



CHARLES MCGHEE TYSON

1905-1908

CHARLES MCGHEE TYSON was born at Clifton Springs, N. Y., on August 10th, 1889, the only son of General and Mrs. Lawrence D. Tyson, of Knoxville, Tenn. He was a lineal descendant of Moses Tyson, who came from England to North Carolina in the early part of the Eighteenth Century, and on his mother's side, of General James White, the founder of Knoxville. His maternal grandfather, C. M. McGhee, railroad president and financier, was well known throughout the South. Shortly after McGhee's birth his father resigned his commission in the United States Army and returned to Knoxville, where McGhee's boyhood was spent.

After attending the Baker Himel School, in Knoxville,

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McGhee, at the age of sixteen, entered the Fourth Form at St. Paul's School. In his Fourth Form year as a "new kid" and his Fifth Form year, when he roomed at Major Rowan's house, his part in the life of the School was not a particularly prominent one. During his Sixth Form year, at the New Upper, however, he became one of the most popular boys in the class, on account of his fun-loving disposition and his entertaining personality. He did not excel in any branch of athletics at the School, but he took part in all. He stood well in his studies and was held in high regard by the Masters. Shortly before "last night," in his Sixth Form year, it was discovered that no arrangements had been made for the usual declamation contest. Rather than see this old custom die out McGhee persuaded three or four boys to enter the contest with him, and then promptly won it by a very creditable recitation of "Spartacus to the Gladiators at Capua." This incident is mentioned because he afterwards became an excellent and amusing impromptu speaker. In the spring of 1908 he finished his school course, a typical St. Paul's boy.

In the fall of that year "Tys" entered Princeton University, as a freshman of the class of 1912. After a reverse or two in studies in his freshman year, his really brilliant mind began to function properly on the more interesting advanced courses and from then on his academic standing was distinctly creditable, especially considering the small amount of time spent in actual study. He never loafed, but in college he played harder than he worked. His athletic activities were confined to rowing and golf, but he took an intense and personal interest in all the other branches of college athletics.

In his sophomore year he was elected a member of the Ivy Club and during his last two years his unique and lovable personality, together with a gift for music in all

of its forms, made him a prime favorite among those privileged to associate with him in the intimate, carefree existence of undergraduate life. The most distinguishing thing in his college life were his friendships, which were not restricted to any group or coterie, but included all sorts and conditions of students. In 1912 he graduated, well up in his class, with the degree of Bachelor of Science. Probably his most important contribution to his class and college, although a perfectly unconscious one, was his example—just what a fine American boy should be.

After graduating from Princeton he returned to Knoxville and entered the textile business. From this time on his talents were turned to more practical questions and he entered into his business relations seriously and with all his ability. After spending two years in learning the textile business in its various phases, he became Vice-President and General Manager of the Knoxville Spinning Company, and under his administration this plant increased and prospered. He soon organized another textile plant, in 1916, the Tennessee Mills, and was Vice-President and General Manager of this company, also, until he entered the service in the war with Germany. During his business career he exhibited great talent for organizing his businesses and in taking care of their financial affairs, but probably his best success was accomplished in the part in which he was most interested, namely, the problems of his laboring people. He was interested in welfare work as well as in labor conditions at the plants, and his success along these lines secured for him an affection from his employees which stood him in good stead during times of labor trouble.

Along with his work and social activities, in which he took a prominent part, he found much time for play and loved it. He was a leader in all wholesome fun, a great sportsman and a good golfer, in which sport he won many

trophies. He was untiring in his efforts for the Cherokee Country and Golf Club, at Knoxville, and to his efforts more than to those of any other is due the splendid course there. A rather touching tribute is, that they have named one of the holes for him.

When America entered the war he was not satisfied to remain at his business, although his father's appointment as Brigadier General cast a heavy burden of work upon his shoulders. In July 1917 he enlisted as a seaman, second class, in the United States Naval Reserve Flying Corps. He was ordered to the Naval Aviation Ground School at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in August 1917, with the second class to enter that school. He completed the course in October and was sent to Pensacola, Florida, for flight training. He qualified as a naval aviator in January 1918, and received a commission as Ensign. He remained at Pensacola for advanced training until April 1919. At that time a force was being recruited to found a self-sustaining naval base for the U. S. Reserve Flying Corps at Killingholme, England, and the officers in charge of this enterprise designated McGhee to take charge of the important work of purchasing supplies and equipment for this station. The purpose of this station was to furnish United States Naval flying boats for use in hunting submarines in the North Sea and in attacking the Kiel Canal and the German coast. To him was entrusted the sole responsibility in deciding the needs and purchasing the equipment for the station. He displayed such excellent judgment on this detail that, with special commendation, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant, Junior Grade, in May 1918 and was ordered to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, to do the same sort of work in connection with equipping another big United States flying station, at Dunkirk, France.

During this period, on June 1st, 1918, Miss Betty Carson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William Moore Carson of New York, and McGhee were married at Garrison-on-the-Hudson. They enjoyed two brief months of married life, until August 8th, 1918, when, in response to repeated requests for active service, McGhee was ordered abroad for duty at the United States Naval Air Station at Killingholme, England.

Shortly after his arrival at Killingholme, he was detailed to executive work, in addition to his flying duties. On October 10th, 1918, there came a request for volunteers to fly over the North Sea on a dangerous mine laying expedition at dawn the following day. Lieut. Tyson volunteered and was chosen gunner with a position in the bow of a large flying boat. Soon after they had left the water, at an altitude of less than one hundred feet, the pilot lost control of the tremendous flying boat and it crashed into the river Humber. The pilot of the expedition was rescued alive, but Lieut. Tyson and two enlisted men met their deaths in the accident. Due to the swift current in this river his body was not recovered until about a month later.

At the time of this accident General Tyson was in command of a brigade engaged in the desperate battle on the Hindenburg Line. Upon being relieved he proceeded at once to Killingholme and arrived just as Lieut. Tyson's body was recovered, a month after the accident. By order of the Commanding Officer at Killingholme, in special honor of his meritorious service and as a personal tribute to him, an impressive funeral was held over his remains at the station. His fellow officers have donated a bronze tablet in commemoration of his life and service, which is now hung in St. John's Episcopal Church, in Knoxville. In writing of him his Commanding Officer said:

"Lieutenant Tyson's great ability as an organizer and

general executive gave him responsibilities which would generally have been borne by men twice his age."

Lieutenant Wilcox, of the Naval Reserve Flying Corps, was detailed as special escort to accompany the body to his home in Knoxville, Tenn.

Following the arrival of the remains at Knoxville, the most remarkable funeral ever held there took place, the whole populace turning out to do honor to the memory of McGhee Tyson. The Governor of the State came from the Capital, together with his full staff, and the troops at Knoxville were also turned out as escort. The town was bowed with grief, not only because of Lieutenant Tyson's splendid life and sacrifice, but also because of his tremendous personal popularity, due to his never failing consideration for all classes and all ages, which won the love, as well as the respect, of all with whom he came in contact.

General and Mrs. Tyson have presented a park to the City of Knoxville as a suitable and living memorial which will contribute to the happiness of others, as McGhee always did in life. A memorial scholarship has been established at Princeton for Tennessee.

On his tomb in Old Gray Cemetery, Knoxville, Tenn., is the following inscription:

"Better death by the sword for some high, unselfish purpose, than to live out a life of ease, safe cloistered all thy days. To live for thine own ends is human; to die for some great cause, for Liberty or for another's good,—that is God-like."

McGhee Tyson, however, had a great deal more than rare charm of personality and high spirits. His keen mind and his ability to acquire information on all subjects had enabled him to form sound opinions and well founded convictions on all important questions of his day. Moreover, his life was governed by his convictions and by his ideals,

which were always of the very highest type. He was absolutely loyal and generous to a fault. He was a true gentleman by birth, instinct and training. Had his life been spared he would certainly have attained a very high place in his community, if not throughout the country. His untimely death is an irreparable loss, but the memory of him will live forever.