

PROFESSOR CHARLES C. FRIES*

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A grain of wheat remains a solitary grain unless
it falls into the ground and dies; but if it dies,
it bears a rich harvest.

John 12:24

I first knew Mr. Fries in the summer of 1937 at the Linguistic Institute of the Linguistic Society of America meeting at Ann Arbor, Michigan. He believed—he later told me—that an Institute where leaders in the field were drawn together in common interest would in fact get involved in discussions which would stimulate all. He therefore sponsored and directed the Institute in its formative years. As a young student I got drawn into this atmosphere as iron filings are drawn by a strong magnet. The time proved to be formative for me, as it did for others.

Mr. Fries gathered little for himself from the Institute except hard work—and satisfaction at opening doors for others to walk through. This kind of altruism typified the years that I knew him. He also founded the English Language Institute—though with different aims and methods from those of the Linguistic Institute—and by it blazed a trail for many to follow. The local "ELI" is no longer alone in the country, but one of many at home and abroad. His influence in such matters is so profound that it no longer seems fitting or possible to acknowledge it by page and paragraph in the grammatical and pedagogical works related to the work of the Institute.

Yet, when his specific academic competence had been stretched to its human limits, this influence had but just begun. Beyond the horizons of direct personal involvement were students who continued to receive encouragement to work steadily when they might otherwise have stopped growing. The Summer Institute of Linguistics Inc. (Santa Anna, Calif.), for example, is profoundly indebted to his warmth of interest for being able to persist in its academic growth while continuing its efforts in behalf of 400 tribal groups. He was able to visit only one or two of these but his impact went beyond his own ability to follow by sight.

*This tribute to Professor Fries was read at the memorial service for Professor Fries in Ann Arbor on December 18, 1967.

These contributions could only be made by a man committed relentlessly to his own goals, but who at the same time was compassionate, selfless, enjoying as much the success of others as of himself.

Those who, like me, grew up academically under this influence can only say: A great shade tree has fallen.

A great shade tree
Has fallen low.
Yet high it rose
O'er battle shout
And lonely vigil kept.

Wail, starting sprouts—
Grow ye must.
Fill forest gap
With shadow young and straight,
Grow lumber tall,

While cities waiting strength
Crave knotless planks.
Age gave seed formed
In cones torn from limbs
By winds blown high in trees.