

Charles Henry Hull

Goldwin Smith Professor of American History

September 29, 1864 — July 15, 1936

Charles Henry Hull was born in Ithaca, September 29, 1864. He graduated from Cornell University in 1886, was appointed Assistant Librarian in 1889, and the year following went to Germany, where he studied economics and history for two years, receiving the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Halle in 1892. Returning to Cornell as Instructor in Political and Social Institutions, he was appointed Assistant Professor of Political Economy in 1893, Professor of American History in 1901, and Goldwin Smith Professor of American History in 1912. He retired from active service in 1931, in excellent health and in the prime of his intellectual powers, only to be prostrated by an obscure and painful disease which he endured with great fortitude until his death, July 15, 1936.

Residing virtually all his life in the place of his birth, Professor Hull's activities were identified, in a singularly happy and useful way, with the City of Ithaca and Cornell University, both of which he served untiringly and to their great advantage. His knowledge of men and things, his sound judgment, and his integrity in thought and conduct made it inevitable that honors and responsibilities should be incessantly thrust upon him. He served as Secretary of the University Faculty, as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and as Faculty representative on the Board of Trustees. His knowledge and love of books, and his competence in the purchase and care of them, was of incalculable assistance to those in charge of the library. He was one of the founders and the first president of the Co-operative Society. He served as president of the Town and Gown Club, and was one of those who did most to make it an agreeable and a useful meeting place for faculty members and townsmen. He served as Vice President of the Ithaca Community Chest, as President of the Hospital Association, as a member of the Ithaca Board of Education, as a Director of the Chamber of Commerce and of the Cornell Library Association. It would be difficult to name a man who, so unobtrusively and with so little self-seeking, was so incessantly and so competently occupied with the practical affairs of the community and the university which he loved.

Although immersed in practical affairs, Professor Hull always regarded teaching as the first of his obligations. Countless men and women throughout the country will remember him as a teacher and a friend. They will remember that he was exacting in his requirements, unerring in detecting and caustic in exposing slipshod or dishonest effort. They will remember still better the acute intelligence, the vivid personality of the man, the genuine interest he took in their work, the time he freely gave in helping them to do it well. Best of all, they will remember

that he was their friend as well as their teacher, that he always met them as individuals, without aloofness or condescension, and that no one was ever more warmly sympathetic, or more ready with substantial aid, when they came to him for advice in any personal trouble.

As a scholar, Professor Hull achieved high distinction. He was one of those who can acquire wide and exact knowledge, and who possess as a native endowment that critical insight, that constructive imagination, and that sympathetic understanding which, applied to knowledge, lead to wisdom. His edition of *The Economic Writings of Sir William Petty*, published when he was thirty-four years of age, was at once pronounced by competent critics, in Europe and America, to be in its kind a masterpiece without blemish. The dominant characteristic of his mind was an insatiable intellectual curiosity—the desire to know what is true in order to understand what is possible and desirable to be done. “I am inclined to think,” he once said, “that there are no uninteresting subjects, there are only uninterested people.” By virtue of a happy union of erudite learning and an analytical intelligence of the first order, he could find any subject interesting by disclosing its essential nature and its significant relations. Whether in the study occupied with books, or among men occupied with affairs, he was ever engaged in research in the original and best sense of that term— engaged in searching more profoundly into the truth of alleged facts, into the validity of accepted conclusions.

We admired Professor Hull for his competence, we honored him for what he did; but we loved and revered him for what he was. We loved him for his sincerity, for his unflinching courtesy and kindness, for his indefeasible integrity. We loved him for the serenity with which he met good and evil fortune, for the subtle humor that disarmed contentiousness, for the ironic understatement that deflated high claims, for the instinctive generosity that promoted good will. We shall remember him as he went about among us, never idle, yet never hurried, and ever ready to lend himself to our necessities. Those of us whose work brought us into close association with him can never forget how free we always were to consult him on any subject, simple or recondite, that might concern us. We shall not forget the genuine modesty with which he would first of all assure us that he knew very little about the matter; nor forget that he would then, in his calm and leisurely manner, in sentences elaborate and unconfined, sinuously intricate and infinitely qualified, set before us a reticulated pattern of relevant facts and of the circumstances that occasioned them, from which there would emerge the conclusions that seemed to him tentatively tenable. Nor shall we forget that he would then sincerely apologize for not being able to be of any real assistance to us. Least of all shall we forget how all but impossible it was to come away from such conferences without having our knowledge increased from his store, our insight quickened by his criticism, our judgment fortified and our wisdom deepened by the easy play of his profound and flexible intelligence.

Those who speak of Charles Henry Hull have no need to recall the precaution *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*. In his life as in his death, as a scholar and as a colleague, as a man and as a citizen, above all as a friend, there is nothing but good that can be said or will be remembered of him. He was a man whose character and conduct challenged pessimism and engendered courage by exhibiting, consistently and in rare perfection, those qualities of intelligence and good will that are essential to a life that is at once wisely ordered and memorable.

Source: Fac. Rec. p. 1949 Resolutions of the Trustees and Faculty of Cornell University, January, Nineteen Hundred And Thirty-Seven

Retired: June 1931 Fac. Rec. p. 1726