

## ERNEST BROWN SKINNER—IN MEMORIAM

Ernest Brown Skinner was born December 12, 1863, at Redfield, Ohio, and died in Madison, Wisconsin, April 3, 1935, after a brief illness of five days. He was the eldest son of a sturdy Ohio farmer. Two of his four brothers are engaged very successfully in educational or scientific work—B. O. Skinner, State Director of Education in Ohio, and C. E. Skinner, Assistant Director of Engineering in the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company.

Professor Skinner graduated at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, in 1888, and shortly afterwards married a college-mate, Adda C. Coe. Together they shared a most happy home life for forty-seven years. Three children, two daughters and a son, survive him.

For three years after graduation Professor Skinner taught at Amity College in Iowa. He was then in 1891 awarded a scholarship at Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, and began his mathematical specialization, largely under Story and Bolza. After a year his study there was broken off because of the offer of an instructorship at the University of Wisconsin. The acceptance of this offer was decisive in his career since it connected him with the institution to which he gave loyal and enthusiastic devotion for forty-three years. His service at Wisconsin was interrupted only by leave of absence for the academic year 1899–1900. By combining this with the preceding and following summer sessions at the University of Chicago, he completed successfully his work for the Ph.D. degree. His thesis bore the title *On ternary monomial substitution-groups of finite order with determinant  $\pm 1$* , and was published in the American Journal of Mathematics, vol. 25 (1902). In succeeding years he remembered with great gratitude and affection those stimulating teachers Maschke, Bolza, and Moore. The lively interest in the theory of groups which these professors inspired in him made this subject henceforth his favorite field of study. The article upon *Groups* in the last edition (1929) of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is from his pen.

In the University of Wisconsin Professor Skinner was successively promoted to an assistant professorship in 1895, to an associate professorship in 1910, to a full professorship in 1920. About 1909 he accepted the onerous task of coordinating and supervising the work in freshman mathematics in the College of Letters and Science, given in some twenty-five divisions under instructors of varied training and ability. For such supervision he was extraordinarily adapted by his sympathy and approachability, his fairness and judgment. The young instructors and graduate assistants working under him relied on his guidance and strength and steadily developed in efficiency. Instructor and student alike knew that there was a strong man at the helm to whom they could always go for advice and encouragement.

Largely because of this supervision of freshman work, Professor Skinner wrote several college textbooks: a *College Algebra* (1917) and an *Introduction to Trigonometry and Analytic Geometry* (1932). But foremost and of outstanding significance for college instruction must be placed his book, *The Mathematical Theory of Investment* issued first in 1913 and later, somewhat

revised, in 1924. This was for America a pioneer in the field called by Germans *Political Arithmetic* and was designed particularly for University students in commercial courses. It admirably met a pressing need and was given the compliment of becoming the model for other texts on the same subject.

A natural outcome of this work in technical mathematics was Professor Skinner's intense interest in the pension and annuity systems for teachers in his university and state. Upon the establishment of the University Retirement Board in 1921 he became its chairman, and he never ceased thereafter to watch with great solicitude over the pension and annuity funds for teachers of the state. Among many other important committee assignments in the university may be singled out his membership in the dean's Executive Committee in the College of Letters and Science. His judgment, human contact, and knowledge of university conditions were so indispensable to this committee that he was retained as a member from the time of first appointment in 1902 until his retirement as professor emeritus in 1934, being the sole member so retained. In the decade when the schools of the state were visited by college professors for certification under the entrance requirements of the university, he was repeatedly employed as an inspector, in which position he became by his tact and judgment more an ambassador of good will than an inspector. His tours over the state and his wide and friendly contact with a great number of freshman students made him in the State of Wisconsin the most widely known and best beloved member of the mathematical staff of the university. When the sub-committee on State Inspection and Supervision of Instruction was formed by the American Commissioners of the International Commission on the Teaching of Mathematics, Professor Skinner was appropriately selected to be the chairman of this sub-committee and wrote its report.

In 1919 Skinner was elected by the City of Madison a member of its Board of Education and fortunately served as its president during nine formative and critical years in the school system of a rapidly growing city. In this position he singularly commanded the confidence of both workingmen and scholars.

Among other connections I may mention his five years as Secretary and Editor of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, his twenty-eight-year directorship in the McCormick Theological Seminary, and his terms in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. with membership in its Judicial Commission for the years 1926-1929. He was a member of the American Mathematical Society and also of the Mathematical Association, being a regular attendant at the Chicago meetings, where he won the high regard and affection of his fellow mathematicians. Ohio University conferred on him the honorary degree of LL.D. in 1932.

The counsel and advice of Professor Skinner were much sought and always highly valued by his colleagues. Broad in sympathy and intellectual outlook, winning in personality, absolutely unselfish and dependable both as teacher and colleague, he gave his all modestly and lavishly. Most fittingly it can be said of Ernest Brown Skinner with his high ideals and robust character that he was "the type of man who makes the backbone of a university."

E. B. VAN VLECK