

INTRODUCTION OF THE PRESIDENT

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If ever there were a case of bringing coals to Newcastle, it is my introducing Harold Williamson to this assemblage. Indeed, when this Conference first met at Evanston, Illinois, on February 27, 1954 -- almost exactly 20 years ago -- Hal had already won the West with his trusty Winchester, and had three other books behind him covering a surprisingly wide range of subjects. Hence, because he is so well known, I'm not going to expand upon his brilliant tours of teaching at Harvard, Yale, M.I.T., Northwestern, and Delaware, nor tell you the details of the nine volumes and countless articles he has produced. When you see it all on paper, or merely contemplate it, it seems unbelievable that one man could do so much.

Be that as it may, I want to comment on some less obvious but, I think, thoroughly relevant aspects of a long and fruitful life. Now when I say "long," don't mistake my meaning; even though William McKinley was still in the White House when Hal first saw the light of day in Piper, Kansas, our man is a long, long way from soft-slippered retirement. With all the ebullience and optimism of youth he has now plunged into a history of Northwestern University, a task that would tax the full energies (and probably overtax the capabilities) of a man half his age. But Williamson will, if anybody can, bring it off, and by the deadline at that.

What are my credentials for such a statement? Why do I have such faith in this gentle character? Well, it was just about 32 years ago that a certain enterprising, well-groomed Associate Professor at Yale asked me to come talk with him about contributing a chapter to a volume he proposed calling The Growth of the American Economy. He had already assembled a distinguished group of scholars to take part in the venture, and, as a comparative youngster, I welcomed the opportunity to participate. Happily my boss on the Burlington, Ralph Budd, was a scholar as well as a gentleman who readily approved my taking the necessary time and travel to do the job. And as the work went forward I came to have vast respect for Editor Williamson. He was available, he was understanding, and he made specific, helpful suggestions. What more could a writer ask? Put otherwise, I'm sure he got the best that could be got out of me. And this gives a hint to one of his greatest attributes. It is more revealing, I think, that seven of Hal's first nine books were written with one or more collaborators. Thus I think he can rightfully claim the distinctive title of "Intellectual entrepreneur". He has always seemed to know what sort of job was worth doing, whom to pick to help do it, how to get a team to work together and, finally, how to mix the disparate efforts of several scholars into a smooth and meaningful blend. This takes talent indeed, yet talent alone has never been enough. Tolerance and integrity, which Hal has in full measure, have been needed as well to enable him to fashion a career that is outstanding in our field.

I know, at first hand, that this is so. As Hal's path and mine have crossed and recrossed -- in New Haven, New York, Evanston, Manchester, Wilmington, and various other way points -- I have cherished a lively and stimulating friendship with our president. Not that we're always agreed -- far from it. We have, for example, and at one time or another, felt quite differently about the format and objectives of this very organization. Then again, we have long argued happily about the appropriate role of quantification in the field of history. But I know, confidently, that I can speak for Hal as well as for myself when I say that we respect each other's views, we learn from them, and we live with the eventual outcome whatever it may be.

So here, finally, is a man we can trust, a man we can't help loving. I give you Harold Francis Williamson.