

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

DONALD BERTRAND TRESIDDER (b. 1894)

In every generation there are a few men who, starting even with the rest, come up to greatness. It may be the greatness which attaches itself in the public mind to exceptional financial success. It may be greatness based on results less tangible. Either way, and with whatever qualification, these are men who stand out in the minds of their fellows. By some combination of natural ability, of favorable circumstance and intense effort, they have set themselves apart.

Donald Bertrand Tresidder, moving from humble medical student to chief of a great corporation, then to the headship of a great university, was, in the world's eyes, one of these men. In the eyes of his associates within the Stanford circle, he was this, but he was also something more and something different. His achievements, material and intellectual, were many; he himself remained still greater than the sum of those achievements.

In tracing the course of his life, it is easy to record instances where circumstances seemed to serve him. It is easy, as it is in every life, to point out how this chance or that one directed his career. No human is immune to chance, but only one out of the many can shape chance to the world's highest advantage. Surveying events of Don Tresidder's life, we can see how that shaping went on.

Born in Tipton, Indiana, on April 7, 1894, by good chance he was born into a family of doctors. His mother, his father, and an uncle were all practising physicians. From his home surroundings came his wish to study medicine. It was chance that, after a year at the University of Chicago, he should take his vacation in California and on the train should strike up an acquaintance with a representative of David A. Curry. Because of this acquaintance, he took a summer job in Yosemite; because he was there, he met Mary Louise Curry who was to become his wife and source of inspiration in years to come; because he was there he met the professor who talked him into a visit to Stanford; because of that visit, he entered Stanford as a student, his life interests thereafter embracing both the campus and the Valley.

So far, chance. But it was not chance that, as he laid hold of each offered opportunity, his inborn administrative ability and his perseverance pushed him toward special achievement. Hundreds of young men and women have worked through summer vacations in Yosemite, finished their college careers, and gone their way, leaving the valley as they found it. Not so this one. The attachments he made were lasting attachments; his mark has been placed again and again on the vast playground he loved. The High Sierra camps, the Ahwahnee, the Badger Camp ski facilities -- all of these have in them a part of Don Tresidder.

Still greater numbers of men and women have worked, or partly worked, their way through Stanford and have carried the University close to their hearts thereafter. Don carried the University in his heart certainly but in his head as well. Always, he was alert for Stanford's welfare -- as student, as alumnus, as a member of the Board of

Trustees, as chairman of the Board, at last as president of the University, who in four trying years gained for himself a national reputation.

But recording this progress, paying tribute to the tenacity and energy without which it could not have been made, is telling less than half the story. The other and more important part lies not in his own actions, taken by themselves, but in his effect on others. The base on which his whole life rested was his extraordinary power of comprehending others, of sympathizing with them, and leaving with them something of himself. It is scarcely an exaggeration -- perhaps it is not an exaggeration at all -- to say that no one was ever thrown with Don Tresidder in however small a degree of intimacy without remembering him and cherishing the memory. This was so among many visitors to Yosemite; so, in the journeys among universities which preceded his coming to the presidency; so, in the widely varied contacts his Stanford office brought him.

To those of us who knew and worked with him here, the atmosphere of affection which grew up around him brought no surprise. We recognized his important accomplishments, understood their worth, but our personal indebtedness to him was of a nature less formal -- was and is, for it is not a thing that will end. The larger part of our debt is not for the products of his brain and hand, good though these were. Rather it is for the way he went about the performance of his work. To have known him, to have been brought within reach of his unfailing optimism, his friendliness and warmth and vigor and honesty -- this is what his colleagues treasure.

There are many friendly people. A university campus is often set thick with them. There are many vigorous and honest people, good to meet, pleasant to recall. But seldom do we meet a stranger who, almost at first glance, makes us feel, "Here is a man who will understand. I like him; I want him for a friend, even though now I scarcely know him." This was Don Tresidder's special gift, a gift hard to define, hard to account for. Material contributions can be listed, can come from many sources. If a given source is cut off, another may be found. But those intangible emanations which draw one human being to another -- these are not born of ability or effort or circumstance. They come from what we call the spirit, and they come rarely.

We miss Don Tresidder in too many ways for full recording. We miss his idealism, his accompanying practicality, his youthful self-confidence, his generous estimates of others, his humility in the face of his own success. We sorely miss his farsighted leadership, and the magnitude of his loss no one can now determine. But to us here, the overwhelming loss is none of these; it is the loss of our friend.

Yet of that friend, one thing we know in utter certainty: this is that some part of him lives on in the lives of those he touched -- student, colleague, semi-stranger -- and that these will pass on to others a part of what they received, and those to others still, even though at last no one of the sharers knows that the friendly warmth which heartens him had its beginning in that warmth towards all living things that was Don Tresidder's.

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