

DOCTOR THOMAS MCFADDEN

A

PIONEER OF OTTERBEIN

By Alice Davison Troop

Based on a biographical paper written by Gilbert McFadden, his son.

It is impossible to evaluate the tremendous impact which a professor of such stature as Dr. Thomas McFadden had upon Otterbein in her formative years.

Interestingly enough, although Thomas McFadden had an unusually excellent scholastic background, he was not a teacher by training. He was a medical doctor. ~~He~~ was not raised in Westerville. He did not belong to the United Brethern Church.

The Thomas McFaddens were drawn from their home in Rushville, Ohio to Westerville, "a town of cultural promise", at the enthusiastic <sup>ing</sup>ur~~gence~~ of former neighbors and friends, ~~the~~ William Hanbys.

In the spring of 1855, thirty-year old Thomas McFadden arrived in Westerville in a mud-splattered wagon with his family and his possessions. They made their home in a cottage on the east side of the Plank Road at the southeast corner of what is now State and Main Streets. At once he became associated with an established physician and surgeon.

<sup>doctor</sup>  
~~Dr.~~ McFadden's winning personality, coupled with a keen, intelligent mind, immediately marked him for leadership in the little town. Westerville's Petition for Incorporation in 1857 carried his signature. At the town's first election when his close friend, <sup>r</sup>Professor Haywood was made mayor,

<sup>Doctor</sup> Dr. McFadden was elected clerk without opposition. The first records of Westerville are in his handwriting.

The "university" too, began early to draw upon his talents. Being one of the few people in the area with an eastern university education (Doctor of Medicine, University of Maryland, 1848), Otterbein invited him to give a series of lectures on Physiology.

So appreciative of his potential was the Board of Trustees that he was made its secretary in June of his first year in Westerville, an office he held for three years.

In 1858 the busy doctor was prevailed upon to join the faculty as Professor of Natural Science, teaching Physiology, Geology, Geography and Chemistry.

From the early minutes of the college we learn that once Thomas was affiliated with the school, he was quickly involved with the administration and the working of various committees. In 1857 when some confusion over funds called for monies to be handled by a man of integrity and business acumen, he was made college treasurer.

Reading between the lines of the records, <sup>we deduce that</sup> the newly appointed professor seems to have been victimized when his title, Professor of Natural Science, was amended without his consultation or approval with the addition of the words, "and Scientific Agriculture."

Following the pattern of other colleges, Otterbein had adopted a plan for "profitable student exercise." The school property included eighteen acres of farm land north of the present Home Street, and lying between West and Grove Streets. This was divided into individual gardens where each male and female student by industriously and "scientifically" spading, hoeing and weeding, would surely develop healthy bodies, as well as succulent vegetables. Apparently the project was a far more popular idea with the trustees than <sup>with</sup> the students ~~youths~~.

At the time <sup>Doctor</sup> Dr. McFadden was induced to take the Chair of Natural Science, compulsory work in the gardens was "close to wrecking the feeble

institution." No doubt the "Scientific Agriculture" appendage was tacked on to <sup>his</sup> Dr. McFadden's title in the hope that with his winning personality the new faculty member could persuade the rebellious students that they enjoyed healthy gardening. By the end of his first summer, Professor McFadden had had enough. There was a very stormy session of the trustees which lasted until two o'clock in the morning, but the sagacious <sup>Professor</sup> Professor McFadden emerged victorious. The gardens became history.

With the beginning of the Civil War, the reports of the tragic suffering of young soldiers (Otterbein youth among them!) on the battlefields played upon his sensibilities to such an extent that in October 1861 he was impelled to close his text books, and to leave his wife and small children to take up the arduous duties of a military surgeon.

<sup>During</sup> In the spring of 1862 Dr. McFadden tended the wounded and dying at the Battle of Shiloh for three days and two nights without rest. The terrific strain of those three days impaired his health for the rest of his life. Completely exhausted he was honorably discharged and ordered home for recuperation, only to heroically volunteer again in 1863 with the need for medical men so desperate. After serving as head of the general hospital at Camp Chase, Columbus, Ohio, he was forced home in the spring of '64, broken in health from the excessive duties there.

Although <sup>Doctor</sup> Dr. McFadden was not able to resume his medical practice, the college persuaded him to return to the Chair of Natural Science in the fall of 1865.

When our present Towers Hall was <sup>occupied (1871-1872)</sup> erected (1871) the science facilities in the building were an answer to Professor McFadden's dream. The large room at the southeast corner of the first floor was his class room. It was fitted with shutters to facilitate experiments with light. It boasted a raised platform for his desk. However, the spacious new building seemed to point up the pathetic meagerness of the science equipment, which had been salvaged from the <sup>devastating</sup> fire of January 1870, and <sup>Doctor McFadden</sup> <sup>complained annually to the Board</sup> of Trustees.

Professor McFadden seemed to sense the coming of the new era of scientific development. He was determined that Otterbein should play her part. So great was his distress over insufficient equipment in his department, and so great his eagerness to have necessary physical materials to impart the known laws of science to his students, that he complained annually to the Board of Trustees.

Finally in 1875 "on advise of eminent authorities", the board appropriated an allowance, generous for the times, to send him to Europe. There he visited universities, interviewed scientists and contacted manufacturers of scientific apparatus. This very stimulating experience increased, if possible, his enthusiasm for the future of the sciences.

Upon his return, the college purchased some of the most modern equipment of the day for his outstanding courses. They served their useful purposes, those pieces of equipment, the barometers, galvanic batteries, pneumatic apparatus, balances, Grove cells (the best source of electrical power then known), induction coils, but they belong to a past age. Among other things acquired at that time was a skeleton that in the following years "was destined to blossom almost like a perennial from campus trees, the victim of student pranks."

It is hard to realize that at this time there still was no opportunity for student experiments or laboratory work. It was not until the nineties that a "chemical laboratory" was opened in the southwest basement room of the building. Water was pumped by hand from a cistern outside to an overhead tank. There was no gas. Students handling chemicals for the first time used little glass alcohol lamps with tiny flames above cotton wicks.

How proud Dr. McFadden would have been of the fine science building erected on the campus in 1920 and named in his honor - a building of classrooms and laboratories to be used solely for instruction in the sciences!

Professor Dr. McFadden had a gift for inspiring students with his amazing prophecies of what the future held in the realm of science. The 1867 commencement oration of W.O. Hanby contains much of what seems to be pure McFadden. Mr. Hanby

foresaw the day when "an engine or waterfall may transmit magnetic force through wires to propel machinery in the heart of a city, or indeed perform any office desired of electric current. ----- This same force that propels machinery, that separates metals, that is a messenger to unite continents, that pierces the storm in crimson flame, is probably the same force that causes plants to grow and the heart to throb."

This can only be a reflection of ideas which stirred the imagination of the youth in Professor McFadden's class room. And yet we should remember that electrons would not be discovered for many years, and that he could not have known that the day would come when electric currents of the heart could be measured.

Thomas G. McFadden was born in Rushville, Ohio, son of the local postmaster and general store keeper. He was a rather frail delicately featured child with wistful eyes. At the age of ten he knew bitter tragedy with the death of his mother. She was killed when the horses of the stage coach in which she was riding ran away, overturning the coach.

Fortunately for young Thomas, two years later his father married a woman who very lovingly and very conscientiously took up the mother-role in the household. She appreciated the sensitive child's keen mind and was determined that it should be developed. When Thomas had exhausted the meager educational facilities afforded at Rushville, she insisted that he must have further schooling. He was sent to a Methodist academy in Kentucky.

One of the letters to him from his stepmother during those years is indicative of her constant encouragement and constructive criticism. After praising him for his penmanship (examples of his beautiful handwriting are preserved in the records of the Board of Trustees of Otterbein for which he served as secretary from 1855 to 1858) and his clearly expressed ideas, his mother wrote, "You are most defective in division of your paragraphs and especially in punctuation, the rules of which it would be well to review."

The boy was next sent to Dickinson College at Carlisle, Pa, and then on to medical college at the University of Maryland.

The following year when Thomas was twenty-four, his childhood playmate and life-long sweetheart, Rebecca Hartley, became his bride. The newly-weds settled in their home town of Rushville where Thomas became "the young doctor" of that rural community.

At the time the Hanbys enticed them to come to Westerville, the McFaddens were the parents of two young children, Louis, who succeeded his father in Otterbein's science department (1882 - 1907), and Agnes, who later as wife of E. A. Starkey, assisted him in organizing the pioneer mission of the United Brethern Church in Los Angeles.

The third child, Cora, still remembered by many alumnae as a beloved and very understanding Dean of Women (1916 - 1928), was born in Westerville, as was Gilbert, the baby, some years later.

Dr. McFadden was not only a civic minded man and an avid scholar, he was a family man, home-loving, tender and sensitive.

His poignant letters to his loved ones during the war years were deeply cherished. To his wife, "Dearest Wife: Dearer, far dearer now than ever" he wrote letters that reflect so beautifully the tenderness of his feelings.

To his little boy, Louis, he wrote in simple style interesting descriptions of things that would appeal to a boy of ten, but too, adding something to stimulate the child's learning. "Do you ever think how far apart we are? Take your map and find the Tennessee River and run your finger up that river till -----." And again, "Can you count how many miles we are apart? It is about 180 miles from Rushville to Cincinnati; about 500 miles from there to Paducah, and 240 from there to this place. Now how many miles does that make?"

Cora was not much more than a baby when her father left for the battle front but she received her letters also. "My dear little Cora: I have been thinking of you so much tonight. ----- Have you got the doll head I promised you? I want you to write to me all about it. ----- Your loving father." Even in her adulthood that cherished doll head was one of Cora's most prized possessions, endeared to her as it was by its associations

with a thoughtful, devoted soldier-father.

As might be expected, <sup>of</sup> a man with such a keen interest in <sup>of</sup> science, he was more than a little fascinated with the electric telegraph which was the scientific sensation during his college years at Dickinson. When his children became old enough, this teacher-father taught them and their close friends, Joseph and Lida Haywood, the Morse Code. With Dr. Haywood he helped them to string their own very exclusive telegraph wire between the Haywood house on Home Street and the McFadden home a block or so north on West Street. What fun! How envious the other neighborhood children must have been of their ability to send each other secret, coded messages.

Further evidence of Professor McFadden's ability to make play of learning, was a game he played with his children until they were quite proficient. He directed them in long involved mental problems in simple arithmetic. Many years later, Dean Cora McFadden, in party mood, could amaze and confound a group of some hundred young women students as they attempted to follow her intricate, lightning-swift, mental calculations. When the problem was finished and no one could give her the correct answer, the little white-haired lady would set about retracing each step slowly enough for lesser minds to follow, her eyes twinkling at <sup>then</sup> our humiliation, twinkling in a manner that must have been very like her father's.

His keen sense of humor and his kindly sympathetic interest in individuals were marked characteristics of Dr. McFadden. As a scholarly man of unusual charm he was greatly loved and respected.

To the Otterbein Family, names recorded in his roll books have their own special significance. The names of such people as Henry Garst, Benjamin Hanby, I. L. Kephart, J. P. Landis, T. J. Sanders, the many Shaucks, the Kumlers and the Guitners attest to the fine influence which the young professor exerted upon the future leaders of the church and college.

Today the many outstanding Otterbein people working in the fields of science and medicine are fulfilling the dream of a doctor-teacher of a hundred years ago who spent his life for his country and our college.