

IN MEMORIAM

JOHN WILLIAM CALHOUN

In the death of Professor John W. Calhoun on July 7, 1947 The University of Texas lost a great builder, a wise counselor, a notable teacher, and one of its most admired and respected characters. He was born in Coffee County, Tennessee, near Reddens Chapel, a log school and Methodist Church house, on October 24, 1871, the oldest of nine children of George Washington and Maria Frances (Glasgow) Calhoun. He attended school at Reddens Chapel an average of three months each year, July to October, from the age of five to nineteen. The remaining months of the year he spent most of his time working on his father's farm. During 1893-1894 he was at a private academy in Manchester, Tennessee, and during 1895-1897 spent fifteen months at Winchester Normal School, Winchester, Tennessee. Prior to entering The University of Texas in 1901, he taught rural schools in Tennessee and Texas, and after a year at the University he dropped out to become, for one year, superintendent at Arlington, Texas. On a formal blank from the Dean's Office asking for "Facts of interest about your undergraduate life," he wrote in 1913: "One of the most absorbing questions of my undergraduate days was where I would ever get the money to get out of debt with." In 1910 he was married to Miss Evelyn Scott of Fort Worth, and is survived by her, by their daughter, Mrs. W. K. Miller of Austin, and by two grandchildren.

Entering the University as a student in 1901, he received the B.A. degree in 1905, and the same year began his long and successful career as a teacher of mathematics. He progressed through all the academic ranks from tutor to professor in the graduate school, and, in addition to his teaching duties, held the office of comptroller from 1925 to 1940 and of president *ad interim* during 1937-1939. Prior to 1919 he was a member of the department of pure mathematics; thereafter he served in the department of applied mathematics. As an extra-official service, he was president of the University Cooperative Society for twenty-five years, from 1932 until 1936. In 1908, at the end of a year's leave of absence richly employed, he received the degree of Master of Arts from Harvard University; and in 1938 Abilene Christian College, of Abilene, Texas, honored him with the degree of LL.D. While at Harvard he held an Austin Teaching Scholarship. Teachers at The University of Texas with whom he did his principal work were Edwin W. Fay in Latin and M. B. Porter and H. Y. Benedict in mathematics. At Harvard he worked with professors Maxime E. Bocher, W. Y. Osgood, W. E. Byerly, and B. O. Pierce.

Professor Calhoun was an exponent of high standards of scholarship and learning. He did not undervalue the importance of research and writing; he recognized the duty of a faculty to contribute to knowledge; but his practical mind was convinced that "productive scholarship" is too often exemplified by mediocre publications and that encouragement and promotion of good teaching ought to be the primary aim of a state university. In a report intended primarily for distribution to the legislature (The University of Texas: The Position Achieved; The Opportunities Ahead. Office of the President, November, 1938), he discussed Teaching and Research as the two basic functions of a university and declared that no university worthy of the name could neglect either of them. But, of the two, good teaching was always nearest his heart and mind. He voiced his creed on all appropriate occasions and repeated it in some brief personal notes that he jotted down a few days before he was stricken by his final illness. He wrote: "I have always contended for the recognition of good teaching and have tried during a rather long life to give a demonstration of good teaching. In a state institution where 90 to 95% of the students are undergraduates, it is criminal to subordinate teaching to anything else." The statement may well be remembered as the epitaph of a courageous and thoughtful teacher. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and a past president of the University Chapter, but he valued the society not for its recognition of his own attainments but as a stimulus to undergraduate learning.

As Comptroller he was charged with oversight of the business management of the University. More specifically he was supervisor of oil production on University lands 1925-1940, of the University endowment investments 1930-1940, and of the University building programs of 1930-1940. His work was everywhere conspicuously successful. A labor of love as well as of duty was the care of the campus trees, a large proportion of which he brought to the campus. A colleague once spoke of him as a "maker of academic shade." It is a title he would have welcomed. Already we are deeply in his debt for the beauty of the campus and the debt grows with the trees.

As President Mr. Calhoun showed the same executive ability that had marked his work as Comptroller. But his personality mellowed with the enlargement of his responsibilities. He became more kindly, more sympathetic, as he viewed the University as a whole and came more into contact with faculty, students, and public. Had his health

allowed, the Regents would probably have sought no further for a successor to President Benedict, and that with general approval.

He was a member of various professional and social organizations, such as the Texas State Teachers' Association, the American Mathematics Society, the Texas Academy of Science, of which he was a fellow, the University Club and the Town and Gown Club of Austin, the Phi Beta Kappa Society, and the Delta Kappa Epsilon Fraternity. He was a gifted extemporaneous speaker in faculty meetings and social gatherings, often combining solid wisdom and biting humor that was sometimes flavored by an apt illustration from the Bible, of which he possessed unusually accurate knowledge. He possessed great power of self-control and commanded the attention and respect of all who heard him speak. He was justly popular with his students, to whom, as a teacher, he devoted his primary interest, and through them and through the contacts entailed by his manifold duties he won friends throughout the state. Men and women who knew him respected his judgment in matters affecting the University. He was conspicuous for his honesty and integrity.

In collaboration with others, Professor Calhoun published two textbooks, in 1918 and 1930. From the point of view of original research, his opinion of his published writings was not very high. In response to the Dean of the Graduate School, he said of an article on "Teaching Load" in The Texas Outlook (April, 1941): "This was a brief protest against the use of the word 'Load' in connection with teaching. It does not represent research but a grievance. It is not worth tabulating in a list issuing from the Office of the Graduate Dean unless it is the purpose to list all the results of the Faculty's 'taking pen in hand' that happens to get into print." It is, in fact, an eloquent expression of his, sincere belief in the dignity and importance of teaching as a life work (and is added as a supplement to this statement). He wrote and left in manuscript, however, three useful volumes that he rightly considered important. The first is his "Autobiography," written in 1939, after his retirement from the president's office. The second is "Campus Trees at Texas" (1942) telling of his extensive planting of live oaks and mapping the location and describing the growth of all important trees on the campus. It ought to be, and no doubt will be, published. The third is "The Short and Simple Annals of the Poor" (1942). This he, described as "An eye-witness account of the manner of living, the education, religion, social and economic status of a little known part of Tennessee from 1870 to 1890."

During his long and devoted service as teacher and administrator, Professor Calhoun's influence touched every phase of University life. He had a feeling of deep and grateful obligation to the University and wished it to become, not only the best in a large but limited region, but the peer of the best in the nation, Regents and officers of the University drew upon his wisdom, and have been deeply indebted to his clear-headed guidance.

A. E. Cooper
H. T. Parlin
C. D. Simmons

A. P. Brogan
W. J. Battle
E. C. Barker, Chairman