

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR
OF
FRANCIS AMASA WALKER.
1840-1897.

BY
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With kindest regards,
Yours faithfully,
James S. Walker

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR OF FRANCIS AMASA WALKER.

FRANCIS AMASA WALKER, member and Vice-President of the National Academy of Sciences, was born in Boston, Mass., July 2, 1840, and died in the same city January 5, 1897. He was a son of Amasa Walker, the well-known teacher and writer, whose studies in political economy had great influence in directing his own line of work. He graduated at Amherst in 1860, and studied law in the office of Devens and Hoar, of Worcester, Mass., until the commencement of the civil war, when he enlisted as sergeant major in the Fifteenth Massachusetts, under the command of Colonel Devens.

He soon received a commission as captain and was rapidly promoted through the several grades to that of brigadier general, serving on the staffs of Generals Couch, Humphreys, Warren, and Hancock, being long connected with the latter, and the author of the History of the Second Army Corps and of the Life of General Hancock. He was severely wounded in 1863, and was captured in 1864 and confined for a time in Libby Prison. After the war he was on the editorial staff of the *Springfield Republican* in 1868; was Chief of the Bureau of Statistics in Washington from January, 1869, to February, 1870, and then became Superintendent of the Census. In 1872 he accepted the chair of political economy in the Sheffield Scientific School at New Haven; in 1879 he became Superintendent of the Census, and in 1881 he accepted the presidency of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which he held until his death. He was Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1871, Chief of the Bureau of Awards of the Philadelphia Exposition in 1876, United States Commissioner to the International Monetary Conference at Paris in 1878, President of the American Statistical Association in 1882, and President of the American Economic Association in 1886. His career was a brilliant one in many fields of labor, and in most of them it was his peculiar ability as an organizer and administrator which gave him preëminence. He was a born leader—bold, frank, sincere, and entirely devoted to his work—

and in the public offices which he held and as chief of a great educational institution his subordinates and assistants became, almost without exception, his loyal and devoted friends. He was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences in 1878, as being the most distinguished American representative of the scientific side of economics and statistical methods. His most important contributions to the theories of economics were his "Law of Wages" and his "Law of Profits." In his work on "The Wages Question," New York, 1876, he opposed the then prevailing theory that wages were paid out of what was called "a wages fund," taking the ground that while wages may be, and often are, paid out of capital in advance of the product, yet that they are ultimately paid from the product, and must in the long run be less than the product by enough to give the capitalist his due returns and the employer his living profits. This work was largely critical, being destructive rather than constructive, but it has had great influence upon the modern teaching on that subject. Subsequently he developed the theory that rent, interest, and profit depend upon certain fixed laws, and that whatever does not belong by these laws to rent, interest, and profit belongs to the laborer. This theory is not generally accepted by recent writers on the subject, although they admit that it accords with recent facts which they would explain in another way. It is not my purpose in this brief sketch either to set forth General Walker's economic views or to criticise them, and I will only say that while his theories on bimetallism are not generally accepted by recent writers on the subject, they were by no means those of the so-called "Silver Party," and that he strongly disapproved of the legislative measures which were proposed by this party in 1896, at the time when his work on international bimetallism was published.

A characteristic feature of General Walker's views on questions in economics and political science is that they take into account the emotional and altruistic side of human nature, as well as the purely intellectual and selfish side. The ethical relations of men in different countries at different times, and under different conditions of popular opinion as to the moral obligations of men of different classes, occupations, and interests had much weight with him in the formation of his opinions upon economic questions, and abstract propositions derived

from the mathematics of exchange did not entirely govern his decisions as to what was the wise and right thing to do in a particular concrete case. In his own words, the political economist should take into account certain motives which influence men in respect to wealth, such as "love of country, love of home, love of friends, mutual sympathy among members of the same class, * * * good will between landlord and tenant, between employer and employed, the power of custom and tradition, the force of inertia, ignorance, and superstition."

He accepted the statement of Lightwood that "the object of law is to regulate the relations existing between men in such a way as to satisfy the sense of right existing in the community."* The laws of theoretical economics have been compared to the mathematical formula for the course of a cannon ball. This formula is valuable, but in its practical application the resistance of the air, the direction and force of the wind, and slight peculiarities in the gun itself must be taken into account if the mark is to be hit.

General Walker was not a sentimentalist or a socialist, but he was a warm-hearted man, full of vitality and sympathy, which influenced his writings and made them understandable by, and interesting to, a great mass of people not familiar with the technical details of so-called scientific economics.

As a statistician, his reputation rests mainly on his work in connection with the United States censuses of 1870 and 1880. He reorganized the methods of the census and broadened its scope, so that its published results have become of great importance in statistical literature, incomplete and imperfect as some of them undoubtedly are. His object was to give a comprehensive view of this country at the end of the first century of its existence so far as this could be done by statistical methods, and in this he was fairly successful. He did not propose that this should be repeated every ten years, but advised that a permanent Census Bureau should be established to carry on the work on more limited and strictly scientific lines. His successors at the head of the Census Bureau have worked along the lines laid down by him, and have also advocated the establishment of the

* The Nature of Positive Law, by John M. Lightwood, p. 26, London, 1883.

permanent Census Bureau, which has recently become an accomplished fact.

Of his work as an educator it is unnecessary to speak here. Its record will be found in the history of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and in the paper by H. W. Tyler on "The Educational Work of Francis A. Walker," published in the *Educational Review*, 1897, vol. XIV, pp. 55-70.

A good bibliography of General Walker's writings is given by J. Laurence Laughlin in the *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 5, March, 1897, pp. 232-236, and a copy of this is appended.

The most important part of his work is not so much in his writings, interesting and valuable as many of them are, as in the influence which he exerted upon his assistants, associates, and pupils, and which appears in the character and amount of the work which they have been and are still doing. No American of his time was more widely known both in this country and abroad. He was the recipient of many academic and society honors, and his sudden death while in the full tide of successful effort was felt as a calamity, not only by his numerous personal friends, but by many who knew him only indirectly through his books and essays.

In the National Academy the place which he left is still vacant, and it will be long before it will be filled by one who will equal him in his knowledge of the wide field covered by his activity, and who will also be as perfect a gentleman and as agreeable an associate.

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