

## JAMES FOSDICK BALDWIN

1871 - 1950

James Fosdick Baldwin was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, in 1871. He died in Poughkeepsie, New York, on Thursday, October the fifth, 1950. During forty-four of the seventy-nine intervening years, he was a member of the Vassar College faculty in the department of history. Hence it is to a fellow gildsman of long service that we now pay respect and honor.

As Mr. Baldwin, setting about his most recent task of writing a history of the college in its modern era, sifted with trained eye and hand the boxes and volumes that constitute the college archives, - Presidents' correspondence, faculty minutes, committee reports, reports of departmental chairmen, and old files of the Miscellany News that recounted gala skits of Founder's Day, he must often have run across his own name and his own handwriting; for he had a zest for life and was ever an active participant in all that was going on about him. His courses in English history introduced him to large numbers of students and his circle of friends and acquaintances among alumnae was wide. His interest in every part of the college was marked, - one could mention for instance certain of our library treasures, rare for a college of this size, that are here because of his scholarly discernment and his initiative.

Engrossing as was the campus to him, however, Mr. Baldwin did not forget that there were pleasures and obligations outside of it, that he was a resident of the town of Poughkeepsie, a citizen of Dutchess County and of his state and nation. He took a lively interest in public affairs to which his approach was that of a humanitarian and a liberal. Better also than some of us, he was able to transfer the field of his specialized interests to the scene at hand. Hence the student of constitutional origins in a distant age and place found ways of making Dutchess County origins exciting to his friends and fellow townsmen. He held office repeatedly in the Dutchess County Historical Society, and in 1942 was officially honored with the title, Dutchess County Historian. Other community activities enlisted his support. His lifelong interest in music, found expression in his work as an organist in one of Poughkeepsie's churches, a post which he filled for years. After his retirement many of these interests were continued. Indeed, there was true gallantry in the way James Baldwin set about to explore

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the resources within himself in order to make his retirement a period both useful and happy. And it was a source of pleasure to his friends that neither old age nor adversity dulled his salty wit nor dimmed the twinkle in his eye.

But beyond these memories left with friends and associates, James Fosdick Baldwin in his early manhood created a more lasting memorial through his contribution to historical scholarship in a highly selective field, that of the English Medieval Constitution. His book on the King's Council in England During the Middle Ages published in Oxford in 1913 was hailed by scholarly journals on both sides of the Atlantic as charting new ground and superseding previous treatments of the subject. It led to his election at once to membership in the Royal Historical Society, and gave him a place among the best scholars in the field in his own country. Even now after almost forty years it still remains a recognized authority. Hence, as Poughkeepsie notes the passing of a good citizen and neighbor, and Vassar College a friend and colleague, medieval historians in both Europe and America record the passing of a respected member of their fraternity, the author of The King's Council.

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