

# Frank Thilly

Professor of Philosophy

— Dec. 28, 1934

In the death of Professor Frank Thilly the University has lost one of its most revered teachers and the community one of its best loved members.

Professor Thilly was twice connected with Cornell University, as Fellow of the Sage School of Philosophy and as Instructor, in 1891-93, and as Professor of Philosophy from 1906 until his death. As a young man, at a time when European training was less common than it now is, he brought to America the sound tradition of philosophical scholarship which he learned from the great teachers of Germany and notably from Kuno Fischer. His eleven years of service at the University of Missouri had a permanent influence on the standards of higher education in the Middle West. He returned to Cornell with a rich experience gained both in that University and in the two years of his professorship at Princeton.

His main concern, as a teacher and as a member of many faculty committees, was to center attention upon the essential values of education. This was manifest in the policies which he advocated as a member of the Faculty and as Dean of his College, and in his activities outside the University. With him the freedom of teaching and the perfect democracy of the intellectual life were the roots of every thought and every act. It was this conviction which led him to take an active part in the founding of the American Association of University Professors, of which he was national president.

The breadth and the accuracy of his learning made him a notable figure in his profession. By his translations he made accessible to readers of English some of the best works of German philosophical scholarship. To the leading American and European philosophical journals he contributed, for a long period of years, searching reviews of current works and authoritative articles on a wide range of topics. He was editor of the *International Journal of Ethics*, associate editor of *Kantstudien*, and one of the editors of the *Philosophical Review*, to which he was a contributor from its first number. His *Introduction to Ethics* and his *History of Philosophy* not only raised the standard of instruction in those parts of his subject in which he was especially interested but also displayed his devotion to truth and opened to many the way of understanding in a difficult science. It was his effort largely which led to the founding of the American Philosophical Association, of which he was president. His teaching was marked by a wealth of knowledge, but it was informed also by a winning and beautiful personality. His courses

exerted a lasting influence on the lives of many students, and of those who owed their professional training to him many have risen to important posts.

In him the cultivation bred of humane studies and the urbanity drawn from a cosmopolitan experience united with the simplicity of innate democracy to form a nature that embodied the best of the American spirit. His honesty of thought and deed, his industry and persistence in all good causes, and his aspiration toward the highest ends are built into the universities in which he taught, into his profession, and into the characters of those who studied with him. His gentleness and humor, his gaiety of spirit, and his singular charm are a green memory in the minds of many friends.

*Source: Fac. Rec., p. 1870-73 Resolutions of the Trustees and Faculty of Cornell University, February, Nineteen Hundred And Thirty-Five*