upon as the means of enforcing discipline. His classes never needed discipline, but like an audience drawn to hear some lecturer for the pleasure and benefit they know they will receive, listened with earnest attention and thronged about him with evident enjoyment. During some years, when his classes had grown very large, not only would every seat be occupied, but students sat also on the platform all about his feet. Many of these also were students not belonging to the particular class, and therefore not required to attend its exercises, but who came of their own free will to obtain the benefit of a review. Why such gatherings need no discipline is obvious.

We hear much said nowadays about methods of education and of training in the art of instruction, and their value and usefulness cannot be denied. One who otherwise would have been a poor teacher may be much benefited by a study of proper methods and a consideration of others’ experiences, and thus be helped to become a good teacher. But between a good teacher who is the product of methods and a great teacher like Professor Dwight, there is a gulf fixed which methods cannot bridge. Some recent words of The Churchman upon this subject are of great weight and significance.

"Probably few college men," it says, "of forty years’ graduation would hesitate, if questioned, to attribute whatever ‘drawing out’ of their own intelligence and capacity may have happened to them, not so much to the college and the environment in which it placed and kept them four years, not so much to the curriculum which poured information into their minds, as water into a cistern, as to the touch of some individual professor or tutor, that uncovered, liberated and set free the living spring of originality and individuality in their being, and enlarged the opening and guided the flow, until it became established; a stream to water the earth. It is no disparagement of the ‘environment,’ nor of the curriculum. These furnished the conditions most favorable to the experiment; but behind the operation was an operator; the personal teacher, with his ‘communicating touch.’

After all is said by the pedagogue, the pedagogue, in the Platonic sense, is the true educator; the main factor in education. Great schools first owe their fame to some master of pedagogy who was born, not made; and preserve their reputations until his influence is lost by slow dilution among his disciples and imitators. The reputation of many a university has waxed and waned with the rising and setting of some bright particular star."

Truly Professor Dwight was such a "bright particular star." Sprung from a distinguished lineage, which has numbered among its family connections some of the most distinguished educators and eminent scholars and writers, whom this country has known, he derived by natural endowment that keen intellectual power, that philosophical tendency of mind, that inquiring nature which reaches to the bottom of things and rests not until causes and reasons are ascertained, and that remarkable aptitude for teaching. The human mind and heart and soul form the teacher's plastic material. He best can fashion and mold them who best can understand the nature of that with which he works, and best realize the effect of every touch, every lasting impress. He best
discerns the true method of working, so that no stroke be lost, no undesired result accomplished, who is most capable to foresee the end from the beginning and perceive most clearly the way to attain it. In Professor Dwight's teaching, as one watched it, there seemed no mystery. His classes were composed, as college classes must be, of men differing in mental endowments, in past attainments, in the power to study, to learn, and to understand. The purpose was not, as men train runners, to train only those who can outstrip, if so it may be, all others, but to train each and every man to run the race set before him, and run it as best he may be able. After the most skillful training of a company of men, only one may be able to run a mile in a given time, while all the rest fall short, in greater or less degrees. Shall only the strongest and fleetest be taught, and the others cast aside, as hardly worth the pains? Professor Dwight had no sympathy with such a theory of education, though it is to-day rife in some quarters. The whole nature of the man was proof against it, even had he been inclined, from cold unsympathetic reasoning to adopt it. So as his students sat about him, every man felt that the teacher had in him a personal interest, and was striving to aid him in every possible way to learn and to understand. The topics taught were often difficult and abstruse, so that the student, with his best efforts, would at times be left bewildered after his toil over the books; and then the teacher would make everything simple and clear, explain the true grounds of every legal doctrine, till the minds of one and all could perceive and be satisfied. The most brilliant may not have needed so much simplifying exposition; but even to them it did great good, by teaching them how to dress their thoughts in clear and plain language, and to arrange principles and rules in their true sequence and dependence. To others this mode of teaching was a real necessity, or else they would have been left in hopeless perplexity. Then, as a consequence, they would have lost zest in study, would have been indifferent as to their progress, and have become heedless and inattentive in the class-room. As it was, the whole class was bound together by a common comprehension of what they were studying, and by an unflagging interest, because they understood, and because, day by day, they felt that they were making real progress in the right direction. So simple did the teaching seem, that men sometimes wondered why Dr. Dwight was said to have a genius for teaching, to be a born teacher, and the like. It has been said of an eminent lawyer, whose brain was packed with an enormous mass of legal lore, that when he argued a case, he administered more of his own confusion of mind to the court than the judges could recover from before the case was decided. There are teachers and professors, it must be said, who have the same woeful faculty of "administering confusion of mind." How far this tendency prevails may not be measurable, but it may help to an understanding of the question, why Professor Dwight was called a "born teacher." Certain it is that so great a thinker upon the subject of education as James Russell Lowell has said: "Great teachers are almost rarer than great poets."

I have considered only Prof. Dwight's life and work as a teacher, because, though he won eminence in various other direc-
tions, I believe his most important service to the world and his surest title to fame, rest upon this ground. His other services were, however, of conspicuous value. He was a member of the New York Constitutional Convention of 1867, where his knowledge of constitutional history and his studies in the science of legislation and the art of government, made him a most useful member. After the downfall of the Tweed ring in New York City, he became a member of the famous "Committee of Seventy," whose labors were so fruitful in securing honest government and redeeming the fair fame of the city. His labors upon this committee upon matters of proposed legislation were productive of important and beneficial results. In 1874, he was appointed a judge of the Commission of Appeals, a court of co-ordinate powers and jurisdiction with the Court of Appeals, the highest tribunal of the State. The opinions he wrote while a member of this court are noted for their comprehensiveness of legal learning, and for their acuteness of analytic power and clearness of argument. He was also prominent in charitable labors, having been president of the New York Prison Association and vice-president of the New York Board of Commissioners of Public Charities. In these undertakings, his labors were of high and enduring value. He took a great interest in prison reform and many important changes of administration in the direction of reformatory methods are due to his efforts. As regards distinctive legal labors, he acted as counsel and referee in many important cases. A number of opinions rendered by him as referee have been published in the reports. He was one of the associate editors of Johnson's Universal Cyclopædia, having charge of the department relating to municipal, civil and constitutional law. He also edited an American edition of Maine's Ancient Law, published a number of legal arguments, etc.

Professor Dwight was a man of great energy, and his passion for and delight in work were especially noteworthy. He dearly loved his chosen profession, and day by day he gave a long day's work in study and research, over and beyond his labors in the class-room. He took a natural satisfaction in the success of his teaching, and followed the fortunes of his graduates with never-ceasing interest. He was greatly gratified when any one of them attained some distinguished position, or won eminence at the bar or on the bench. But all his students were endeared to him, whether they ever achieved greatness or not. He called them his "boys," and like the father of some great family, took a sincere and cordial interest in the career and fortunes of every one of them. His memory for faces and names was remarkable. Meeting his students of former years, as he did frequently, he was nearly always able to call each one by name, as he extended his hand in friendly greeting. It was a little thing, apparently, but it always gave great pleasure to those who were thus greeted. One witnessing this pleasure could not help wishing for a like gift and faculty.

A most precious influence exerted by him upon his students, and indeed upon the community, was by dignifying and ennobling his profession. The law was to him not the handmaid of sophistry and chicanery, but the mouthpiece of justice, the voice of right speaking in the language of men. He ever set before his
pupils a noble ideal of a professional career. He loved in his addresses to them to dwell upon the honorable lives and noble achievements of the great men who have adorned the ranks of the profession in all time. The fruitfulness of this teaching, who can realize? It speaks through the lives and example of his students, and forms the worthiest monument to his name.