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IN MEMORIAM

Donald Milton Erb

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Donald Milton Erb

1900-1943

PRESIDENT, UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

1938-1943



" . . . Do not be tolerant of misrepresentation, of superficiality, of the parading of false issues as though they were real issues. Tolerance does not extend to intellectual dishonesty or ineptitude."

DONALD MILTON ERB

A Brief Biography

IT WAS fitting that the man who became President of the University of Oregon in March 1938 should during his career have followed the trail of the pioneers across the continent. To him, as to the pioneer, life was a constant adventure, and the opportunity to arouse and influence the minds and spirits of youth was the greatest adventure of all.

Donald Milton Erb was born in Brooklyn, New York, on August 3, 1900, son of John Lawrence and Ethel B. (Heydinger) Erb. In 1905 Donald began his westward trek, when his father accepted the directorship of the Conservatory of Music of Wooster College at Wooster, Ohio. He had nearly completed grade school in Wooster when once more, in 1913, the west beckoned and the family moved to Chicago. Here for a year, while his father made for himself a place in the musical circles of the city and region, the boy attended the widely known "progressive" Francis Parker School. Then in 1914 the father was appointed director of the School of Music of the University of Illinois, and the family moved to Urbana. Whatever may have been the various influences which helped mold the character and personality of Donald Erb during his formative years, it is certain that he gained through inheritance and association the deep appreciation which, throughout the remainder of his life, made fine music a never-failing source of joy and refreshment to him.

After graduating from the Urbana High School in 1918 young Erb entered the University of Illinois. He took a well-rounded program of liberal arts courses, with a major in the School of Commerce, leading to the Bachelor of Science degree, which he was granted in 1922. During his college years he was normally active in student affairs. He was a member of Phi Gamma Delta and of Alpha Kappa Psi, commerce honorary fraternity.

At the time of receiving his baccalaureate degree he was firmly convinced that his career would lie in the world of business. For nearly a year he was employed in the offices of a Boston export and import firm. Later for a few months he was engaged in merchandising in a Peoria retail store. It was during this period, on March 24, 1923, that he was married to Roxane Catherine Stuart.

Then he was "converted" to an academic career, either because his experience in business was not wholly satisfactory to him or because of the persuasive powers of Dean C. M. Thompson. He returned to the University of Illinois, where from 1923 to 1925 he was assistant in economics. In 1924 he received the Master of Science degree from Illinois. In the fall of 1925 he entered the Harvard University Graduate School. Here he was Thayer Fellow, 1925-26, and in 1927 received both his Master of Arts degree in economics and the coveted Ricardo Prize.

It was in 1927 that Donald Erb completed his interrupted migration to the west, when he came to the University of Oregon as assistant professor of economics, teaching principally in the field of transportation. After a leave of absence during the year 1929-30 he received the Doctor of Philosophy degree at Harvard, his doctoral dissertation being a study of "Weak Railroads in the United States: Their Relation to Regulatory Policy." In 1930 he returned to the University of Oregon as professor of economics, which position he held until 1933, when he accepted a professorship of economics in Stanford University. During his five years at Stanford he returned twice to Oregon to teach in the University summer sessions and to enjoy the neighboring woods, mountains, and fishing streams.

Both at the University of Oregon and at Stanford University Dr. Erb was recognized by his faculty colleagues and by the students as an outstanding teacher and scholar. He performed his full share of committee service and while at Oregon, especially, was generous in his response to numerous requests for addresses before high schools and community organizations throughout the state. Shortly before leaving Stanford he served for a year as acting chairman of the Department of Economics. Research during his teaching period bore fruit in a number of published articles, among which are the following: "Worker, Technician, Owner: A Study in Group Conflict" (*Commonwealth Review*, 1929); "The Cross-State Railroad Issue" (*Commonwealth Review*, 1931); "The Anti-Trust Acts, Pricing, and Industrial Codes" (*Proceedings of the Pacific Coast Economic Association*, 1933); "Banks and Business Cycles" (*Yearbook of the Oregon Bankers Association*, 1937-38); and "Depression History of a Small California Town" (*Proceedings of the Pacific Coast Economic Association*, 1936).

In 1937 Dr. Clarence Valentine Boyer announced his desire to retire from the presidency of the University of Oregon. After an extensive search for a successor—a search in which faculty opinion and preference were given much weight—the choice fell on Donald Milton Erb to

become the seventh President of the University. The wisdom of the selection was increasingly attested with each succeeding year from the time when he assumed the duties of the office on March 1, 1938 until his sudden and untimely death on December 23, 1943. His services as President of the University, his role as an educational statesman, and his qualities as a man are described and evaluated by others in these pages. His spirit and his influence are built beyond destruction into the institution which he loved and served so well.

DAN ELBERT CLARK

Professor of History, University of Oregon.

DONALD MILTON ERB

Educator, Statesman, Friend

FRIENDS of Donald Erb: No words I can summon today can express the grief and shock which fill your hearts and mine. No tribute I can offer can be so eloquent as the fact that you who loved him have crowded this great room to do him honor. Never in my memory has the passing of one man, in Oregon, brought so much of sorrow to so many.

We come here still numb with unbelief that he, who was the epitome of manhood's prime vigor, can be gone. By the measure of our own personal loss, we can gauge the anguish of those who were nearest and dearest to him. We hold out our deep sympathy to them, knowing the while that their strength in this tragic hour will not come from human help. We hope, only, that they may find some little comfort in the knowledge that literally thousands share their grief and long to be of aid. We hope that, even in their sorrow, they can feel pride in the high regard in which he whom they mourn was universally held; we hope they can find strength to be brave, because he would have had them so.

I wish I might bring the golden words of a great orator and the sensitive soul of a poet to pay the high tribute which I know every member of the State Board of Higher Education would offer. But I take comfort in feeling that glowing metaphor and extravagant encomium are, somehow, out of character with the forthright straightforwardness which was the very essence of Donald Erb. So I shall try to tell you, quite simply, what he meant to us who cherished him as associate and friend. The thoughts are my own. I can only hope they may express in small measure the gratitude, the affection, and the high regard of all.

The search for a university president is a hard and discouraging one. Five and one-half years ago we pursued it long and laboriously, because we hoped to find that rare combination, a thoughtful man of action—one who should be both philosopher and administrator, educator and statesman. That is a mold which nature uses but seldom.

When we came to Donald Erb, when we had opportunity to see him and talk with him, every member of the Board was satisfied that here was the man. Here was the end of our search and the beginning of great leadership for the University of Oregon.

We learned that he was a great teacher—not through facile brilliance

which drew students to his feet to drink in his eloquence, but because he required those who sat in his classes to work and think, because with him they gave as well as took away. As a great teacher, he would know and demand the uniform good teaching which is the keystone of a great educational institution.

There was valid evidence that he was a sound scholar, one who had won distinction in institutions and among men where standards were high and competition keen. As a scholar he could be trusted to recognize and respect scholarship, to foster and inspire it among students and staff.

But there was yet another essential qualification to be met—one so important that some institutions, discouraged in the search for the rare combination, have contented themselves with that alone. The head of a great university must be an able administrator. Here we could not fall back on the record. For a university president, Donald Erb was very young, and unproven as an executive. Yet none of us felt any doubt. The remarkable lucidity of his mind, his fine balance and sound judgment, his incisiveness and courage were guarantee enough. Here, we knew, was a man who could offer not only a great contribution himself, but who could create an atmosphere of harmony and discipline where others could do their best work.

The State Board of Higher Education named Donald Erb President of the University of Oregon with full confidence and high hope. The confidence has been justified, the hope realized beyond our most eager expectations. I hope you will believe that I speak without extravagance and with the utmost sincerity when I say I can recall no occasion when he disappointed us, and can name you a hundred when his ability and vision were more than we could have asked.

I need not speak to you of what his leadership has meant to this institution. You know better than I how his demand for high standards, honest discipline, progressive but sound curricula has added to the academic distinction of the University. You know how confusion and discord have vanished before his absolute fairness, his sound balance, and his imperturbable good spirit.

For him, education was no rare adornment for the exceptional mind, but the very fabric of the good life, conceived out of the need of a democratic people and dedicated to the common good.

As an educator he made this an institution to be proud of; as a statesman he dedicated it to the service of the commonwealth. He was invaluable in interpreting the school to the state. Thousands of citizens

understand the University better because they liked Donald Erb so much. Thousands are more friendly to higher education because in him, its exponent, they found so much to admire.

Townpeople took him to their hearts; alumni were proud that at the head of the University there was a man of stature, fit leader for a great and growing school. In the broad field of higher education the nation over, his present promise was held but the bright omen of a great future.

Totally without pretense, never consciously seeking favor, with conspicuous and unflagging attention to duty, Donald Erb won and held the accolade from the variant groups his life touched.

Notable among these were his fellow workers in other institutions in the Oregon State System of Higher Education. The tributes which have come from them are not generous gestures of sympathy to a sister institution which has suffered a hard blow, but sincere expressions of their own great loss. They know that without his honest and helpful judgment, his invariable fair play, his discernment of the indivisibility of educational service to the state, their own tasks will be harder.

I know that students on this campus thought of him not as one of towering stature whose high achievements they could admire without hoping to approach, but as comrade and leader, whose qualities they could wholly respect, and yet hope to emulate. No one was ever abashed or overawed in his presence, for here was one who could understand and help.

I shall always think of him as an exceptional person because of his very lack of spectacular qualities. He had none of the flashing irregularity of the lonely genius. As educator, statesman, and friend, he personified that rare balance, that combination of excellence which makes for the rounded whole of a splendid personality. I am confident that every student going out from this institution is better for the bright inspiration of the person and character of Donald Erb, scholar and gentleman.

He was so fine, so useful, so human, so gay, so full of vigor and the joy of living, we cannot think of him as gone from Oregon, where his work was only well begun—gone from the woods and fishing streams, from the campus and tree-lined streets of Eugene which he loved. Why must death love such a shining mark—strike such a signal blow? In our sorrow we cry, "Lycidas is dead ere his prime, and he hath left no peer."

But Donald Erb would be the first to rebuke us for the idleness of tears and the futile luxury of lamentation and reproach. I believe he

would say, "If you loved me, cherish and comfort those I loved; confirm and strengthen the spirit of truth, unity, and concord, of discipline and service which I fostered here; make the University the great institution for which I worked and dreamed."

We who call ourselves moderns and realists are a little embarrassed by contemplation of spiritual strength. But in these tragic years of decision we have had bitter evidence that human life is pitifully expendable, that work of human hands overnight may become but valiant dust. We have learned, painfully and reluctantly, that in the hour of trial it is only the imponderables which endure.

I believe that the spirit of Donald Erb will endure on this campus. I have felt it in the days following his death in the attitudes which have been brought to his unfinished tasks. I believe it will sustain you in the readjustment ahead. I know it will guide and govern us who must seek one worthy to be his successor.

His last appearance before the Board was in behalf of a Student Union building which should serve as heart and center of the life of the campus. How right and proper it would be if that project could be consummated in his name and in his memory, as a fitting memorial to him and to gallant and useful young men like him, who have died in the service of their country.

But the worthiest memorial this University can raise to Donald Erb will not be built with hands. In every great university there burns a "pure and gem-like flame." It lights the way for the never-ending quest for truth. It is the symbol of zeal for the general spread of knowledge and understanding, to the end that all men, everywhere, may be possessed of the strength and freedom which come from the enriched mind and fervent heart. President Erb tended and augmented that flame on this campus. He was a present part of that gallant company of faithful people who know that truth is imperishable, and that, as one would seek eternity, he must become ally and partner of truth.

As this University, bondsman for the light of learning, keeps the flame alive and bright, the ideals which pervade classroom and campus, the zeal which inspires students, the faith and ardor which give heart to faculty will draw strength and comfort from the living spirit of Donald Erb. A memorial worthy of him will be built as this University fulfills its high destiny in the commonwealth.

Donald Erb will live in the hearts of his friends ever young and strong, useful and forward looking. "Death gives him sleep, eternal youth and immortality." Our grief is too new, the wound yet too raw,

to bring to our sorrow the consolations of philosophy. Perhaps, when time has eased this fresh sense of pain, we shall be able to feel that it is not unmitigated tragedy that he will never know diminution of power. For him "decay's effacing fingers will never sweep the lines where beauty lies."

Not now, but one day, perhaps, we may be able to think of Donald Erb's magnificent, unfulfilled potentialities, and say, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

BEATRICE WALTON SACKETT

Vice-President of the Oregon State Board of Higher Education.

DONALD MILTON ERB

Commemorative Verses

Part I

WHEN grief seems all the meaning that is left
In the wide world, and darkness everywhere,
And we but think of how a heart is cleft
And feed to sickness on our own despair,
It is his voice that calls on us to know
The truth of him triumphant through our woe.

Look to the hills he loved: they are not bowed
With sorrow; and the streams that knew him well
Still flash their waters, clean, and strong, and proud
Through the green valleys, for what they have to tell
Of him is not a sad thing but the praise
Of one who was a man in all his days.

There is a nook where alders drop a shade
On Mason Bend—it is a place he loved—
And thinking of him there, sorely afraid
Of what my heart will say, I stand reproved,
For those great waters sing with one clear voice
“We gave him joy you must not wrong—rejoice!”

So is it everywhere we follow now
The ways he went: a brightness lingers there
Like the clear light that is upon the brow
Of one who dreams and all his dreams are fair,
Or like the splendor left in heaven afar
Along the pathway of a fallen star.

We see that brightness and our grief is still;
We will not dim it even with our tears,
But, like the streams he loved and every hill,
Be proud and speed him onward through the years
In the full beauty of his stainless fame
And all the goodness that was in his name.

Part II

But there are other meanings he would make
Us know and not forsake,
Pointing ahead to a bright, distant goal;
Calling us from our sleep
Of grief to rise and keep
Sternly the battle stations of the soul.

For he was ever a soldier in the fight
For freedom, truth and light,
The war from whose hard stress is no relief.
Fronting the battle blast
He shook not but stood fast,
Ah, steadfastly, a soldier and our Chief!

A story from the past comes back to me,
And there it is I see
The symbol of his vision and his powers;
The symbol of the goal
He set for his own soul
The splendid thing that knit his life to ours.

The story of Prometheus who gave
The fire that burns to save
Man from the gloom of ignorance and sin.
Knowledge he gave, and love,
And, mightiest to move
The heart toward heaven, beauty the prize to win.

And Jove the treacherous and all-evil one
Chained him where never the sun
Warms the deep frost on bitter Caucasus;
And there he hangs today
Tortured as none can say,
The Good who fights the all-evil One for us.

The Chief whom we pay tribute to this hour
Led us with quiet power
To where that awful Hero warms the stone.
"Reach up and set him free,"

That was his word: "Let be
Good on the earth, its king, and good alone!"

Clad in his strength he stands beside us now,
Our Chief, with lifted brow,
And chants with us the Eternal Hymn of Light;
The faith that will not break
Though earth's foundations shake,
That rocks the throne of darkness with its might:

Part III

"Still hangs Prometheus on the bitter stone
Shrouded in cloud so that we cannot see
Even his feet;
Flesh of our flesh they are, bone of our bone,
For we, for we
Are all of us his brothers waiting here
As we have watched and waited year by year
And shall until—oh faith how wildly sweet!—
Our hands shall break his chains and set him free.

"We know he hangs there by the blood that drips
Out of the cloud and by the cruel sound
Ever of wings;
We know the agony upon his lips
And look around
One to another at what our fingers hold,
Salves for his wounds and waters clean and cold,
And turn away, knowing them useless things,
And stare at the red drops upon the ground.

"He died in Greece thousands of years ago;
In Rome amid the torches and the din.
By sword and flame
He tasted every death that man can know.
And when the thin
Cry of sick children in a later day
Came to him from deep jungles far away
He woke and rose and answered to his name
And bared his arm and let the fever in.

"He died wherever evil called for blood,
Wherever beauty perished in the blaze
Of maddened lust;
Wherever truth, shieldless and lovely, stood
At quiet gaze
Upon the spears that thronged against her breast,
He struck some down and gathered in the rest
And made her live through all our yesterdays.

"But who shall tell us where today he dies,
Each hour, each minute, smitten to his knees
Yet fighting on!
On all the world's wide lands, in all her skies,
In all her seas
He stands with freemen in the time of fears,
His thousand names one name in all their ears,
And, as they fall and one by one are gone,
He dies—and lives—the one great soul of these.

"Still, still he hangs upon the bitter stone.
Oh, lift your heads up, brothers, and be proud
And unafraid!
Though Jove has wooed him with a golden throne,
And though aloud
The evil sirens have sung songs to him
Of joys in heaven, for each tortured limb
Salves and sweet rest, he hangs there undismayed
And keeps his trust there steadfast in the cloud.

"It is not Hercules will set you free,
Prometheus—can you hear us in the gloom?
Not Hercules
Nor any strong one, but your brothers, we
Who in the womb
Took the same dream that chains you to your stone
And that great faith—oh, terribly alone,
Hear us as now we speak it on our knees—
That all your million graves are not your tomb!"

ERNEST GEORGE MOLL

Professor of English, University of Oregon.

DONALD MILTON ERB

A Friend of the Students

STUDENTS of Oregon have lost a great friend, a friend who was not only ready at all times to listen to their pleas, but also to give them advice that could come only from the experience such as he had. We all remember the many times that he asked the students to come directly to him when they needed help in working out the solution of their problems. Those of us who worked with Dr. Erb know how very sincere he was in saying this. His office was always open to the students, and he was never too busy to pause in his work to talk over their difficulties.

It was his frankness and honesty that made the students value his opinion and advice. They knew that he would give them a straightforward answer to any question they wanted to ask. We were aware that he was always anxious to have the students' opinion and to have them think for themselves. We all know that he did everything possible to direct the students' interests into those channels which would mold them into useful and intelligent citizens. He promoted those activities which would not only be of interest to the students, but would give them an opportunity for self-expression and formation of worthwhile ideas.

He recognized our youthful desires for fun and yet knew that society regarded us as adults. He knew that most students are great dreamers, and so impressed upon us the fact that the world will demand more than dreams, that we must be "doers" as well. He consistently reminded us that we were attending an educational institution, and yet knew that an education included more than facts we could learn from books. Certainly he wanted us to learn, but to learn to know ourselves, our abilities, our capacities, and our interests. For, as he said, the mark of a truly educated person is his ability to spend an enjoyable evening alone with himself.

Such ideas are barren if they are not incorporated into the very life of their sponsor. Dr. Erb lived his ideas. As President of this University he was to us an embodiment of the ideals of truth and reason for which our institution exists. Yes, Dr. Erb was a great man, a great leader, and a great friend of the students.

He is not entirely lost to us, however; for his ideals will remain a

part of our campus life long after we have left it. His tangible achievements will go down in the history of the University and will be remembered. His hopes, his words, and his actions left an indelible impression upon our institution, so that far in the future these last five years will be remembered as a period of tremendous importance in Oregon's development.

But Dr. Erb's influence has extended far beyond the general body of the University. It has affected each one of us. It is not a momentary impression that he gave us. It is not something we can forget as we walk off the University campus. He showed us a way of life. He taught us how to live and for what we are living. These are the influences that will remain in the minds of his students.

Not many men can pass on such inspiration to their followers; for to do this one must not only be a great man with great ideas, but also a true friend. It is in the heart that true friendship remains and is treasured. It will be in the hearts of his students that Dr. Erb will live as a friend. We cannot forget how he called us each by name; how he always had a word of encouragement for us; and how he was never too busy to help us laugh off the troubles of the day. These are small things to remember, and yet we know they are all part of his greatness and of his outstanding service to us.

We cannot now thank Dr. Erb in full measure for all he has done. Therefore we feel that the most suitable memorial that we can establish for a man who has been so generous with his time, his energy, and his efforts is to perpetuate his standards in the University and within our own lives. Since these standards have already become an integral part of our University, we, as students, dedicate ourselves to their continuance as our memorial to Donald Milton Erb.

NANCY AMES

President of Associated Students, University of Oregon.

DONALD MILTON ERB

In Memoriam

RESOLVED, That this faculty hereby testifies to the severity of the loss that has been suffered by the University, and by each of us, in the untimely death of President Donald M. Erb. We held him in the highest professional esteem and warmest personal affection. His association among us, from the beginning, exemplified a perfection of human relationship often aspired to but seldom attained. When he came among us first as a young man the outgoing seniors declared him the most inspiring and intellectually rewarding of their teachers. When he was at Oregon the second time it was as professor of economics and it was then we took his measure as a man, as a scholar, and as a friend. In 1937 we had the opportunity of participating actively, to a degree unusual in American universities, in the selection of our own presiding officer. Our choice was Donald Erb. When he came among us for the third time, it was as President.

He was able, impeccably just, and unfailingly kind. He had the qualities of leadership—foresight, courage, decisiveness. His mind was quick, his sympathies were broad, and he grasped the values in all the varied disciplines of the University. He formed close ties with innumerable people, and used their knowledge and their insights in integration with his own. When the war came, he stood unshaken, lending confidence to those less steady than himself.

He was only forty-three when he suddenly died. Our faith in him, and our affection for him, were deeper and richer than they had been six years before when, of our own free choice, we had asked that he become our leader.

*Resolution adopted by the faculty of the
University of Oregon, January 5, 1944*