

In Memoriam

HON. IRA FRANCIS THOMPSON

Associate Justice of the District Court of Appeal of the State of California, 1926-1932; Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of California, 1932-1937.

At a regular session of the Supreme Court held on September 3, 1937, the following proceedings were had in honor of the memory of the late Honorable Ira Francis Thompson, Associate Justice.

Upon convening of court, G. Ellsworth Meyer, Esq., as chairman of the committee appointed by the court, presented the following memorial to Justice Thompson. He addressed the court as follows:

May It Please the Court:

The time having arrived in the divine plan when Ira Francis Thompson, late Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of California, has been called to higher duties, it is fitting and proper that we should pause to add our humble words of tribute to his memory. We cannot hope here and now to carve a monument to him. We can but point to a few of the inscriptions on the monument he himself erected by his own life and conduct. Born on a farm in Crawford County, Wisconsin, on June the 20th, 1885, he lost both his father and mother while still a baby. In the family thus deprived of parental counsel and affection there was little time for play or leisure. Thus, at an age when most boys are to be found engaged in the normal pursuits of childhood, he was performing the arduous farm labor of a grown man. As a consequence, he developed the capacity to think problems through to their logical conclusions and, having reached a conclusion, to rely upon his decision. The experience gained in those first fifteen years of his life were perhaps costly on the physical side, but they brought great compensations on the moral side. This early background

was discernible in many aspects of his character throughout his life, but in none more beautifully than in his love for growing things. He seemed to possess that subtle touch which brought forth the greenest branches and the most beautiful blossoms. Many persons present today have been guests at his home and will recall pleasant hours spent in his garden while he, with the keenest delight, discussed the progress of each planting. At the age of 15 he came from Wisconsin to Eureka, California, and began his high school education. Upon being graduated in 1904 he matriculated at the University of California at Berkeley, where he earned his own way and completed the usual six-year course of undergraduate and law studies in four years. Many of his fondest memories were of his campus days. There he met his future wife, Hilda Manning; there he established friendships which endured to the end; there he acquired a devotion to the university which never ebbed. He was admitted to the bar in 1909, and after one year's practice in Oakland came to Los Angeles to be associated with the late John F. Manning. He married and his home was blessed with a daughter, Elizabeth, and a son, John, both of whom, together with their mother, survive him. Judge Thompson early took an active interest and part in civic affairs. His reputation and ability gained him such recognition that in 1923 Governor Friend W. Richardson appointed him a judge of the Superior Court for Los Angeles County. At the ensuing final election he was retained by the largest vote accorded any of the incumbents. Such was the discharge of his duties in that high office that his appointment in 1926 as an associate justice of the District Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District, was received with the highest approbation. To this office he was also re-elected. While serving on the District Court, his display of legal ability, his concern for the common weal and the faithful discharge of his duties brought him yet further recognition, and in the latter part of 1932, less than ten years after his first appointment, the late Governor James Rolph, Jr., appointed him to a vacancy on the bench of the Supreme Court of the State of California. Thus he reached the highest court of this State at the early age of 48 years. The term to which he had been appointed expired at the next general election. It was a time of turmoil and great unrest. He faced a statewide campaign and met its rigorous requirements without slackening his work on this court. It was during

this period that he received the first mortal blow, but such was his ability and reputation that while still in the shadow of the sick room he was returned to office by an overwhelming vote which, in view of the times and the state of his health, must ever remain one of the great accolades of his career. From that time until the end, three years later, he discharged his duties under physical conditions to which only his associates and closest friends held a clue. In this period of trial, he again showed that determination which had carried him, an orphan, from that Wisconsin farm to the highest tribunal of this State. Erudite in the law and possessing a clarity of expression so marked in his opinions, he never lost the human touch. Honors in many endeavors came to him, yet he remained loyal to every associate and was always willing to go on foot and out of his way for a friend. Reticent as he was in disclosing his efforts in aiding and assisting others, yet we know few men ever helped as many as he. Ever mindful of his early struggles, he gave freely of his time and energy to assist and encourage those just starting on the road of life. Young people were his particular delight and from them and the solution of their problems he derived his greatest satisfaction. We cannot hope to enumerate the many causes to which he devoted himself. We can but note that during his six years he taught in the Law School of the University of Southern California he became a part of the life of that institution and left his impress on every student who passed through his classes, that he was a great and good influence in the student life of the University of California at Los Angeles through his work as chairman of the Board of Directors of the Masonic Clubhouse at Westwood from its inception until his passing. We know further that the members of the Delta Chi fraternity considered him their particular counselor and leader, and that by many means he had contributed to the campus life and welfare of the University of California at Berkeley, and had just completed and inaugurated a plan whereby certain deserving students might secure their education at that institution. Inadequate as this brief survey is, it suffices to intimate the breadth of the influence he wielded in the formative period in the lives of the men and women of today and tomorrow, an influence which cannot be circumscribed by time, place or eulogium. Throughout his life a dynamic devotion to God, to country, to his family and friends, combined with an uncompromising

attitude toward what he deemed right, were his particular characteristics. His passing, to our finite minds, seems all too early, yet he has left his indelible mark on the jurisprudence and life of this State, and we who knew and worked with him are the richer because he walked awhile with us.

G. ELLSWORTH MEYER, CHAIRMAN;
FRANK G. FINLAYSON,
LEO E. SIEVERT,
WARREN E. LIBBY,
LOUIS W. MYERS,
ROY V. RHODES.

Chief Justice Waste responded for the court:

At a meeting of the Bar Association of San Francisco there was presented and adopted a resolution from which we quote: "The passing of the Honorable Associate Justice Ira Francis Thompson was an event fraught with sorrow for the members of the association, because they had lost the companionship and helpfulness of a man of sympathy, learning, fairness and unimpeachable integrity, but, woven in this sorrow was the Golden Thread of Joy, because of the knowledge that they had, and in a higher sense still have, as a friend a man who lived a life of cheerful kindness and left the world better for his living in it." So beautifully do these words express the appreciation of the members of the court of the affection in which our deceased associate was held by the legal profession of the State that we appropriate them in response to the splendid tribute presented here today by the committee appointed by the court. It was, of course, to be anticipated the ceremony of today would be held. But on the morning following the evening when Mr. Justice Thompson laid down to rest in the beautiful home at Berkeley surrounded by the members of his family, only to pass in a short while into the sleep from which there is no awakening, his associates of the court sadly assembled for the usual midweek "consultation." At the request of the justices, Mr. Justice Seawell prepared a statement for the press. We feel we could not, though we tried, find words which more sincerely or more fittingly serve the purpose of this hour. We therefore choose the words then written on behalf of the court by Mr. Justice Seawell, as the court's tribute to our beloved associate, Mr. Justice Ira F. Thompson: "The members of this court were deeply saddened as they gathered in regular Thursday con-

ference to consider mortal problems upon realization that their beloved associate, Mr. Justice Ira F. Thompson, had been suddenly removed from the councils of the court by the swift hand of death. It is but our purpose here to pause for the moment to note the passing of and to pay a simple and sincere tribute to one of California's ablest jurists and a man whom we held in high esteem and affection. Upon another and appropriate occasion the bench and bar of this great commonwealth will join in paying a fitting and lasting tribute which will stand as a memorial to his judicial learning and talents and to his broad human impulses. Judge Thompson's life from early childhood to his last day was devoted untiringly to work and service. His upward course in the judicial department of the State government was meteoric in its brilliancy. In 1923 he received his first appointment to a judicial office, that of judge of the Superior Court of the County of Los Angeles. In 1926 he was promoted to a justiceship of the District Court of Appeal, and in 1932 he was selected to serve as a justice of the Supreme Court. Step by step he won his way from an honored place on the Superior Court to a place on the highest court of the State of California. Being a man of great strength of character, of unquestioned integrity, untiring industry, keen and analytical powers, fine sense of perception, and possessing a well balanced mind, he attained the highest judicial honor which the State may confer on its citizens ere he had scarcely reached the high plateau of middle life where conditions are most favorable for lasting and enduring achievements. Justice Thompson was a prodigious and indefatigable worker, and as a member of this court, even when a mortal malady was insidiously cutting down his strength, he persisted in doing more than his full share of work. It may be almost literally said that he died with a book in his hand. The day before he was mortally stricken he wrote a case which was one among his assignments. He held the confidence and respect of the people of this State, which they expressed in an overwhelming majority at the last State election in which he was a candidate. Kind and gentle and just, he passed from the scenes of a busy and active life leaving behind a good name as a heritage to his devoted wife and loving daughter and son."

Following presentation of the memorial and response, it was ordered that both be spread upon the minutes of the court, and transmitted to the family.