



—Robert Christie.

"... despite a congenital capacity for happiness he became and remained a philosopher."

IRWIN EDMAN

1896-1954

Memoir of a Friend

On the first anniversary of Irwin Edman's untimely death SR presents this memoir by his friend and colleague James Gutmann. Mr. Gutmann is professor of philosophy at Columbia University and succeeded Irwin Edman as chairman of the department in 1952. The Irwin Edman Fellowship is being established at Columbia to commemorate his career as teacher and scholar by assisting students of particular promise. Readers are invited to send contributions to the treasurer of the fund: Mr. Albert G. Redpath, 52 Wall Street, New York City, N. Y.

By JAMES GUTMANN

IRWIN EDMAN was, I believe, the happiest man I have ever known. To have known him as a friend was to share richly in his happiness. Despite sorrow at the loss of such a friend great happiness remains in recollection, and so I set down some memories of him whom I knew as a friend for forty years.

The public record of his life is not without interest, though in most ways not unlike that of other academic careers. He was born in New York City, not far from the university with which his life was so intimately linked, on November 28, 1896. Educated in the New York public schools he was graduated from Townsend Harris, one of the notable group of able students which that enterprising

school produced and ever an enthusiastically loyal alumnus. He received his bachelor's degree from Columbia College in 1917 and his doctorate from Columbia University three years later. In 1918 he was appointed a lecturer in the Columbia department of philosophy and remained a member of that department to the end of his life, rising through the various academic grades to become professor of philosophy in 1935. In 1950 he was awarded the distinguished Johnsonian professorship.

He also taught in many other colleges and universities in America and abroad—among others at Amherst, California, Hamilton, Harvard, the University of Brazil, the Sorbonne, Aix-en-Provence, and Oxford. He received a number of honorary doctorates and other academic awards. He enjoyed membership in Phi Beta Kappa, the Institute of Arts and Letters, the Century Association of New York, and the Athenaeum of London—the word “enjoyed” is used advisedly, for he was a truly “clubbable” man and among his associations the Coffee House of New York deserves special mention. He was the author of a dozen books, including “Arts and the Man,” “Four Ways of Philosophy,” “The Mind of Paul,” “Philosophers’ Holiday,” and “Philosopher’s Quest,” and contributor to many others.* He was an editor of several periodicals, including *The American Scholar*, and a frequent contributor to learned and popular publications.

With all these academic, pedagogical, and literary activities, with all these distinctions and honors duly recorded, what has been said about Irwin Edman? Are we to say that they constituted the basis of a singularly happy life or that he was happy in spite of them? He himself suggested that the statement which Dr. Johnson made about himself could be reversed in his case—that despite a congenital capacity for happiness he became and remained a philosopher. Perhaps it would be near the truth to say that though many gifts of nature and fortune contributed to Irwin Edman’s contentment and happiness—the joys of friendships extraordinarily varied, of devoted students amazingly numerous, his own talents and those he stimulated in others, deep love of literature and music and the arts, pleasures of travel and pleasures of tranquility, wit, and laughter, he was es-

* To his bibliography there can now be added the recently published volume in Bobbs-Merrill’s *Makers of the American Tradition Series*, “John Dewey,” prepared with the collaboration of his student and colleague Professor H. S. Thayer (SR, Aug. 13); and also the forthcoming selections from his writings, “The Uses of Philosophy” (Simon and Schuster), edited by another former student and colleague, Professor Charles Frankel.

entially a philosopher and from philosophy he derived both consolation and the joy of life.

EACH of his friends surely has recollections as precious to him or her as mine are to me. If I record some that are superficially trivial or if they suggest a measure of egotism since they are *my* memories, they may to an extent be representative or help to recall other remembrances. What I would do, insofar as I can, as each may wish to do for himself, is to recapture through memory as much as possible of the sense of Irwin's presence—an essence of our friendship to take a term appropriate to him as to Plato and Santayana.

It is almost exactly forty years since I first saw Irwin Edman, though he had been known to me before that as "Irwin" in FPA's "Conning Tower." When I first met him I did not realize the identity but I can recollect the circumstances in detail. It was at a meeting of John Erskine's "Boar's Head," an undergraduate literary society of Columbia College in which I had that very day become a freshman. A high-school classmate who had entered college a half year ahead of me took me to the meeting. The minutes of the previous meeting were called for as the session opened and were read in a hesitating voice but unhesitant light-verse metres by a small, very blond sophomore. It seemed to me the unbelievably perfect climax of an exciting first day in college, the reader altogether entrancing, altogether delightful. Irwin's

undergraduate verses "Measures of the Moment" remain gay and refreshing to this day.

During a summer of our college years Irwin and I went to a concert in the old Madison Square Garden—a predecessor of the Stadium Concerts, to which we went together many times in later years. The setting was odd, the music accompanied by lemonade though not, as now, by the interruption of airplanes. There were, I think, no printed programs or, at least, we had none and this led to an episode to which Irwin referred many times in later years, sometimes to my embarrassment. As the orchestra sounded the first notes of the Overture to "Die Walküre" I, it seems, turned to Irwin and told him what it was. He apparently expressed surprise at my erudition. Whether I felt flattered at the time I do not recall, but subsequently I began to suspect that my leg was being pulled. However, years later Irwin insisted that he had in no sense been teasing me, that he had, indeed, not known the music and was impressed by my knowledge. I mention this now as an indication of the nature of Irwin's largely self-taught intimacy with all manner of musical composition, his extensive musical memory, and his love of the art. It may also suggest an explanation of an item in an obituary notice, mentioning Brahms as being Irwin's "favorite composer." It seems unlikely to me that Irwin would have expressed a preference in just this way and, though I should defer to better qualified judgments, I think the very expression of this taste improbable as his serious critical comment.

Many have had the experience of Irwin bringing comic relief when serious discussion verged on solemnity, without intrusion or even diversion in one sense of that word. But how diverting Irwin could be! How often after a telephone call—even a lengthy one—Irwin would ring back for another word, many times a funny one, a funny story which had occurred to him as he hung up and which he wanted to share.

This urge to share his thoughts—whether serious or jocular or in any combination of the two—was, I think, also essential in Irwin to an extraordinary degree and a part of the genius of his career as a great teacher. His skill with words brought constant joy to all who knew him, whether as teacher or writer, and to him himself. This was as true of lecture hall and classroom as it was of his speaking on the radio, as true of his writing for the *Journal of Philosophy* as of his contributions to *The New Yorker*. In teaching as in writing his use of words seemed, and I think was, essentially

spontaneous, but this does not imply lack of a high degree of professional discipline and professional conscience. He acquired early in his career the habit of productivity, of meeting printers' deadlines, and fulfilling publishers' contracts; he had the true professional's taste for the smell of printers' ink, as he had the professor's delight in the responsiveness of his students.

IRWIN's defective eyesight was compensated by his remarkable ability to repeat whole passages and pages without referring to the text. So, also, other physical disabilities not only did not interfere with but actually added to the flow of his pen or the click of his typewriter. Pages of curious typescript came out of largely sleepless nights; a bout of physical discomfort yielded light-hearted verse; an attack of grippe produced an essay or two for "Under Whatever Sky."

He could hardly wait for his readers. He loved to read aloud what he had written, managing to assemble the apparently confused pages as he went along or, at times, substituting his extraordinary memory if the confusion proved too great. Up to a point he invited and wanted criticism and suggestions but only up to a point, for he had confidence in his own taste and judgment about his work. It was, indeed, not only his own writings which he enjoyed sharing in this way. He would read aloud a newly discovered or rediscovered letter by Keats, a chapter of Dickens, or a passage from St. John of the Cross. Or it might be a Mozart aria or Monteverdi record which he wished to play, a record which like as not became a gift for the visitor since, by some strange chance, Irwin had just happened to buy a duplicate. His generosity was as expansive as his joy in the arts, which was utterly unaffected and infectious.

In Irwin Edman's first book, "Human Traits and Their Social Significance," the outlines of a view which remained characteristic of him throughout his career as writer and teacher were already apparent. I well remember the circumstances under which this book was written. It was to be his Ph.D. thesis and it was also to serve as the introductory text in
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FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 636

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 636 will be found in the next issue.

ABCD B EFGBHJFG

KGHLOGH BML KBKB'H

LH JCMPNRGO SLET

B XGFKBM RGD.

TGCFD XBC ODRG.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 635
Executive ability is deciding quickly and getting somebody else to do the work.

—J. G. POLLARD.

