

Edwin Hamlin Woodruff

September 2, 1862 — July 8, 1941

Edwin Hamlin Woodruff, Professor of Law Emeritus, died in mid-summer 1941, full of years and honors. He was the son of Philo Marion and Aristona Holmes Woodruff, and was born in Ithaca in 1862. He entered Cornell University in 1878 after preparation at the Ithaca High School, and remained in attendance until 1880. Of the next six years he spent four in the service of the Astor Library in New York and of the Cornell University Library. He reentered Cornell as a law student in 1887, and in 1888 received his LL.B. degree as a member of the Law School's first class. He was admitted to the New York bar in the same year.

From 1888 to 1890 Professor Woodruff was an Instructor of English at Cornell. Thereafter he served for a year as Librarian of the Fiske Library in Florence, Italy. His next post was at Stanford University, where he was Librarian from 1891 to 1896 and Acting Professor of Law during the last three years of that period. He returned to Cornell as Professor of Law in 1896, and continued as a member of its Faculty until his death. He was Dean of the Law School from 1916 to 1921, and became Professor Emeritus in 1927.

To the teaching profession and to law students at many institutions other than Cornell, Professor Woodruff was known as the editor of case books on contracts, quasi contracts, domestic relations, and insurance. These collections, first prepared between 1894 and 1905, had a long and extensive popularity, calling for successive editions, a fourth edition of Cases on Contracts in 1925, and a third edition of Quasi Contracts in 1933. They demonstrated his rare scholarship and also his understanding of the practical needs of the student. They marked a departure from the earlier Harvard case books in that Professor Woodruff selected and presented for study the most recent significant American decisions. The importance of the historical development of a doctrine was not ignored, and when that was not expounded in his selection of opinions from recent decisions, he revealed and explained it in his footnotes. Very early in his career Professor Woodruff wrote a masterful essay on "Chancery in Massachusetts," published in Volume V of the Law Quarterly Review, in 1889. In 1898, he published his Introduction to the Study of Law.

His theory of law teaching combined the disciplinary with the informational methods, taking advantage of the best features of each and avoiding the weaknesses of both. Though he attached first importance to the student's need for mental discipline, he was practical and did not hesitate occasionally to substitute the lecture for the discussion, when he felt that certain parts of his courses justified the adoption of the former as a more effective method of widening the horizon of the student's information. Irresistibly and with aptness, drawing upon his extraordinary

erudition in many fields of knowledge, he gave his students a liberal education. His meticulously lucid expositions were lightened with a sparkling wit. His understanding of human nature gave him patience and perseverance in the classroom and instilled a confidence that drew students to his office and to his home for advice. Concerning the role which Professor Woodruff played in general University affairs the late Livingston Farrand, former President of the University, said upon the occasion of Professor Woodruff's retirement from teaching in 1927:

"I came to Cornell with all the welcome that anyone could ask. But I was bewildered. Here was a great, vigorous, active university, a great collection of colleges, charged with their own professional responsibilities and quite different from each other. It is no easy job to familiarize oneself with all the intricate details and problems that these colleges face. And one of the obligations of a new executive is as quickly as possible to find out where are the sources of sound information, and who are the persons who are able, not only to inform accurately, but who can exercise sound judgment and offer sound advice. It was a very short time before, in my survey of this University some six years ago, it was clear to me that one of the clearest sighted, one of the best informed, one of the wisest men, and one of the men whose ideals were absolutely immovable in their soundness, was the man in whose honor we are coming together. His judgment and wisdom were not confined to affairs of this school. He was an integral part of Cornell University."

Professor Woodruff charmed all with the brilliance of his conversation, which was rooted in a culture of exceptional breadth but inevitably punctuated with humor. Modest, and escaping publicity, he thrived on intimate contacts. Of these, he had an over-supply in the local friends and the stream of returning alumni who sought him out, and in an active correspondence with distinguished persons about decisions, politics, and books.

Having devoted his life to Cornell and to his students, he symbolized the Cornell Law School in the minds of those who graduated from it during the period of his service as professor and dean. Few teachers of any time or place have been so richly rewarded with the admiration and the affection of his students and his colleagues as was Professor Woodruff.