

Preserved Smith

July 22, 1880 — May 15, 1941

Preserved Smith, who was proud to be the tenth member of his line to bear the name Preserved, was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, on July 22, 1880. His father, Henry Preserved Smith, an ordained Presbyterian minister and a distinguished Hebrew and Old Testament scholar, suffered for his enlightened views by being brought to trial and then dismissed from his office for heresy. The harsh experience like the scholarly pursuits of the father made a deep impression on the son, in whose own writings in due course erudition and broad tolerance were to be happily combined. In 1897, after a preparatory year at Lawrenceville, Preserved Smith entered Amherst College, and in 1901 he received his Bachelor's degree. The next six years he spent partly in graduate study at Columbia University, partly as an instructor in Political Science at Williams College. He then returned to Amherst for seven years as a Fellow in History. During the session 1919-20 he lectured at Harvard University and two years later he came to Cornell first as lecturer, and then as Professor of Medieval History. In 1931 his title was changed to Professor of History.

From 1907, when his doctoral dissertation, *A Critical Study of Martin Luther's Table-talk*, was published, Preserved Smith for many years concentrated his main interest on the religious and intellectual history of the sixteenth century. In 1911 there appeared the *Life and Letters of Martin Luther*, a book which attained a second edition only three years later. There followed, in 1920, *The Age of the Reformation*, which has since been used widely as a college textbook and is still perhaps the best general survey of the subject in English. His profound admiration for Erasmus found special expression in a *Life of Erasmus* (1923) and in a *Key to the Colloquies of Erasmus* (1927). Always a man of wide intellectual interests, he now turned his attention to a broader field, no less than a *History of Modern Culture*, which he planned to complete in four volumes. The first appeared in 1930, the second, which carried the story down to the later part of the eighteenth century, in 1934. He was actively engaged on the third volume when, in the autumn of 1940, he was stricken down by the illness from which he was never to recover. In addition to these larger works he contributed at various times articles to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the *New International Encyclopaedia* and reviews to American and European journals.

By his studies in the period and on the leaders of the Reformation, Preserved Smith won notable recognition from scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. He was awarded the degree Doctor of Letters by Muhlenberg (1922) and by Amherst College (1927), and he was for a number of years a valued member of the Advisory Board of Editors of

the *American Historical Review*. His last and most ambitious work was intended for a wider educated public. Even though it may be vulnerable to criticism by specialists on points of detail, it was a remarkable undertaking for one man to attempt, and the two published volumes will always stand out as an impressive achievement.

Somewhat retiring by nature, Preserved Smith nevertheless won the respect and affection of his students. He was perhaps most successful in his more advanced classes, and several of his graduate students now occupy responsible positions in important universities. He was always a loyal and valued colleague, who had at heart the interests of the University as a whole and of the department of which he was a distinguished member. His death has left a gap in the University community which will not easily be filled. His many friends will long remember him as a man of liberal views with a gift of dry humour, a lover of landscape, literature, and music, and a kindly and courteous host.