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John Condon

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JOHN CONDON¹

"A Tower is fallen, a star is set."

THESE words of lamentation from the old Moorish ballad must have risen to the lips of a great many men when they read the announcement that John Condon was dead.

It is impossible for me in a short time to review the distinguished career or make note of the accomplishments. I must content myself with a mere reference. This is not an easy task for me. Dean Condon was not only my superior in the Law School, but he was my dear and valued friend and I am the poorer at his passing. The world will never be to me quite the same since he is gone.

Life, death and time are mysteries; yet here we find ourselves struggling, as all the world has struggled, with problems which vex with relentless questionings. The best we can do, possibly all we can do, is to gather up the memories of good men's lives, of brave splendid deeds, and of achievements that have made the world happier, or freer, or better.

It is difficult to speak the language of mere praise. Such words are kept for the children of genius, for those meteors that flash in the sky to dazzle the eye and fill the world with wonder. But what was he? Two homely, home-spun words most aptly describe him. "consecration" and "duty." By the light of those sublime words he lived and moved and had his being. He had that largeness of comprehension, that mastery of self, that relentless vigor of action, which never permitted him to give up his cherished ideals.

How plain and simple he was! The feverish vision that disturbs the souls of so many men never troubled him. The ambition that babbles of title, and distinction, and sometimes whispers of wealth and power found him deaf to every voice save that which bade him go forward to his simple duty.

We think of him today in this presence as the founder of the Law

¹This address was presented at the funeral of Dean John T. Condon, founder of the University of Washington School of Law, and its dean throughout the twenty-seven years of its existence. Dean Condon died January 5, 1926.

School. We think of his more than a quarter of a century of devotion and dedication to this enterprise, but I like best to think of him as a lonely boy, born in this State, starting out to study law. Traveling across the country he paused in Chicago where an operation was performed upon his eyes in the days before there were anaesthetics for such operations. With quiet bravery he mounted the surgeon's table and endured the pain without a whimper, and then after a few days journeyed on to Ann Arbor.

I would have you picture this lonely lad coming into a strange city without money, without influential friends, without distinguished family connections, finding for himself the first afternoon a boarding place, then after supper stealing out onto the campus and locating the Law Building. Amid the holy hush and calm of the early eventide when the buildings were closed, he stood beside this structure and placing his hand upon the cornerstone promised himself and Almighty God that he would dedicate his life to the service of the Law. The fruit of that dedication, that consecration, we here in this University, have for more than a quarter of a century been privileged to witness. His fame rests not upon harvested selfish and sordid ambitions but upon love, earned and freely vouchsafed. He mended broken hearts where he could, but he broke none.

John Condon was a type of America's best and most characteristic manhood. He was essentially a teacher, set apart by fitness and desire to be a teacher, and an inspiration for his fellow men. He was utterly fearless in following where truth seemed to lead. He often saw many sides where overzealous little souls saw but one. He was patient by reason of a great ideal. Nothing disturbed his sublime faith in the ultimate destiny of this University and its Law School. He believed in the realities of moral and spiritual being. He never shirked an issue. Thousands can testify to his generosity of spirit and his ever ready helpfulness. No service, no kindness, was too great for him to render to others. His manner sometimes deceived those who did not know him well, but he proved his love for his fellowmen by constant service and sacrifice.

His character was as firm as granite, time and events had softened the outline but had not changed the substance. He served the University with all the consecration of his nature. He had the daring faith of Job, and powerfully did he set forth the reality of an all embracing force of a great ideal. His passion for truth, his scorn of the ignoble, his reliance on right, his serenity and his high devotion made him a constant influence for good among the young men with whom he came in contact. Great as was his power as a teacher, great

as was his power as an administrator, he transcended all his manifestations and was greater as a man.

“The sun still shines, and happy, blithesome birds
Are singing on the swaying boughs in bloom,
My eyes look forth and see no sign of gloom,
No loss casts shadow on the grazing herds;
And yet I know a grief that feeble words
Can ne'er express, for in the silent tomb
Is laid the body of my friend, the doom
Of silence on that matchless voice. Now girds
My spirit for the struggle he would praise,
A leader viewless to the mortal eye
Still guides my steps, still calls with clarion cry
To deeds of honor, and my thoughts would rise
To seek the truth and share the love on high.
With loyal heart I'll follow all my days.”

Whoever saw John Condon was impressed by his genuine humanity and his immense virility. John Condon lived intensely, but not narrowly. Whatever he did, he did it with his might. He appeared to have no subordinate interests. Whatever he read and what he studied, he read and studied with equal ardor if not with equal interest.

He lived intensely, and he did not cease to live in that fashion. Many people live intensely for a little time and then grow weary and react into lethargy. It appears impossible to hold the interest of the average man strongly and loyally for any great length of time. It was not so with John Condon. He lived the strenuous life and continued to live it. The warmth of his keen interest did not die down to cold ashes, nor even to the gentle glow of hot coals; to the end of his life he was a flaming torch. Here was a man who hurled back into the teeth of the world the lie that American character can be expressed in terms of money. Here was a man who lived greatly and simply and triumphantly, and whose personality and ideals kindled the imagination of the young men of this State, and no one thinks to ask how much money he had. By force of character, by devotion to the public welfare, by fearless love of righteousness, and by faith in God and in the American educational system, he wrought righteousness and exalted in the minds of all the young men of this State the glory of the Law. He has made it for every one of us who faces the duties of life in like spirit, a nobler thing to be a lawyer.

He was a learned and high-minded man, an undecorated knight, wearing no insignia, belonging to no order, but moving forward steadily under consecration to ideals not always visible, but always real. He lived in the gladsome light of those sweet influences of a high impulse, stimulated by an intelligent conception of duty, both as a

lawyer and as a citizen. Before all men he stood for the orderly movement of events, that even flow of the great current in which history moves to the consummation of the highest ideals to which the race can come.

None could surpass him in the breadth of genuine humanity, which seemed to permeate all of his works, his character, and his philosophy of life. This was the basis of his power to move young men. He could really show us ourselves as others honestly see us. He appreciated and illustrated as few have done, the real Western characteristics of the composite American on the Pacific Coast. He reveled in the depths of the resourcefulness and helpfulness and optimism of the men who made the West, and became a striking personal example of their idealism, their progressiveness, and patriotism.

We shall miss him in our work. We shall miss his clear-eyed courage, his sound wisdom, and radiant hopefulness. We shall miss his profound faith in the triumph of the forces of progress and brotherly kindness, and that with the splendid material advancement would go equally the highest moral and spiritual accomplishment. No one could be so missed unless he were gifted with an honest soul, a clean mind, and a serene courage and faith which believes in a triumphant righteousness. Words cannot add to his fame among his fellowmen or to the love which those who knew him well bore for him. His memory for us will be a cherished treasure, and the example of his qualities and his achievements will be a grateful possession for those of us who were his friends and students, and a blessed legacy to those who had the right to love him best. And no one can rightfully tell how far that bountiful affection of his for his students and their sympathy and love for him uplifted and ennobled and sanctified that life to which they all had contributed and for which they have such a just and mournful pride.

When his final summons came few had greater right to exclaim. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."

"He never failed to march breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never thought, though right were worsted, wrong
would triumph,
Believed we fall to rise, are beaten to fight harder;
sleep to wake."

Farewell, noble man, great teacher, loving friend. Thou art not dead, but translated to that higher life, still carrying high and unspilled the chalice of life's generous image for the enduring service of God and man.

Clark P Bissett.