

Religious Bulletin

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A Great And Good Man Gone.

(By Father John Cavanaugh)

As the oldest friend of Dudley G. Wooten on the campus I am asked to pay brief tribute to his distinguished quality, character and achievement. Judge Wooten came to Notre Dame as a professor of Law in September 1924. My acquaintance with him had begun with correspondence twelve years earlier, both of us hoping he might soon be added to the faculty. The Judge became a Catholic late in life, but at least ten years before his conversion he had won much attention by occasional studies in history, sociology, law and government -- these studies being surprisingly colored and flavored with Catholic philosophy and feeling. As a Catholic layman he was thorough-going, consistent and devout.

The fact that in his early youth he had wooed and won an ideal Catholic woman whose intelligence, loyalty and virtue were eloquent preachers, had probably most to do (after the grace of God) with Judge Wooten's conversion. Besides, he had been well educated -- first in the University of Virginia, then in Princeton. He had had long experience in legal and judicial work; he had been for years an impressive actor in high-class political drama as Congressman and as Democratic Nestor in the great regions of Texas and the extreme Northwest. Because of these experiences and of his instinctive reverence for truth and justice, Dudley Wooten treated every proposition that came before him in thought or conduct as a case brought in court. He studied pro and con of the case about the Catholic Church; undoubtedly that is one great reason why he reached the right conclusion. Many others study only the con -- in both senses -- and therefore they come to have only what they pleasantly describe as "impressions" or "views" of religion instead of dynamic, hard convictions.

In youth and in age Dudley Wooten had been a manly man, for that was of his very stuff and fiber; and from that quality sprang, I think, much of the cogency of all his arguments, appeals, speeches. The man behind the word is as important as the man behind the gun. I believe he had always been an innocent man, too, for he had loyally carried in his hands life's finest flags and most beautiful banners -- the noblest views of action, the finest philosophy of teaching. In him a clean and generous nature met and functioned constantly with a beautiful mind. His eloquence at its best was as perfect as any I have ever known.

What all of us will especially remember is that he was a perfect Notre Dame man, though coming to us late in life. He walked seemingly without intermediate growth into the heart, the sympathies, the enthusiasms, the ideals of our campus. He loved all the students with such love as noble Southern aristocrats especially can give to their friends. To the Law Men very properly his devotion was a thing almost fanatical. When the final illness first began to detain him at home he missed his lectures and his "boys" so pathetically that more than once he pleaded -- and he always pleaded successfully -- to be helped into his automobile and driven around the quadrangle so that he might see the students walking to and from classes and look again at the college buildings and the campus scenes.

The men at Notre Dame, whether professors or students, will not forget this most lovable and kindly brother of theirs. They will pray much and fervently that in the bosom of that God from Whom he came and to Whom he has returned he may find the rest and peace that he never unworthily sought in life. And because they know he would have it so, they will give a share of their prayerful remembrance to the noble woman who walked so sweetly and gently at his side through life, to whom he gave and from whom he received such beautiful devotion, and to whom he owed in such large measure the happiness and the success which came to him in the years of his great accomplishment.