

DEATH OF THE "QUIET OBSERVER"

Erasmus Wilson, known to several generations of newspaper readers as the "Quiet Observer" is dead. The end came on January 14, 1922, and the accounts of his life and death which appeared in the daily newspapers, were read by thousands of his friends and admirers, as well as by the members of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, of which he was a Director, with mournful interest. On January 17th the funeral service was held in the First Presbyterian Church of this city, and before a vast assemblage gathered there the pastor, Rev. Dr. Maitland Alexander, preached the funeral service which was a remarkable discourse and is printed herewith.

Dr. Alexander spoke as follows:

There are many ways of leaving an impress on that part of the history of a city in which we are permitted to live. An impress is left by one who may have the genius of government, or the secret of a splendid philanthropy, or the power of a well administered wealth or that rarer ability, to make a lasting impression by character, optimism, kindliness, and the bestowal of loyal friendship to those who sought it. Such an impression has been left on this community by Erasmus Wilson. He went in and out among us and lived the simple quiet life of a gentleman of the Old School. He gathered, during the long years of his life here, hosts of friends, but his voice was never raised in anger, his pen was never dipped in unkindness, his hand was never withheld from those who needed it. As he passes out from us, though perhaps we did not realize it, he has left an impression which those of his day will not soon forget. It is not important for us to review the details of the life of Erasmus Wilson or to follow him through all its long years. The farm, that home of so many great men, knew him. Who knows but that as David's, greatness began as he cared for his sheep on the plains of Bethlehem, so Erasmus Wilson may have gotten some of his depths of insight and idealism from his early farmer days. The army, that school of mighty men, knew him, and we may perhaps find the secret of his rugged strength in the discipline of war. For 50 years he lived among journalists and newspaper men and in that 50 years

he looked with keen eyes on his fellowmen. He saw their faults, but also their virtues; he saw their meannesses and hypocracies and phariseeism but also their generosity, kindness and good intentions. He had a balanced mind, but always wore the spectacles of toleration and charity when he estimated and wrote about people or their foibles or idiosyncrasies. I feel so keenly his appreciation of the simple life unassuming, unostentatious that I am compelled to limit myself to the plainest and most unadorned references to his great qualities as a man and a citizen.

1. I think there stands out preeminently in Erasmus Wilson his love for his fellow-men. No man could write as he did or serve as he did or have friends as he did unless he loved folks. This is a God-like thing in any man. The love of people is a marvelous asset in any life, and Erasmus Wilson had it fully developed. No one passed that he was not interested in what they were thinking or planning or fearing or longing for. I ran into him on Liberty street recently when I was thinking about something, and when I apologized he smiled and said, "I was forgiven if I would tell him what I was thinking about," that nothing interested him more than the thoughts of people. This kept him young, fresh in his thinking, interested in life and gave him as well a great heart of sympathy.

2. Erasmus Wilson was an idealist, a dreamer of dreams in a very materialistic and rationalistic age. A newspaper life is not conducive to either spirituality or idealism, but he had them both. Forests spoke to Erasmus Wilson, the whisper of the wind in the pines, the ripple of the brook over the stones, the smell of the clover in the fields, the shining of the stars, or the roar of the ocean, even the silences were vocal to him. I have wondered what they said to him. They must have spoken of his Father and his care and wisdom and love and power and goodness. They spoke of this old world and of the patent beauty and peace and fragrance underneath its student voices and the shame and grimness of its sin. Erasmus Wilson was full of sentiment, not the maudlin cheap variety, but a sentiment which is the natural product of a man with a big heart.

To me, one of the most interesting and helpful things

in our friend's life, and which gave his writings the widest popularity, was his ability to take men back to the scenes of their early life, before the dew was off their early days and before they became jaded and cynical and toilworn. Before they crowded into cities and were contaminated by the city's life. A few lines from his pen and the old farm appeared—the well, the orchard, the garden, the chickens and cows, the figure in the sunbonnet, the old mare and the yellow corn, watermelons—and to thousands the cares of the city life dropped off and they were boys again. So to many his writings became an oasis in the wilderness, a spring in the desert at which they drank and renewed their youth.

I should never call Erasmus Wilson a philosopher. He lived on faith too much for that. Faith in God and faith in man. If I should give him a name it would be that of a doctor of the soul, who with skillful hands and kindly pen made life easier, and God nearer and career higher, and hopes more beautiful. A man has to live in something else besides a philosophical atmosphere to be what he was.

It is a sad thing when young life is cut off in its prime. It is a glorious thing when a man reaches 80 years with the harvest of splendid life gathered, and a clear conscience, and a host of friends to bid farewell as he pushes out on the ebbing tide into the ocean of a boundless eternity.