

Philip Green Wright, Double Jumbo and Inventor of IV Regression

Remembrance by Rosalind Wright

I would like to thank all who planned and contributed to this celebration of my grandfather's contribution to econometrics - a phase of his life in which I had no part.

So I shall comment on another aspect: a young child's best friend for ten years. I had managed to seriously injure myself, age 1 ½, on the eve of my parents departure for the Near East (as it was then known.) In a leg cast and generally miserable I was left with my grandparents for several months. After weeks of tending to a howling tot my grandfather could write his niece:

Every morning I take her down in the Ford to the end of our drive when I get milk. This makes her supremely happy. Neither she nor I would miss this little ride together for anything. When I come home after work she hears the car coming up the hill and shouts "ders bapa" and when I stop opposite the kitchen she is at the window with great eyes at a pitch of high excitement.

I think she regards her grandfather and grandmother as her favorite toys, and she takes pretty much all our time and makes a lot of work.

But after all I am beginning to feel that when Quincy and Louise come back we shall have to tell them to get another baby for we are going to keep Rosalind.

When I see Rosalind in her sleep ... duties on sugar and oils, foreign policies and even League of Nations seem rather trivial.

Who could not reciprocate such love, I did for the next nine years during long visits to Forest Glen

My grandparents were gentle people with endless patience for the young and a deep desire to help them discover the natural world around them. When we drove from Washington station to Forest Glen Grandpa made a point of driving through the Rock Creek Park fords so we might spot the buffalo who for some reason roamed nearby. This was accompanied by a deep love of literature and learning for its own sake which was fed to me in enchanting ways.

Handwritten initials: "MFD" and "EEN" written vertically on the left margin.

Grandpa made me his assistant in tending the vegetable garden mornings before he left for work. We mourned the devastation wrought by turtles on the melons and tomatoes. – but I was allowed to keep a turtle as a pet as well as fish caught in the local stream. I was also allowed to turn the machine which separated the cookstove ash from the cinders.

Evenings meant story reading - songs as Grandpa played the piano - looking at pictures with the stereoscope and, as I grew older, going outdoors to look at the stars and learn their names and myths.

help to her,
I can only regret that Grandpa did not live long enough to explain his economic work to me – I might have understood it.

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Remembrances by Theodore P. Wright Jr.

Remarks about Philip G. Wright at Tufts University Economics Dept on occasion of his sesquicentennial, Oct.3, 2011 by Theodore P. Wright, Jr., grandson

I want first to thank Prof. Spolaore, the Economics Department and Tufts University for honoring the long neglected work of my grandfather, Philip G. Wright, a Tufts graduate of the class of 1884. The principal talks by Professors James Stock of Harvard and Joshua Angrist of MIT (will be/have been) on Wright's invention late in his career of Instrumental Variables (IV) Regression in econometrics. I want to dwell on a completely different aspect of his life, the writing of poetry.

Philip Wright published several slim volumes of poetry during his twenty years (1892-1912) of teaching at Lombard College in Galesburg, Illinois. Success did not come easily if at all. There were many rejection slips, yet he seems to have esteemed literature and poetry more than mathematics and economics which he taught and which eventually established his reputation. This perhaps reflected the classical education he received in Medford High School and Tufts College. Reputedly he could recite from memory many lines of Greek poetry. Will Provine, in his biography of Philip's eldest son, Sewall Wright, the geneticist, reports that Philip did not encourage, even deprecated his son's interest in natural history and urged him to seek a career in the humanities. Nevertheless, his own degree at Tufts (1884) was in civil engineering and his M.A.(1887) at Harvard was in Economics. (There he was a classmate of William Osgood (whose grandson, Theodore, is in our audience).

One of his poems from "The Dreamer" (Galesburg: the Asgard Press, 1906) is "The Teacher" which I think is quite autobiographical and expresses his discouragement in this period of his life, which led him courageously in 1912 to resign his secure position at Lombard and return at fifty-one to graduate school at Harvard and the study of Economics. In "The Teacher", he wrote:

"Today, in Horace, Minnie Ames, a bright girl but impertinent and somewhat lacking, as I think, in application, blundered in rendering the gerund. Twas the very thing in which I'd drilled the class the day before. So I admonished her; I said it was her duty while at college to study, and to pay attention in her classes, that she should not waste her time in idle pleasure, frivolous delights and social dissipations

as she did. "Close application is the price of sure success."

And she – for she is bold and saucy because her father is a wealthy man, perhaps, and she supposes that the college would like to get his money – looked pertly up and said, "Professor, I suppose that you- you always were attentive, when a boy?" And someone laughed. I wonder what it means? At first it seemed an idle, witless jest, for had I not been diligent and had I not ranked highest in my class, and had I not success?

Success; "the price of sure success" Why did they titter? Can it be- it never came into my mind before- But can it be, my students, whom I teach and give wise counsel to, and who, I thought with all their wilfulness, looked up to me and held my learning to some reverence, that they, my students, pity me, a poor old man, content to gnaw the husks of life while others eat the corn; As one whose life is all in half tones, neutral, colorless, without high lights or blues or crimsons, one who shrinks from the fierce joy of struggle, where fair in the open field, men meet with men, man fashion; one too timid to stake his life upon a cast, and win or lose. Do they reason well, thinking, perhaps, when I admonish them "If diligence and self restraint and application to our books lead to success like his, then we shall not be diligent nor self-denying nor too close in application to our books?"

Yes I can answer Minnie's question- yes I was ambitious when a boy at college And, for my teachers uttered then the same wise saws I utter to my classes- I believed them, and was studious and docile. I got my lessons thoroughly and had no time for frivolous amusements with the boys, made few acquaintances, I could not be distracted from my present duty; and my reward came, for I led my class and was assigned the valedictory. Within a year from that commencement, I was offered the position which I hold today. It was not much, I thought, the chair of classics in a struggling western school, but it would serve- a stepping stone, perhaps to something higher.

Forty years have passed; boys that I knew at college and despised for idleness have somehow grown, expanded, sounded life's depths and shallows and upborne upon its current have attained to posts of honor, wealth and prominence, all that the world in its rude rule of thumb has called success; and poor

boys whom I taught and helped through college have moved forward, filled their lives with deeds and now have married and are rich and prosperous. And I am where I was. Once I had an offer, but this college, founded to spread my faith, I then had learned to love and would not leave it.

Was it well? Is it success to pluck and eat? And is it empty folly to deny oneself, repress, restrain, as I have ever done? They say that all my students love me. That is something. Well, I took this place. I thought it was a stepping stone to something higher. Perhaps it is. Though I am old and gray and life flows swiftly past and though my feet will scarcely tempt again its flood, I wait the Master's summons. Ay, thou will explain.

I must stop here my meditations. It is late and I have twenty exercises to correct and then I go to rest."

But that was not to be the end of the story. We know from the main speeches of this meeting that Philip Wright escaped Lombard and entered a whole different stage of life with greater rewards and satisfactions in Cambridge and Washington. His poem inspired me to leave little Bates College in 1965 for the new State University of Albany and a career in research about India. Philip's love of poetry inspired his most notable student, Carl Sandburg, to a place in all the anthologies of American poetry, but with a style of poetry far different from his mentor's.