SIDNEY DEAN TOWNLEY, 1867–1946

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The most recent loss to the rapidly thinning ranks of astronomers who received their early training in the days when practically all observational work was done visually has come through the death, on March 18, 1946, of Sidney Dean Townley, professor of astronomy and geodesy, emeritus, of Stanford University. Though he was nearing the end of his seventy-ninth year, and had been more or less an invalid for several years, he looked so well and was so alert, mentally, that his death was totally unexpected, and brought a shock as well as deep sorrow to all his many friends.

Born on April 10, 1867, in the small town of Waukesha, Wisconsin, some sixty miles from Madison, the seventh and youngest child of the Rev. Robert and Mary Wilkinson Townley, young Sidney was reared in an atmosphere of "plain living and high thinking," and, let me add, of hard work. The schools at Waukesha, fortunately, were good, and the boy made a good record at them, especially in mathematics, so that when he had completed the studies that correspond to a modern high-school course, he readily found a responsible place as clerk in the town bank at the princely salary (if I may call it so) of $10.00 a month! This was raised to $15.00 after six months' service, sufficient evidence of his efficiency. His leisure hours, during the fifteen months of his work at the bank, he spent in various jobs and sports, in which baseball, hunting, and digging potatoes figured largely. Then, in 1886, he entered the University of Wisconsin, at Madison, taking a general science course.

Townley spent six joyous years at Madison. He made an excellent scholastic record, his work in mathematics being outstanding. But he found time as well to take a leading part in many of the general student activities. He was president of his class for a year, president of his literary society, one of the editors of the college paper and of the *Junior Annual,* and took part in sports, baseball in particular, both as a player on the University nine, and as manager of the team.

It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that at the close of his senior year, when he received his B.S. degree and became a member of Phi Beta Kappa, he was also awarded one of the four fellowships open to members of his class.

Townley had not specialized as an undergraduate and did not manifest any particular interest in astronomy until toward the close of his second year at the University. Then he took his first course in astronomy, and at the same time he was given a room at the Washburn Observatory, for which he paid by acting as night assistant in the dome. Presently he began to make observations of his own, studying variable stars and using the meridian instrument for latitude and time determinations. He also carried on advanced studies in celestial mechanics. In his two years as fellow at the University, he taught one class a day in mathematics, devoting the rest of his time to the continuation of his astronomical work.

At the close of his second postgraduate year, Townley was offered, doubtless on the recommendation of Dr. G. C. Comstock, director of the Washburn Observatory, a Phoebe Hearst Fellowship at the Lick Observatory. He accepted the offer promptly and arrived at Mount Hamilton on the daily noon mail stage on July 1, 1892, the opening day of the academic year.

Only a few short weeks ago, in exchanging reminiscences, he told me, with his usual twinkle and genial smile, that his greeting by Director E. S. Holden had been a reprimand, because he had not arrived the day before, so that he might enter upon his new duties at 9:00 A.M., July 1! Despite this rather chilly greeting, Holden treated the new Fellow well, and assigned him only nominal routine observatory duties, leaving practically his entire time free to spend in such research as he chose. The year was a profitable one, with regular work on variable stars, and the opportunities for association with all the members of the staff, and with Professors Schaeberle and Barnard in particular.

The next ten years Townley devoted chiefly to teaching astronomy; first at the University of Michigan, where he received his Sc.D. degree in 1907, and then at the University of California. Then after short sojourns at the Universities of Berlin and Munich, he was appointed director of the Interna-

tional Latitude Station at Ukiah, California. His work there, and his studies of the phenomena resulting from the great earthquake in 1906, aroused his interest in geodesy and especially in seismology, the subjects that engaged so much of his time in later years.

It was in these early years in California, too, that he became so active a member in the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. He served as a director of the Society, as a member of the Publication Committee (chairman from 1908 to 1911), and as president in 1916. His interest in the work of the Society continued throughout his life.

After five years at Ukiah, Townley, in 1911, became assistant professor of applied mathematics at Stanford University, soon to be promoted to the rank of full professor, a post he held, under varying titles, until he retired, in 1932, at the age of sixty-five, under the University rules. He retained his residence at the University to the end of his days and continued his work, except teaching, as long as health permitted.

Stanford University's general program did not include the development of a research department in astronomy. Townley had therefore to limit himself at first mainly to teaching astronomy and mathematics. His interest, as we have seen, had been aroused in seismology, and there was opportunity to carry on work in that field. He was active in promoting the organization of the Seismological Society, of which he was secretary-treasurer for a number of years, editor of its *Journal* from 1911 to 1930, and president.

As a result of these varied activities, Townley published about one hundred papers on astronomical and seismological subjects. He made a good record in research; but his most significant contributions, both to astronomy and to geodesy, were made through his editorial work, and, more particularly, through his inspirational teaching. Which is the greater service, who shall say? It is enough here to note that he was held in high respect for his work, both by his scientific colleagues and by his students, and that he was honored and loved as a man by all who knew him.

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