

GRAHAM TAYLOR, CLASS OF 1870

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“GOOD Neighbor, Unfaltering Citizen, Social Scientist, Pioneer on Social Frontiers,” with these words a panel of distinguished Chicago educators and well known citizens dedicated to Graham Taylor in June 1937 “The Chicago Local Merit Award,” sponsored by the Chicago Rotary Club, which selected the panel.

A few years earlier, Graham Taylor, in the foreword to his autobiography, *Pioneering on Social Frontiers*, published in 1930 by the University of Chicago Press, had written:

To have lived while the great changes of the past fifty years have been taking place, to have dwelt on the frontiers of the social order where these changes have registered their most marked effects, and to have associated with those whose lives bore the waymarks of the trend of events, has been the experience of a life lived over in retrospect.

Born in 1851 into a family faithful to the traditions of the Dutch Reformed Church of America, in which ancestors of both his parents had ably served as ministers, Graham Taylor was brought up in Philadelphia and in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in a conservative, but very warm, family. His father, William James Romeyn Taylor, and his grandfather, Benjamin Cook Taylor, had long careers in the service of the church.

After attending Rutgers Grammar School, Graham Taylor in 1866 entered Rutgers College with the Class of 1870. His education focussed on the classics. Later, he felt that his education had not prepared him for life with his fellow men or for an understanding of his environment.

Influenced by his own convictions and by his family background, he entered the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he was graduated in 1873. While there he became better acquainted with Leah Demarest, the daughter of Professor David D. Demarest of the Seminary faculty, and an older sister of William H. S. Demarest, who became President of Rutgers in 1906. After mar-

riage in 1873 to Leah, Graham Taylor at the age of twenty-two became pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church of Hopewell Junction, Dutchess County, New York, not far from Poughkeepsie. In starting pastoral work in this rural community, he was greatly helped by the friendship and wise counsel of Dr. Chester D. Hartranft, who had been his pastor during his college and seminary years. Through the strong influence of his father and of Dr. Hartranft, he began to "bridge the breach between religion and life, church and the world, by interpreting and serving both." His seven years in that community brought him in close touch with the problems of the tenant farmer and the absentee landowner. He also carried his service out beyond his church center into schoolhouses to be closer to the people.

In a very difficult, but important, decision which involved leaving the denomination in which he had been brought up and educated, he accepted a call in 1880 to a neglected downtown Congregational church in Hartford, Connecticut. Later he described this church as "having more of a history than a hope." But the change brought him into intimate relationship with the lives of people who were suffering from the civic neglect of the inner city. From people of many different backgrounds and experience, and also from a wide range of environments, he learned much of the philosophy on which his life work was built.

His pioneer social service there impressed the faculty of the Hartford Theological Seminary, of which Dr. Hartranft was then President, and brought him the offer of a Professorship in "Practical Theology." This he accepted on condition that he could develop field work for his students through his continuing service to his church. His great ability to interpret vividly his first hand experiences brought him many invitations to share in religious and educational conferences long before the field of social work began to develop as a profession. His new position gave him the opportunity to travel, and to meet outstanding people throughout the country, from whom he learned much about progress in civic services and in religious and educational institutions.

In 1892 the Congregational Chicago Theological Seminary offered him the opportunity to develop a new department to be called "Christian Sociology," the first such department in any theological

seminary. After much deliberation, he accepted this offer with the condition that he have liberty to plan his own courses and to initiate field work for the students. He also asked that he have the "opportunity to live and work among the masses of the people, bringing his students into actual contact with their fellow men."

He had read of Jane Addams and her work in the heart of Chicago, and had visited her at Hull House on one of his trips west. He was overwhelmed by the complexity of life in that neighborhood with its teeming population of immigrants from many countries abroad, and by the city's lack of concern for sanitation and housing, as well as by the serious unemployment and the industrial exploitation of cheap labor and child labor.

He became convinced that only by living in such a community and sharing its hazardous life with neighbors, could one learn at first hand the great problems of family life in a crowded cosmopolitan neighborhood. He hoped to study ways in which remedial and preventive work could be initiated by the people themselves as well as by awakening the conscience of the whole city's population. He also felt keenly that if his students were to have any influence on the people whom they would be serving, they must have the opportunity to know them in their own environment.

So in May of 1894, having been in Chicago less than two years, he moved with his wife and four children, six to sixteen years of age, into a neglected old house, to which a large two-story wood building was attached. The annex had been built to house offices after the Chicago fire of 1871. This neighborhood, close to the Chicago River, was a mile from the city's center, housing industry and a dense population of immigrants from Ireland, Norway, and Italy. During the first year he lived there, the "office" building was occupied by twelve Italian families with many children, whose peddler wagons and horses were quartered under the building.

Drawing on his own small salary to pay the rent, and with the help of students and some other hardy volunteers, Graham Taylor established what became Chicago Commons Social Settlement. It was incorporated a year later under a non-sectarian Board of Trustees, thus making it one of the very early settlements in the United States.

Its early program included a kindergarten, then regarded as new

and experimental, clubs and classes for children and young people, mothers' groups, a "Winter Night College" meeting basic educational needs for adults, and a "social action" community club of men. This group attacked entrenched civic and political local "bosses," and helped bring about some significant changes. Most spectacular was a twelve-year period of decent and honest aldermen, elected in alternate years by the bi-partisan work of Republicans and Democrats.

After seven years in this center with almost primitive living and working facilities, Graham Taylor, with a minimum of assistance, raised funds for a substantial five-story building, providing for a resident group of twenty workers and family quarters, and adequate space to meet neighborhood needs. Through constant study of the community and through participation with its various organizations, Chicago Commons has helped those of differing backgrounds to work together for the common good. It has helped raise the standard of living for families and for neighborhood life. The program has always been flexible in order to meet the changing needs of the times and the ever-changing neighborhood life.

From this practical base Graham Taylor began the broad service which had widespread influence on many educational, civic and religious agencies working for better understanding between those of differing points of view or methods of work. His contribution, through the years, to the educational work of the Chicago Theological Seminary was recognized when in 1926 the Assembly Hall in its new building adjoining the University of Chicago campus, was named Graham Taylor Hall. Participating in its dedication ceremony were the Protestant Chairman of the Seminary Board, a prominent Jewish philanthropist, and the Roman Catholic Mayor of Chicago, whose political career began as alderman in the old Commons neighborhood.

To share with others his experiences, and to publicize similar ventures springing up throughout the country, Graham Taylor published from 1896 to 1905 a monthly magazine called *The Commons*, which gained a national circulation. It later was merged with the New York magazine *Charities*, and became the influential magazine of social and civic welfare as *The Survey* and the *Survey Graphic*, on the editorial boards of which he continued to serve.

At the invitation of Victor F. Lawson, publisher of the Chicago *Daily News*, he wrote a weekly column under the heading "By Graham Taylor," which appeared every Saturday on the editorial page from 1903 to 1937. It became a current commentary on a wide range of industrial, political, social and civic topics during those decades.

Keenly aware that some sort of training was essential for those who were struggling to help people and communities solve their problems, Graham Taylor accepted the offer of backing by President Harper of the University of Chicago to plan and teach courses in its downtown center for those employed in welfare, correctional, and health services. After five years, from 1903 to 1908, of such courses under a special grant from President Harper and later under the Board of Trustees of Chicago Commons, Graham Taylor founded the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy which from 1908 to 1920 developed an organized course of training for those entering the social welfare field, as well as short courses for those already at work. He secured the services of Julia C. Lathrop, who developed a research department to collect and study the basic facts needed for subsequent educational, organizational, and legislative development. This work was ably carried on when Sophonisba P. Breckinridge and Edith Abbott joined the faculty of the school. In 1920 their educational and research work was carried by them into the curriculum of the University of Chicago, where it became the Graduate School of Social Service Administration. Today the School is housed in its beautiful new building on the campus of the University. A large classroom has, at the request of a donor to the building fund, Edward L. Ryerson, been named in honor of Graham Taylor.

In many effective ways, Graham Taylor contributed his knowledge and services to municipal, state and national boards and commissions on which he was asked to serve. Among these were the Municipal Voters League of Chicago, which from 1897 on helped "drive the grey wolves from the City Council"; and the Vice Commission appointed by the Mayor in 1910, which after competent study and investigation led to the abolition of the wide-open "Red Light" district, which had enjoyed flagrant police protection for years. During his service on the Illinois Mining Commission, ap-

pointed by the Governor of Illinois, there occurred the Cherry Mine Disaster in 1909, in which 274 men and boys lost their lives. Graham Taylor personally shared with that small community the sorrow of this tragedy, and through the work of the Commission helped achieve the enactment of stricter mining regulations. He also worked toward the establishment of other industrial safety measures, as well as for the establishment of the State Free Employment offices.

In 1917-18 he served as chairman of the local Selective Service Board, which was located at Chicago Commons. There twelve thousand men were registered, the majority of whom, however, proved to be alien, or had dependents, or were ineligible for service for other reasons. Later, after the war, he worked with the agency concerned with the welfare of returning soldiers.

In addition to service on various church commissions, he participated in the discussions which led to the formation of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, which brought together the different Protestant denominations for cooperative effort. In 1914 he was elected President of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections—now the National Conference of Social Work. In 1917 he became President of the National Federation of Settlements and continued for years as a member of its Board. His many talks in the early Chautauqua gatherings throughout the country and in other civic, social and religious conferences vividly impressed those who heard him, and inspired many to initiate and carry on work in their own communities.

His book *Religion in Social Action*, published in 1913, used in its title a term which is much in the forefront of the thought of today. His autobiography, *Pioneering on Social Frontiers*, was published by the University of Chicago Press in 1930, which also published in 1964 a biography entitled *Graham Taylor, Pioneer for Social Justice*, by Louise C. Wade. The collection of his writings and papers is on file in the Newberry Library of Chicago, a research library, and is being made use of by historians today.

H. Paul Douglas, in the issue of the magazine *Social Action* dedicated to "Graham Taylor, Prophet of Democracy" in February 1939, wrote:

Graham Taylor's originality was of the authentic sort, simple, objective, humble, experimental, always hopeful. And after all, these are the abiding

qualities, whatever changes circumstances may dictate in technique or organization.

Graham Taylor summed up his own life philosophy in 1930 in these words:

The goodwill to understand one another,
to interpret misunderstood attitudes and situations,
to reconcile and be reconciled to differences
of taste and temperament, race and religion,
heritage and aspiration,—and through service and sacrifice
to promote the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

His influence extended far beyond the years of his life which ended in September 1938, and his fundamental concerns are built into much service by those who are facing up to the difficult problems in the world of today.