

JOHN BASCOM: PROPHET

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John Bascom: Prophet by Sanford Robinson

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SANFORD ROBINSON

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PROPHET**

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JOHN BASCOM
PROPHET



John F. Johnson

JOHN BASCOM
PROPHET

BY
SANFORD ROBINSON



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INTRODUCTION

THE annual meeting of the Alumni Association of Williams College held at Williamstown during the Commencement week of 1922, was devoted to the consideration of John Bascom's life and work. I was one of the speakers, and at the request of the association I have attempted to reproduce the substance of my remarks. The following pages are the result, though this presentation is necessarily somewhat expanded. The time limit of twenty-five minutes did not permit of the outline necessary to make a written presentation understandable. I have kept down the pages as much as possible, because of the lesson I have learned that the engrossed public like the court is more sympathetic towards short than towards extended written argument.

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Introduction

I have felt for several years that the world was ready for John Bascom. The point of view toward life has changed during my lifetime. When I began work the thing emphasized was success in the chosen calling, but now we have come to see that it does not so much concern us how great a success a man makes of his work unless he can also make a success of his personal life. This advanced outlook on life has reawakened in men a quickened interest in the nature of the spirit of the world and the relation of the individual to it. Society does not move forward at a regular pace or in one direction, and the accelerating movement taking place today is generally recognized. The war is often assigned as the cause, but the war is very much more a result than the cause of social changes. Prussianism stood in the way of progress and had to go. The widespread interest in religious belief today, and the progress being made toward a better statement of faith are indicated by the lament that is going up from some theologians,

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whose hearts are encrusted beyond growth and who see in the regenerate spirit of men generally nothing but disaster.

The thing that has impressed me most in my contact with men is the universal desire for continued personal existence after death. The obstacles to a sure grasp of this faith almost always come from two sources. When the present generation of workers was in college, Idealistic Pantheism was the philosophic view generally accepted and taught, and even if a man did not go to college, his thought nevertheless was filled with this conception of how the world came into being, because the popular literature and discussion were absorbed with this idea. Under the pantheistic view there is no room for continued personality after the soul leaves the body, and the conception of immortality was dismissed as a notion which dreamers had created. The other obstacle to faith is the general distrust on the part of hard-headed workers towards the