VERNON LOUIS PARRINGTON AN APPRECIATION BY
A STUDENT DISCIPLE, ADELAIDE LOOMIS PARKER '06

Since Professor Vernon Louis Parrington died in July there have been
published in the literary magazines, in the reviewers' columns in New
York dailies, and elsewhere, many articles in appreciation of his work
as a writer.

There will be a thousand tributes to his work as a teacher, but only
a very few will ever see the light in print.

The critics have columns open to them. His former students for the
most part have not. Their tributes, deeply felt though they may be, are
verbal only, and at that they are only half articulate, less than half
adequate.

The critics have a very tangible work before them, two large volumes
soon to be finished by a third, which cover definite ground, thought out
along certain lines, and well written in a well defined style.

One who has sat under his instruction finds less definite results. After
all it was not the facts given, nor the ideas developed, though these were
most stimulating, nor was it even the manner of their presentation, though
that was always smooth, and often beautiful, that made Professor Par-
rington an inspiring teacher. The inspiration resulted from all these, plus
that vague, intangible, endlessly important thing we call personality.

How can I tell you all it meant to us to have him for a teacher? Okla-
homa was young in those days. Most of the students were born in other
states, for the simple reason that Oklahoma was not as old as the fresh-
men. All of them were poor. No matter what the background had been
elsewhere, here the one pervading problem was how in God's name to
make a living. Every morning in chapel we were reminded by someone
that our parents were making sacrifice to send us there. They were .
Sometimes we heard the same fact from home, from the little frame
houses that braced themselves in such shallow toe-holds against the
prairie winds.

Then we went into this man's room and for an hour at least we lived
in a different world. It was always quiet there and we could relax. We
could take our eyes off the windy horizon. We could follow the grim
and watery struggle between Grendel and Beowulf, or laugh at the
table manners of Chaucer's dainty prioress who did not even have to
lick her fingers, or behold with indignation the soldiers of Cromwell
who saddled in a glorious cathedral, or snigger with Pepys at the shame-
lessly bedizened courtesan who dropped a garter, and something much
more serious than a garter if we had only known. We shed a bitter
when fate had played its game out with Tess. We lost ourselves in the
love of David Copperfield for his Dora. We agonized over Steerforth and
Emily and felt that Pegotty loved us too, and incidentally we learned how
an English novel was put together. We listened to the majestic roll of
Milton, were stirred by the deep and tragic music of Carlyle, and were
charmed by DeQuincy's frail sweet flute. Then one day we began to
study Keats, and that day the door to Beauty opened, a high wide door
that has never since quite closed.

And Shakespeare, and the love of words, the respect for them, the
concern that they should not be abused, the thrill at discovering unsus-
pected relations between them, and the far flung romantic histories of
them, all these were taught in that quiet room, in that smooth and
quiet voice.

One year Professor Parrington went to Europe. After that we learned
something of Gothic architecture, we had details of this or that cathedral
traced with an artist's hand upon our blackboard. He built a house,
and all his students came to know something of good taste of simplicity
and something of the history of furniture. A mind that was capable of
the most profound scholarship, as witness his two volumes on the Main
Currents in American Thought, was anything but a single-track mind.

There were other great teachers there then. In those days we were
not so many but that sooner or later we all sat under the highest and
the best. But somehow in Professor Parrington's room we forgot the
dry sun and the never-ending wind, and the painful and pressing prob-
lem of how to make a living, and, while we were there, we lived.

When one realizes how a teacher like that can galvanize facts into
living things, can induce thought and speculation where before was in-
difference, who creates appreciations which grow throughout a lifetime
and always remain a source of happiness, one wonders how any profes-
sion could be so important as that of the teacher.

I had hoped that my son would go to him when he comes of college
age, so that one who had opened doors for me might open doors for
him too, and show him paths that would gleam all through the years.
Words cannot speak my grief that this is not to be.