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Letter to Mrs. Wooten

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A letter written to Mrs. Wooten by Clarence J. Ruddy, Class of 1927.

My Dear Mrs. Wooten:

February 24, 1929.

I have only recently learned of the death of Judge Wooten. I was greatly surprised to hear of it, all the more because I had understood that he was well on the road to recovery, and that after a short sojourn in Texas, would be able to rejoin his students at Notre Dame.

Believe me, Mrs. Wooten, when I say that his death is a deep personal loss to me. I was closer to him than was perhaps any other student while I was at school, and I know exactly how my fellows regarded the Judge and how he regarded them. I shall never, so long as I live, forget the hours I spent listening to him recount his experiences, explain his theories and impart his advice. He was in every sense of the word a perfect professor, he was an inspiration to every student that was privileged to take classes from him. There was not a single student in my class (and I know this for an absolute fact) who did not love with whole heart and soul the "old Judge"—and the word "old" softly spoken, was itself expressive of the highest veneration. Not one who knew him would allow any person to speak of him in any way but in terms of highest praise. I have heard many Arts and Letters students hotly rebuked because they dared to intimate that some of their professors were more learned than Judge Wooten—and I myself have rebuked several. Every college has, I know, a professor who is especially beloved; but none has ever had one beloved so much as the Judge; around the dining tables, or smoking between classes outside the Law School, or in one another's rooms, or walking down town, law students would never tire of exchanging stories and exploits of the Judge—and the love borne by the students was fully reciprocated by him. He would do anything in the world for his "boys", and he did many many things that few professors do. He stood firm for the rights of the law school in its occasional conflicts with other colleges, and obtained for it many concessions which would not otherwise have been possible. Had it not been for him, for instance, I am sure the Annual Lawyer's Ball would not have been inaugurated. Judge Wooten, though his years at Notre Dame were not many, was, I am certain, the most ardent champion of the law school that it had ever known.

But it is not for any of these things that I shall chiefly remember Judge Wooten: my reason is one much more personal. He was the one who most encouraged me, and aided me, and found for me in founding and developing "The Notre Dame Lawyer". He worked with me ceaselessly from the day the idea was first conceived until I was graduated from law school. He made suggestions, solicited his friends, intervened with the University, corrected editorials, read proof, and wrote articles. Without him all efforts would have been futile though others worked hard, too.

You know, Mrs. Wooten, all during my life I had heard of professors who were inspirations to their students—but I never really met one until I met the Judge. He was an inspiration. In his person was summed up every single quality that makes a good, Catholic lawyer: knowledge, culture, sincerity, tolerance, kindness and piety. He was my ideal of a perfect lawyer.

Men are generally accused of sentimentality when they profess love for one another—but sentimental or not—I did love the Judge: I loved him with a fervor that was intense and a zeal that is eternal. If I could only be like him I could ask for nothing more, but would be absolutely, perfectly happy, conscious that in me reposed all of the virtues that constitute a good man. To accomplish what he has accomplished, to win the friends that he has won, to live a life like his—what more could anyone ask?

But the Judge is dead. The hours I have spent in the glow of his presence can never be repeated. I have permanently lost the most helpful friend I have ever had. He is gone—but I hope his influence survives, and remains with me until I die too. If it does, then I can do no wrong. If I ever possess a tenth of his wisdom, I shall be wiser than any person of my generation: but if I ever attain to a twentieth part of his goodness, I shall be a saint.

I do not write this letter, Mrs. Wooten to add to your sorrow; but to let you know that there are other persons who are sorrowful too, that there are hundreds of young men who loved him while he lived, and miss him when he is dead—and that of these, Mrs. Wooten, I am one.

Signed, CLARENCE J. RUDDY.

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