

F. L. GILSON--FIRST CHAIRMAN OF THE SPEECH DEPARTMENT

AT THE KANSAS STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE

1913-1946

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Betty McDonald

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Charles R. Hill
Approved for the Major Department

John E. Peterson
Approved for the Graduate Council

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Importance and Background of the Problem

In 1957 David Matheny wrote a thesis on the history of the Speech Department at the Kansas State Teachers College at Emporia, Kansas. He covered the general activities of the department from 1883-1957 in chronological order. He did not include material in detail on the career of Dr. F. L. Gilson, Chairman of the Speech Department from 1913-1946, and his influence on this Speech Department; therefore, the work of Dr. Gilson has not been fully explored and recorded.

Dr. Gilson came to Emporia in 1913; and when he died in 1946, he had served over thirty years as head of the Speech Department. These years were formative ones for this Speech Department as it grew and developed rapidly within the college at this time. When Dr. Gilson first came to Emporia, he and one other professor handled all the classes of the Speech Department. There were so few classes in speech that, in order to teach a full load, Dr. Gilson taught two English classes. Thirty years later the department supported six full time instructors. Dr. Gilson's leadership was evidently instrumental in this tremendous growth of the department. Indirectly his influence may have affected the growth of the entire college through his tours

with a dramatics group called the Gilson Players. With this group he spread good will and the name of the Kansas State Teachers College throughout the state of Kansas.

During these thirty years he saw courses added to this department, which developed its program and expanded its scope. Since his primary interest was theatre, he directed the majority of shows produced by the department while he was here and played a major role in many of them himself. He even introduced the Speech Department to the complexities of "the air" by producing numerous one-act plays and interpretative readings for the radio audience. Dr. Gilson stressed creativity, and one of his popular classes was Play Construction in which students actually wrote plays. Many of these were performed on this campus, and many were published. He himself wrote both poetry and plays, and in 1926 he published a text-book for fundamentals of speech entitled The Speaking of English.

All these accomplishments plus his other activities made Dr. Gilson a popular and well-known man and educator in the state of Kansas in the first half of the twentieth century. Undoubtedly his colorful image and abilities as an educator contributed to the establishment of speech activities as a significant academic discipline in this college.

The Problem

This study, then, describes the life and activities of Dr. Gilson and the growth and development of the Speech

Department at the Kansas State Teachers College under his direction from 1913-1946. The purpose of this study is simply to record the activities, both curricular and extra-curricular, which were organized by the department under the direction of Dr. Gilson. While the approach to this problem is descriptive, objectivity is limited by the sources available. A critical analysis of the factors and the motivations of persons involved in the development of this department is not within the scope of this study.

Chapter 1 explains the background and importance of the study, states the problem and sets any limitations.

Chapter 2 is a brief biography of Dr. Gilson's early life, education and accomplishments before he became connected with the Speech Department at the Kansas State Normal School. Chapter 2 further describes Dr. Gilson, the man. It concerns his personal life, his family, friends, and social life, plus his education, his character and temperament, his habits, and his appearance.

Chapter 3 describes Dr. Gilson the professional man and the impressions he created as a teacher, co-worker, and as an administrator. This chapter reviews the curriculum changes during his tenure, the courses he taught, and his views toward education.

Chapter 4 concentrates on Dr. Gilson the artist and discusses his methods and procedures in preparing a production. It also includes a short review of the speech textbook which he wrote entitled The Speaking of English,

and it briefly examines his original poetry.

Chapter 5 summarizes the major events in Dr. Gilson's life, and it answers the questions of who he was, what were his attitudes, and what he accomplished.

The appendixes reproduce his poetry and other original prose works; they include an outline of his text book, plus a list of plays which he produced during his time as head of the department.

Sources

The primary source for the personal material is a scrapbook assembled by Mrs. F. L. Gilson containing family history, letters, and photographs, as well as press notices and clippings from many newspapers.

The following newspapers are those from which the majority of clippings in the family scrapbook were taken.

1. The Winfield Daily Courier (Winfield, Kansas), September, 1901-August, 1913.
2. The Southwestern Collegian (Winfield, Kansas), September, 1901-August, 1913.
3. The Emporia Gazette (Emporia, Kansas), August, 1913-January, 1946.
4. The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), August, 1913-January, 1946.

Two of the above newspapers were inspected for information not contained in the scrapbook, The Emporia Gazette and The Bulletin.

Because of their personal associations with Dr. Gilson the following persons were interviewed: Marjorie

Williams and Teresa DeLong, daughters; Dr. Russell Porter, student, director, and son-in-law; Kathryn Kayser and Dr. George R. Pflaum, co-workers; Dr. Everett Rich and Richard L. Roahen, English faculty; and Dr. Thomas Butcher and Kenneth Scott, students.

The following chapters, then, are based upon the material obtained from the above named sources.

Chapter 2

F. L. GILSON'S BACKGROUND

Franklin Leonard Gilson was born in West Union, Iowa, on March 21, 1895, and was named after his two grandfathers, Isaac Franklin Clark and Oliver Leonard Gilson. Both his mother's and his father's families date back to the Revolutionary War, and it is believed that both families had ancestors who were early settlers in the Colonies. After their marriage in 1871 Dr. Gilson's parents settled on the family farm in Illyria where young Dr. Gilson spent his boyhood. He was the eldest of six children: Dr. Gilson; Harry; the twins Roy and Ross, who died in infancy; Ella; and Glenn Marian, who also died as a young child.

The attitudes and dreams of the young Dr. Gilson are expressed in his autobiography, which was written for a class during his last year at Upper Iowa University.¹ Living away from town on a farm with no other families close, Dr. Gilson was a lonely child. He considered himself an adult sort of a child because of his close association with parents, grandparents, and other older relatives. The brother next to Dr. Gilson in age was Harry, who was five

¹Franklin Leonard Gilson, The Story of My Life, March 25, 1899. Contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

years younger; so Dr. Gilson had no companions his own age. As a result, his imagination produced his playmates, and he found early happiness in play-acting. While this early training may have prepared him for his career in the theatre, it did nothing to prepare him for school; and he found on his first day of first grade that he was horrified by the rough games played by the boys. He did not adapt readily to school life. While he found no problems with school work, he did find it difficult to make friends; and it was not until his senior year of high school that he really enjoyed attending school. On entering adolescence he found another escape from his lonely life; he began reading novels. Rather than submitting to his own love of sentimentality by turning to the much published and readily available writers of maudlin fiction of the day, he chose his reading material from among the better authors such as Dickens and Hawthorne. He believed that his choices were originally made to enable him to say that he had read them; but fortunately he developed a taste for them, and they formed the foundation for his love of a broad range of good literature. Although Dr. Gilson himself didn't realize it at the time, his life-long interest in the theatre was already forming in 1891 when at the age of sixteen he took part in a junior high school program. He played the role of Daniel O'Rafferty in a comedy called Striking Oil and was completely captivated by the play making process. Before his discovery of the theatre, his true interest was music. He took piano lessons

as a child and gradually improved his musicianship through his own efforts because of his extreme interest in that art. Although he was never to make a career out of his love for the piano, he continued to play and enjoy music all his life. Another field that almost won him away from speech was botany. He was always fond of plants and could name almost any specimen on sight. The theatre, however, remained his favorite subject.

Upon Dr. Gilson's graduation from high school at the age of seventeen in 1892, it was George Monroe Gilson's thought that his son should become a farmer. Dr. Gilson detested the idea and applied for and received his first teaching certificate--a six months, second class teaching certificate issued by the Fayette County Public Schools on January 27, 1893. This period between his high school graduation and his entrance into college in September of 1894 was the most unhappy time of his life. He taught in a rural school for two terms, which he enjoyed, but the rest of his time was spent miserably in trying to become a farmer. He dreaded the cold April mornings with a full day's plowing ahead, knowing that upon returning home at night the chores awaited him.

The first college he attended was Cornell College at Mount Vernon, Iowa. He over-anticipated the joys of being away at school, and he was no doubt still the shy unaggressive boy he had been in high school. As a result, he recalled bitterly the reality of his first few weeks at

college. By second term, however, he had formed his first close friendship with another person. This was his college roommate--a boy from quite a different background with different interests, but with whom he grew very close. He viewed this friendship as a turning point in his life, and it paved the way for his forming other friendships. "The world seemed so much better and happier to live in."²

In many ways Dr. Gilson was typical of boys away from home for the first time. He certainly enjoyed receiving packages from the farm. In a letter to his grandfather dated February 17, 1895, he expressed his thanks for "the box of eatables."³ He especially enjoyed the butter-nut meats, but said, "In fact everything in the box is just splendid and I thank you all very much for it."⁴ Another "typical" example is the paragraph which begins, "Tell Papa I wish he would please send me ten dollars as soon as he can conveniently; I think the board bill is due March 5th."⁵ Also at this time he discovered his deep interest in the field of expression and vowed to make it his life's work. Academy Graduation Exercises at Cornell College in June, 1895

²Gilson, The Story of My Life.

³Franklin Leonard Gilson, in a letter to his grandfather, February 17, 1895. Contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

⁴Gilson, letter.

⁵Gilson, letter.

were performed with Franklin L. Gilson presenting an original essay entitled Veneering.⁶

When Dr. Gilson returned home after finishing the year he had no intention of returning to school. Instead he took another teaching position in a small country school about a mile and a half southwest of the Gilson home. He took his younger sister Ella with him to school the winter he taught there. Lone Oak School was a one-room, freshly painted, white frame building closer to home than the brick structure two miles east of their farm where he had gone to school. He now held a twelve months, first-class teaching certificate issued by the Fayette County Public Schools on August 24, 1895.

April and May of 1896 brought double sadness to the Gilson family. On April 29 Dr. Gilson's youngest sister Glenn Marian, who was six years old, died. Two weeks later his beloved grandmother Mary J. Gilson also passed away on May 12. She was seventy-one.

In the spring term of 1897 Dr. Gilson returned to school following the advice of his mother Ann Marie, whom he much admired. He did not return to Cornell College but entered Upper Iowa University, which was closer to home. He continued to follow his interest in expression and was frequently featured in programs. His ability became well known, and one press notice states that "Mr. Gilson then favored

⁶The original copy, contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook, is reproduced in Appendix B.

the class with a reading entitled The Volunteer Organist. Mr. Gilson, in his usual way, pleased his audience very much."⁷ His senior year he participated very actively in his chosen field, giving readings in elocution recitals, literary society programs, senior banquet entertainment, and commencement exercises. He graduated on Thursday, June 10, 1899, receiving the degree Ph. B. or Bachelor of Philosophy.

After graduation from Upper Iowa University, Dr. Gilson took a special course in the Cunnock School of Oratory at Evanston, Illinois, a department of Northwestern University. There he met Ralph Brownell Dennis, who was to become the Director of Northwestern University's School of Speech. Dennis became well-known as a popular lecturer on Russia and the discovered of actor Edgar Bergen. Dennis and Dr. Gilson became lifetime friends. Dr. Gilson graduated from Northwestern with the degree of Bachelor of Oratory. Professor Cunnock and President Benton of Upper Iowa University both considered Dr. Gilson's work of "superior excellence."⁸

After his year at Northwestern he learned of the newly formed School of Oratory at Southwestern College, a Methodist College in Winfield, Kansas. In 1901 he joined their staff as Director of the School of Oratory and until

⁷Fayette Collegian (Fayette, Iowa), October 15, 1898. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

⁸Bulletin of Information, Southwest Kansas College, 1st Series No. 5, August, 1901. Contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

1908 was that department's only instructor. His starting salary was \$155.00 plus all tuition from his department which may have amounted to \$600.00 or more for the year.

During his first year at Southwestern no major plays were produced. Rather, the School of Oratory was represented by numerous recitals, both from students and faculty. These presentations were warmly and enthusiastically received as can be seen by the reaction of The Collegian:

As evidenced by this program and others, the department has never done better work than in the present year, a fact which speaks in the highest terms not only of the interest manifested by the students, but also of the ability and careful labor of its honored head, Professor Gilson.⁹

Dr. Gilson was at this time just twenty-seven years old.

In the spring term of 1903 the School of Oratory produced the first play ever seen at Southwestern. Dr. Gilson directed Charley's Aunt and was credited with its success. Later that school year, on May 20, 1903, The Merchant of Venice was produced with Dr. Gilson in the role of Antonio. Dr. Gilson was no stranger to Winfield audiences by this time as he frequently was featured in programs in the area as well as participated in the various music and oratory recitals of Southwestern students. In addition he had organized the Gilson Concert Company consisting of the Director of Stringed Instruments at Southwestern, Professor

⁹The Southwestern Collegian (Winfield, Kansas), June, 1902. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

G. Sidney Stark, on the violin; Miss Edith R. Howard, soprano, a student at the college; and Dr. Gilson, who performed readings and acted as accompanist on the piano. This company played not only in Winfield but also in many small towns in the surrounding area. Dr. Gilson also toured as a single act. With a program announcing "Franklin L. Gilson-Reader" he presented an evening's entertainment with selections ranging from Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer to Tennyson's Enoch Arden (with piano accompaniment). This took him as far as Clear Lake, Iowa, and Lamar, Colorado, and must have resulted in good publicity for the school. In the spring of 1903 he was able to announce that there were twice as many students enrolled in the school of Oratory as there had been in the previous year.

Between the years 1903-1906 no complete record has been kept as to the activities of the School of Oratory, but one small item appeared in The Collegian in October, 1905 recording the activities of Dr. Gilson: "Professor Gilson and Miss Lulu Purdy attended church Sunday evening, October 22."¹⁰ Later that school year in the spring term Miss Purdy's name again appears--this time in the cast for a skit, Merchant of Venice Up-to-Date. It was Miss Purdy's senior year, and shortly after graduation the following announcement was to be seen, "A most delightful event in

¹⁰The Southwestern Collegian (Winfield, Kansas), October, 1905. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

college circles was the marriage, on Wednesday evening, June 6, at 8:30 o'clock, of Miss Lulu Edna Purdy to Professor Franklin L. Gilson"¹¹ The couple spent the summer with Frank's family in Iowa, and then they set up house-keeping in Winfield in the fall. Less than a month had elapsed when Dr. Gilson was recalled to West Union, Iowa, to attend the funeral of his father, George Monroe Gilson, who died on September 29, 1906.

In both the 1906-1907 and the 1907-1908 school years the only record of plays available is a production of As You Like It, presented both years. A number of recitals by the graduating seniors of the School of Oratory were seen each spring, and Dr. Gilson remained a popular attraction, but until 1911-1912 there is no record of other productions by the department. At home Dr. Gilson's family was growing. July 5, 1907, saw the birth of the Gilson's first baby girl, Marjorie Clifford. A brother-in-law was added when in 1909 Dr. Gilson returned home to West Union to play for the wedding of his sister Ella. Ella had been living with her mother and grandfather, but since her marriage to a missionary took her far from home, arrangements were made for the elder Gilsons to spend the winter in Winfield with Dr. Gilson's family. That fall on November 1, 1909, Marjorie's little sister Miriam Glenn was born, and shortly after that

¹¹The Winfield Daily Courier (Winfield, Kansas), June, 1906. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

their grandmother Anna and great-grandfather O. L. Gilson arrived in Winfield for their visit. On May 19, 1911, a third daughter Teresa Elaine was born. The "Gilson Trio" were three very attractive little girls as shown in photographs contained in the family scrapbook.

In 1910 there is again evidence that Dr. Gilson was hard at work in the field of drama, but there is still no record of college productions. My Friend from India in which Dr. Gilson acted as well as directed was presented to Winfield audiences on Monday, February 9, 1910, then repeated on Wednesday, February 16 to the people of Arkansas City, Kansas. A showing was scheduled for Oxford, Kansas, on Friday, February 18, and for Belle Plaine on the twenty-second. This production was strictly a "home talent" play given for the benefit of the Y. M. C. A. Then on April 11, 1910, the Senior Class of Blackwell High School presented A Midsummer Night's Dream directed by Dr. Gilson. The following February the "home talent" company again produced a play. This time the benefits from The College Widow went to the Cemetery Association. Dr. Gilson was again outstanding as an actor.¹²

The spring of 1911 an announcement appeared in The Collegian that the Junior Class would produce a play entitled The Benefit of the Doubt by Arthur W. Pinero, however there

¹²Locations and dates of Dr. Gilson's activities were compiled from programs and newspaper clippings contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

is no evidence that it was presented. No reference to this play is found in the scrapbook, nor is there any mention made of it in Norman Callison's historical thesis about Southwestern's Speech Department.¹³ In late summer and early fall of 1911 Dr. Gilson spent three months studying in the Curry School of Expression at Boston, and another month at the Cumnock School of Oratory in Evanston, Illinois. Records do show that in the 1911-1912 school year the following plays were presented: The Man of the Hour by Octave Thanet, Heavenly Twins, and Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew; while in 1912-1913 She Stoops to Conquer by Oliver Goldsmith, Ingomar, The Barbarian by Marie Lovell, and the comic opera The Mikado by Gilbert and Sullivan were seen.¹⁴ Ko-Ko, Lord High Executioner, was one of the last roles performed at Southwestern by Dr. Gilson.

Not all of Dr. Gilson's activities at Southwestern College were solely in the field of dramatics. He was described by The Collegian as a "Premier Forensic Coach whose Record in Training Orators is Best in Kansas."¹⁵ From 1902-1912 his orators averaged a 2.5 in delivery at the State Contest, a number one being the highest rank achieved.

¹³Norman Callison, "A History of the Department of Speech and Dramatics at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas" (unpublished master's thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas, 1967).

¹⁴Callison, p. 161.

¹⁵The Southwestern Collegian (Winfield, Kansas), April 5, 1912. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

on a scale from one to ten. During that time several number one ratings were received by Dr. Gilson's orators in 1905, 1906, 1908, 1909, and 1912. A very productive year for Dr. Gilson was 1907. During that year he instituted Oral Interpretation as a part of the curriculum, founded a teaching methods class, and offered debate as an academic course. There was quite an active debate group at Southwestern, annually competing with Fairmount College, later Wichita State University in Wichita, Baker University at Baldwin, Ottawa University, the College of Emporia, Park College in Missouri, and Friends University. One of his last efforts at Southwestern was the forming of a women's oratorical association in 1913. It was named the "Women's Intercollegiate Association of Kansas."¹⁶

In 1913 Dr. Gilson, one of the oldest members of the Southwestern faculty in view of his twelve years experience there decided to resign. His decision was based on the increase in salary that the Kansas State Normal School offered and the opportunity of teaching in a larger school. His departure was much regretted by faculty, students, and Winfield in general as Dr. Gilson was a very popular man. The faculty committee of the Board of Trustees offered him a tentative increase in salary, but they found it impossible to meet the offer made by the state school. Dr. Gilson left a position that was difficult to fill. In the four years

¹⁶Callison, p. 120.

following his resignation, the School of Oratory had three different directors before a general reorganization of the department took place. Winfield's loss was Emporia's gain.

In the fall of 1913 the Gilson family moved to Emporia. Dr. Gilson went first and rented a house at 1304 Highland for a year. The rest of the family followed early in September. The family consisted at that time of Dr. and Mrs. Gilson; the three little girls--Marjorie, Miriam, and Teresa; Dr. Gilson's mother, Anna Clark Gilson; Aunt Ella Clark Welsh; and Dr. Gilson's grandfather, Oliver Leonard Gilson. Within a year of the move to Emporia plans had been laid for a new house to be built at 801 West 12th Street, and by November of 1914 the family moved into what was to be the Gilson home for the next fifty years. Three more children were born to the Gilsons: the twins Gareth Franklin and Goeffrey Purdy, on December 10, 1915 and Leonard Hooker on November 20, 1920.

Of this large family Dr. Gilson is remembered as the dominant parent. Although his work took him away from home frequently it is indicative of his forceful personality that his daughters remember their father as always being at home--especially when they were young. And despite his schedule, he did find time to be with his family. He joined in all family projects. He even went with the girls to pick out their clothes or planned and made them himself. The family depended upon his taste--his sense of style and

color. Mrs. Williams stated that he had better taste than anybody.¹⁷ Mrs. DeLong also remembered him as kind--the sort of thoughtful person who found time to do little things for others.¹⁸ One particular chore which he performed every Tuesday night was the family wash (not such a "little thing" for a family the size of his). His kindness and gentleness and his responsibility for domestic chores did not indicate that he was a weak man, but they reflected some rather unusual qualities for a man of that period. These qualities suggest rather that he was a strong person--undaunted by stereotyped images of how a man must behave. Though small in stature he commanded respect. He was decisive and could be sharp; he was the disciplinarian. Mrs. Williams felt confident that if he understood his childrens' reasons for an action, he would support them.¹⁹

Early pictures of Dr. Gilson show a solemn, dignified man; however, these photographs were primarily professional portraits taken for solemn, dignified events--class sittings, graduations, faculty portraits. Nor was it the style of photographers of the period to insist that the subject smile. Of course, in life Dr. Gilson always had great dignity, but later photographs do show that his facial expression had

¹⁷Statement by Mrs. Marjorie Williams, personal interview, July, 1971.

¹⁸Statement by Mrs. John DeLong, personal interview, July, 1971.

¹⁹Mrs. Williams, interview.

mellowed somewhat for the camera. In many family photographs and casual group pictures he displays a warm smile. And, publicity stills of his various characterizations reveal that he is anything but the somber, strait-laced individual his early portraits suggest. As a young man his hair was thick and dark. In later years his hair line receded somewhat, and his hair thinned and turned grey at the temples. He was somewhat portly in later years, and he also acquired glasses. He was neat in appearance and dressed well, but not flamboyantly.

Dr. Gilson was social-minded to an extent. He enjoyed having friends on the faculty in to tea in his office some afternoons. Mr. Richard L. Roahen remembered that Dr. Gilson liked to have one of the ladies in the Speech Department pour, but if no one was available he would pour himself.²⁰ As a fraternity sponsor Dr. Gilson was able to indulge in his love for dancing. If Lulu Gilson couldn't go, as was frequently the case with young children at home, he'd take one of the girls instead. They loved it. He was always so much fun, probably because he had more fun than anybody. He was interested in and enthusiastic about whatever he was doing.

However, the Gilsons didn't entertain at home much. There were occasional card parties, but so much of his time was spent with others outside of his home that he seemed to

²⁰Statement by Richard L. Roahen, personal interview, April, 1971.

take refuge there from society--it was a place to be just with his family. A typical Gilson day would find him up early and off to the barbershop. Jimmy Mitchell shaved him daily. After morning classes he would eat his lunch at school and then take a brief nap in his office. After afternoon activities he would be home for supper if no dinner engagements claimed him. Evenings were usually spent at the school for rehearsals. If no play was being prepared, his time might be required by any of various clubs needing something special in entertainment. Similar to his position in Winfield, Dr. Gilson rapidly became a popular reader with a vast repertoire. This average day, of course, excludes those weeks he was out of town on tour with a play. His greatest form of relaxation, therefore, was simply to stay at home with his family and cats. Cats were his favorite "teacher's pet," and a wide assortment of them lived with the Gilsons from time to time.²¹ "We always have cats, lots of them," said Dr. Gilson, "We all like them and lots of strange ones have come to us which we have adopted. Cats give an attitude of domesticity to the home."²²

Although he was not a joiner in the general sense Dr. Gilson was at one time president of the Faculty Club, belonged to educational associations, and was a charter

²¹The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), October 11, 1935, p. 4. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

²²The Bulletin, October 11, 1935.

member of Kappa Delta Pi, the National Honorary Scholastic Fraternity. He was seldom on committees, but rather served his church and community in the manner in which he felt most competent--by providing plays suitable to the occasion.

The winter of 1927-28 and the summer of 1928 Dr. Gilson spent in Ypsilanti, Michigan, where he taught at the Michigan Normal College while doing graduate work for his Masters degree at the University of Michigan. The work was completed in Emporia by extension, and the degree, Master of Arts, was received by Dr. Gilson on October 4, 1929. On June 1, 1936, Upper Iowa University conferred upon Dr. Gilson the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature.

Vacations, just for fun, were infrequent; but during Christmas vacation in 1930, Dr. Gilson made a special trip to visit his mother, Anna, and Aunt Ella who were then living with his sister and her husband in California. While he was there Dr. Gilson couldn't resist the temptation to tour the Pasadena Playhouse. The male members of the Gilson family toured the Ozarks in August of 1931 in a "Model T" Ford, purchased for the boys. Dr. Gilson didn't drive and was reluctant to learn on the old car, so the family was astonished to hear Goeffery announce upon their return that Dad drove all the way. Mrs. Williams recalled that after enjoying their reactions he finished, "From the back seat."²³ Another California trip to visit Frank's Aunt and sister took

²³Mrs. Williams, interview.

place in 1937. Anna, Frank's mother, had passed away the previous year on February 1, 1936. Marjorie, Gareth, and Leonard accompanied their parents.

The early 1940's were tragic for Dr. Gilson. In less than a year's time he lost two of his sons. On October 5, 1942 services were held for Gareth Franklin who was killed in a plane crash outside Enid, Oklahoma, less than a week after he had flown into Emporia for a brief visit with his parents. In early May of 1943 Leonard Hooker was reported missing in action in the Burma-India-China theatre since April 28, 1943. In the summer of 1945 Dr. Gilson suffered serious heart attacks and was confined to the hospital and at his home for almost two months. However he returned to the campus in the fall and taught that semester, apparently in good health until about two weeks before his death when he suffered another heart attack. He died on November 27, 1946.

Dr. Gilson's personality is difficult to capture on paper. There are so many contradictions about him. Mrs. DeLong pictured him as being broad-minded, even lenient.²⁴ Yet, many of his students were afraid of him--perhaps because he was so dignified. Some acquaintances described him as quite gruff. He was not the sort of person who encouraged familiarity from his students. Those students who knew him

²⁴Statement by Mrs. John DeLong, personal interview, July, 1971.

well were on fairly informal terms with him, however. Dr. Gilson's frequent appearances in his plays suggest that he was a person who craved attention and acclaim. Also, the frequent use of his own family in his plays made many feel that he was highly egocentric. While he was aware of the criticism, he was not cowed by it; and he offered rational explanations for his actions. Certainly there was nothing "wishy-washy" about the man, but he was complex. Those who loved him were devoted absolutely, but no one ever crossed him. Many were intimidated by him, and for those he had no respect. All those people interviewed remembered him as a very forceful, impressive personality.

Regardless of the various reactions people had to him, the fact remains that Dr. Gilson was a colorful figure who made a vivid impression upon all who came into contact with him.

Chapter 3

DR. GILSON--THE PROFESSIONAL MAN

There exists a major difficulty in separating Dr. Gilson's private life from his artistic life or from his professional work. In his private life Dr. Gilson had no hobbies other than his work. His work was deeply involved with the theatre which was his greatest interest in life. Nevertheless, chapter three attempts to discuss Dr. Gilson, the professional man, and the impressions he created both as an administrator and as a teacher as well as the concomitant development of the Kansas State Teachers College Speech Department.

According to Dr. George R. R. Pflaum, Head of the Speech Department at Kansas State Teachers College from 1947-1960, an administrator's two biggest jobs are securing staff and securing funds; these problems also proved troublesome during Dr. Gilson's leadership in the department.¹ When Dr. Gilson arrived on the Kansas State Normal School's campus in 1913, there was only one other instructor in the Speech Department. The demand for speech was small, so he taught two classes in the English Department in order to teach a

¹Statement by Dr. George R. R. Pflaum, personal interview, July, 1971.

full load. In 1915 when he added two other instructors to the department, they both taught English courses also. In Dr. Gilson's first ten years in the Speech Department members of his staff frequently completed teaching loads by also instructing in the English Department. In the case of V. A. Davis, an opening in the debate program brought him into the Speech Department though he was primarily an English instructor. In those first ten years Dr. Gilson hired thirteen new instructors. He averaged three teachers in the department a year until 1922 when he increased the staff to five. Eleven of those hired stayed only one or two years, which indicates a rather large turnover in the department. During the next eight years sixteen full time instructors were hired, and the department averaged 5.5 full time instructors a year. Not all were new to the department. Winifred Parsons returned after an absence of two years, and Irma Graves Weyler returned after her marriage and an absence of four years to teach another two years. Of the sixteen teachers hired, eleven were women and six of them taught only one year each. During this period most women quit working after marriage, which helps to explain this great fluctuation in staff; however, there are no records stating that all these women left because of marriage. Dr. Everett Rich reported that Dr. Thomas Butcher, President of the Kansas State Normal School from 1913-1943, suggested to Dr. Gilson that the turnover in his department was too

great.² Nineteen thirty-two was the first year that no new personnel was hired and none were lost. At that time the speech faculty consisted of five: Dr. Gilson, Opal Ada Keeney, George R. R. Pflaum, Russell Porter, and Dan L. Wilhelm. In 1934 Kathryn Estalyn Kayser joined the staff. Although nine other instructors passed through the department from 1932-1946, this group was the nucleus of the department. In 1936 Miss Keeney left, and in 1941 Mr. Wilhelm died, but the department had long since stabilized with a congenial and loyal staff.

Problems securing funds were a major consideration in any department, but this was certainly critical in one such as Speech--where expensive extra-curricular training is an integral part of the education of each student. For nearly twenty years the department was divided roughly into two areas--public address and theatre. In the public address area the debate program was the source of constant expense because of the trips to distant cities and eventually to other states to compete with the debate teams from all over the country. The cost of producing plays is high, because it involves not only the permanent facilities--the stage and lighting, plus the different costumes, settings, and properties--but also royalties and cost of scripts for each new production. Other cost factors which increased departmental

²Statement by Dr. Everett Rich, personal interview, April, 1971.

expenses occurred under Gilson's leadership. For example, soon after his arrival in Emporia he conceived the idea of taking plays on tours to surrounding towns much as the Music Department took its Glee Clubs over the state. The group that evolved from this idea was organized in 1916 and called for purposes of publicity, the Gilson Players. In 1939 radio was included in the curriculum involving further expense. Support for these extra activities of the department came from different sources. The Bulletin reported in 1935:

The Speech Department does not receive any appropriation from the student activity fund and so it has to make expenses besides paying royalties. Any profit from productions is placed in a fund to be used in the production of the next plays.³

At one point the public address section was able to enlist the aid of the Student Council, but the theatre still relied on box office receipts. In 1937 The Bulletin commented on this:

Debators evidently have made good use of the art of politics and persuasion, having persuaded the Student Council a few years ago to give eight per cent of the student activity fund to pay debate expenses . . . the trips which the Gilson Players make to towns throughout the state doing excellent advertising for Kansas State Teachers College are made on the same basis as professional stock companies--no box office receipts, no eats.⁴

In addition, students making the trips with the Gilson

³The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), March 12, 1935. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

⁴The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), March 2, 1937. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

Players paid their personal expenses themselves. However difficult securing funds must have been, the job was successful because the Speech Department grew in personnel, curriculum and facilities. Under Dr. Gilson's influence the department continued to improve and expand its scope, giving the student the best in speech education.

In a thesis written in 1934 on the history of the college Miss Kayser and Mr. Fish report that the school was seriously affected by World War I and the economic depression of the 1930's resulting in losses of enrollment and decreases in faculty positions.⁵ These diminishing effects are not noticeable in records of the Speech Department. During 1917 there were two instructors, and when Dr. Gilson's co-worker left, her position was filled for the 1918 school year; the following year a third teacher was added to the staff. In 1928 the Speech Department had six instructors, and in 1929 it boasted not only seven full time instructors but also an additional teacher for the summer session. The speech courses were evidently in demand even in times when other departments were having to withdraw classes and reduce their faculty numbers.

This demand can be attributed to three influences: the nature of the work involved, the publicity given to the

⁵Everett D. Fish and Kathryn Kayser, "An Outline of the History of the Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, 1865-1934" (unpublished master's thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas, 1936).

department, and the personality of the head of the department. From the early years activity in speech was popular. Even before the department was formed, speech contests were held on the campus. The contests were between members of literary societies, which existed solely because individuals were interested in speech activities. From the founding of the school in 1865 to the forming of the Department of Speech Arts and Oral English in 1908, any activity in debate, oratory, dramatic reading, or one-act plays was completely extra-curricular thus attesting to the popularity of the work. When Dr. Gilson came to the school in the fall of 1913 he re-organized and re-named the department. The Department of Public Speaking and Expression offered seven courses plus private lessons as opposed to the nineteen courses offered the year before. These seven courses combined work done in the various classes the previous year and eliminated much that Dr. Gilson felt unnecessary or out-dated. The result was a solid foundation on which to base the development of the department. Following are the course descriptions of those seven classes offered by the department under the direction of Dr. Gilson:

1. Fundamentals of Expression. (3 Hrs.)

A course in the underlying principles of expression, including training in voice, pronunciation, and bodily expression as applied to interpretation of literature. The course is designed to help teachers make all oral exercises in the classroom intelligent and pleasing. Some practice will be given in story-telling, and causes and remedies for defective speech will be considered.

2. Methods in Reading. (2 Hrs.)

A pedagogical course, dealing with methods and problems of teaching reading in the grades. The state text in fourth and fifth readers is used, with lectures and references to standard authorities in this line.

3. Dramatics. (2 Hrs.)

A course in presentation of farces and plays. The aim of the course is to gain a clear understanding of the dramatic form in literature, and to give the student practical knowledge of how to stage a play.

4. Argumentation and Debate. (2 Hrs.)

A good text is used for the basis of actual work in debate. The matter of debate work considered both as to form and matter.

5. Public Speaking. (3 Hrs.)

A course in extemporaneous speech. Phillip's Effective Public Speaking is used as a text; and much drill is given in the presentation of speeches. The aim of the course is principally to give the student ease and effectiveness in public speech.

6. Orations. (2 Hrs.)

A course in the writing and delivery of the formal type of public address. The student is recommended to take Course 1 or Course 5 before entering this class.

7. Advanced Expression. (3 Hrs.)

A continuation of Course 1. Drill in platform work, arranging programs, making readings from stories and plays.

8. Private Lessons.

It is necessary that the student who majors in this department have much individual work. For this, the private lesson is offered, to be arranged after consultation with the head of the department. A special fee is required for this course.⁶

In order for a student to major in speech it was necessary to complete all of the courses offered. During the following

⁶Kansas State Normal School, General Catalogue, 1913-1914, NS, Vol. III (Emporia, Kansas), pp. 106-107.

years changes were made in the initial list of classes. Those changes are recorded below with the exception of minor changes such as altering Argumentation and Debate from a two hour course to three hours of credit, or the dropping of the words "fundamentals" or "advanced" in favor of Roman numerals I or II.

In 1914-1915, Methods in Reading and Orations were dropped, and Advanced Public Speaking and Methods in Oral English were added, thus maintaining the number of courses offered at seven; 1916-1917, three classes were added to the curriculum--Story-telling, the Occasional Address, and Platform Reading; 1917-1918, Pageantry was added; 1921-1922, Dramatics II was added; 1922-1923, Course 1, Oral English, became Oral Expression I, and Oral Expression II was added bringing the list of classes available to fourteen. The requirement for a major in speech was changed from all classes offered to a minimum of twenty hours completed in the department and the course enrollment was limited to twenty students. In 1924 Dr. Gilson issued the following as to the purpose of the department:

It is the purpose of the Department of Public Speaking and Expression to enable its students to speak the English language distinctly and correctly, to express the master-pieces of literature with true meaning and feeling, to address an audience easily and effectively, and to have so thorough a knowledge of the methods used that they may teach the subject wisely.⁷

⁷Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, Bulletin of Information, General Catalogue, 1924, No. 15 (Emporia, Kansas), p. 42.

In 1926 the name of the department was changed to the Department of Speech. To acquire a major in the department a student was required to earn twenty-five hours. The greatest single change in the department was the shift of emphasis from platform address to drama. When Dr. Gilson joined the department in 1913, only two of the nineteen courses offered were in the area of dramatics. This remained true after Gilson's re-organization of the department. With the exception of two classes in drama emphasis still remained in the area of public address. By 1926, however, there was an equal number of classes offered to students in both areas of interest.

In the 1928-29 school year a course in Speech Pathology was made part of the curriculum for the first time in a Kansas college; 1929-1930, Play Construction I and II were added, which were playwriting courses; 1931-1932, Speech Pathology was expanded by the addition of Speech Correction; 1932-1933, Dr. Gilson added Material and Background for Interpretation, and Seminar in Speech Correction, which was open to graduate students. Speech Pathology does not appear in the catalogues this last year; 1935-1936, Teaching of Speech was added; 1936-1937 Voice Science was new to the curriculum; 1937-1938, The Occasional Address was deleted from the list of courses offered. Also this year, students were allowed to gain academic credit for participating in forensic activities with the addition of a course entitled Forensics. In 1938-1939, three classes were offered for

those students interested in theatre--Stagecraft, Voice and Diction, and Play Production. In 1940-1941, Fundamentals of Speech III was added, and a new area was opened to speech students with the addition of Radio Broadcasting; 1944-1945, Independent Study, Radio Speech, and Radio Writing were included. The following list of courses is the curriculum offered by the Department of Speech in the 1945-1946 Catalogue, which was Dr. Gilson's final year as Head of the department:

1. Fundamentals of Speech I (2 Hrs.)
2. Fundamentals of Speech II (1 Hr.)
3. Fundamentals of Speech III (3 Hrs.)
25. Oral Interpretation I (3 Hrs.)
26. Public Speaking I (3 Hrs.)
27. Story-telling (3 Hrs.)
28. Dramatics (3 Hrs.)
29. Argumentation and Debate (2 Hrs.)
31. Stagecraft (2 Hrs.)
32. Voice and Diction (1 Hr.)
33. Commercial Music (2 Hrs.)
34. Acoustics of Music and Speech (see Music)
35. Radio Broadcasting (2 Hrs.)
37. Radio (2 Hrs.)
- *40. Radio Programs and Traffic (2 Hrs.)
48. Radio Speech (3 Hrs.)
- *49. Radio Production (3 Hrs.)
50. Acting (3 Hrs.)
51. Public Speaking II (3 Hrs.)
52. Oral Interpretation II (3 Hrs.)
54. Voice Science (3 Hrs.)
55. Introduction to Speech Correction (3 Hrs.)
56. Forensics (2 Hrs.)
57. Play Production (1 Hr.)
- *58. Radio in the Classroom (2 Hrs.)
60. Radio Writing (3 Hrs.)
- *65. a. Radio Practice (3 Hrs.) (Speech)
- *65. b. Radio Practice (3 Hrs.) (Writing)
71. Independent Study (2-4 Hrs.)
76. Recitals (2 Hrs.)
77. Teaching of Speech

(1 Hr.) 78. Play Construction I (2 Hrs.) 79. Play Construction II *80. Radio Problems (3 Hrs.) 85. Speech Correction (3 Hrs.) 109. Material and Background for Interpretation (2 Hrs.) 125. Seminar in Speech Correction.⁸

The scope of the department had broadened greatly during these years, and Dr. Gilson summarized its aims with this statement:

The objective of the Department of Speech is to develop pleasing and effective personality. As the student gains the ability to express himself, he begins to have confidence in himself. All work done in the department is to develop not only an effective speaker, but also an effective individual.

The immediate purpose of most of the courses in speech is to develop ability to express thought. Each of the various speech activities--extemporaneous speaking, oral interpretation, acting--has its own special techniques, mastery of which gives the student ability to express himself.

The Department of Speech sponsors extra-curricular activities in which students of outstanding ability take part: plays, debate, discussion groups, Speaker's Bureau, and radio broadcasting. New students will be especially interested in the Freshman Play, the cast of which is annually chosen in try-outs.⁹

Dr. Gilson is certainly not the sole originator of all innovations in the Speech Department. Credit must be given to Dr. George R. R. Pflaum for developing the speech

⁸The Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, Bulletin of Information, Catalog Number for 1946, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Emporia, Kansas, 1946), The asteriks beside the various radio classes offered indicated that for credit toward degrees the student must consult the Head of the department and the Registrar.

⁹The Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, Bulletin of Information, Catalog Number for 1944-1945, Vol. 24, No. 7 (Emporia, Kansas, 1944), pp. 64-5.

correction program and the forensic program. Indeed, Dr. Gilson's interest in debate was small. He considered it almost an appendix to the department, and preceding the addition of Dr. Pflaum to the staff, debate was often taught by someone from the history, social studies, or English departments. R. Russell Porter was responsible for early ventures into radio and devoted much time to developing that area of the department. In like fashion many of the new courses offered by the department were undoubtedly suggested by various instructors. But, the responsibility for the curriculum was Dr. Gilson's, and as Head of the department he had veto power. While some disciplines within the college either fell back or remained at a standstill, the Speech Department grew because of Dr. Gilson's leadership. He had drive and imagination, and the program expanded under his supervision.

As mentioned earlier, Dr. Gilson created the Gilson Players in 1916. With the exception of the World War I years and the Depression, this group toured Kansas towns once or twice a year from 1916-1946 with plays of exceptional quality. The purpose of this organization according to Dr. Gilson was two-fold: "First, is to give students who merit it, the opportunity for practical work in dramatics; and secondly, to present standard drama in towns seldom or never visited by good professional companies."¹⁰ However, the

¹⁰The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), May 5, 1936. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

group produced other advantages also. Speech teachers with an invaluable background and experience in the theatre returned to Kansas communities to teach high school drama; good taste and keen appreciation for fine quality drama was fostered in small towns all over the state; and not to be understated, the Kansas State Teachers College and its Speech Department were publicized throughout Kansas. This group can be credited in part for the increase in the size of the department. It certainly was responsible also for luring some students to the Kansas State Teachers College campus.

The third reason offered for the stability of the Speech Department during the war years and the Depression was the personality of the head of the department. Dr. Gilson's personality has already been discussed in Chapter 2, but a reminder of the esteem in which the student body held him was demonstrated in 1931 when The Sunflower, the school's yearbook, was dedicated to him. In his thesis Dr. David Matheny has written that ". . . the success or failure of a department is reflected by the personality of its leadership" ¹¹ But for closer insight into what the man himself believed responsible for the success of the Speech Department, there is this statement from Dr. Gilson:

¹¹David Matheny, "A Historical Review of the Department of Speech of Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas, From 1883-1957" (unpublished master's thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas, 1957).

Personally I feel that this growth is due to the fact we have tried to make speech fit the students' needs socially, culturally, and educationally. It is due to the nature of the subject matter itself which we have tried to make fit the needs of the people. The growth of the Speech Department has been gradual; it has been no boom affair. We have had co-operation from the president and faculty. They have had a keen appreciation of what we were trying to do.¹²

When Dr. Gilson became the Administrator of the Department of Public Speaking and Expression, one of his first moves was to inform the student body during an assembly that plans were being made for inter-collegiate debate. Dr. Gilson's new methods of selecting teams generated much enthusiasm in the student body. His plan, based on that used at the University of Chicago and at the University of Michigan was to allow all students an opportunity to debate, and he would then grade and chose the top twelve debators. This method of selection was altered frequently in ensuing years depending upon the debate coach of each particular year. That first year interest was high and the chosen debators were sent off by the student body with all the heraldry normally accorded the athletic teams of today. In 1916 he organized the Kansas Zeta Chapter of Pi Kappa Delta, which was the largest national forensic organization. The Teachers College chapter was to become one of the largest chapters in the United States, and in 1926 they presented Dr. Gilson with the Pi Kappa Delta key of special honor and

¹²The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), July 10, 1934. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

distinction. The key was of the order of instruction and is granted only to those who have distinguished themselves in the field of teaching forensics.

During these early years Dr. Gilson's interest in debate began to wane, and for the majority of his tenure at Kansas State Teachers College his name was synonymous with good theatre while he left the organization of forensic activities strictly up to the person employed in that area. In 1916 Dr. Gilson was on a committee to organize a Shakespeare festival which was held May 18, 1916, and which was accorded excellent reviews in the Emporia Weekly Gazette.¹³ This was also the year in which Dr. Gilson officially organized the Gilson Players.

Dr. Gilson considered the production of plays to be his primary occupation. In the early years the only regularly scheduled play was the Senior Class Play, but soon the department was offering opportunities for acting experience in a wide variety of vehicles. Dr. Gilson's class in dramatics produced one-act and three-act plays, and the Gilson Players presented at least one production a year as well as the regularly scheduled major production of the department. This schedule resulted in three or four presentations annually. One-act plays became a specialty of the department. Many were produced in Chapel, which was the regularly

¹³Emporia Weekly Gazette (Emporia, Kansas), May 25, 1916, p. 4, cols. 3-4.

scheduled, all-school assembly. In order to expand facilities for presentation of more one-act plays, in 1919 a small theatre was constructed which occupied the center of the third floor hall in the Preston B. Plumb Memorial Building. It contained two sections of stage--a lower level and a level some seven inches higher behind. This higher level measured eighteen feet by twelve feet while the lower stage was only eighteen feet by seven feet. Natural-colored Monk's cloth was used as curtains, and a system of modern lighting completed the new playhouse which was called the Little Theatre. Dr. Gilson used this space as a classroom as well as a center for presentation of one-act plays and numerous recitals. He encouraged his entire staff to appear before groups regularly in order to sharpen their talents. Dr. Gilson frequently appeared, reading selected poetry or prose, or a play. According to various reviews of the frequent recitals, quality was high in the Little Theatre. In addition the audience could expect to see new ideas explored there as well as classic fare. The Little Theatre offered an experimental situation in which Dr. Gilson could present to the relatively sophisticated college audience some courageous innovations that could not be presented elsewhere. Dr. Rich remembered, for example, that he first saw the daring Erskine Caldwell drama of social criticism Tobacco Road interpreted in this theatre.¹⁴ Because of

¹⁴Dr. Rich, interview.

Emporia's convenient geography in relation to the Santa Fe, when professional road shows passed through Kansas they frequently stopped over night in Emporia and presented their shows in Albert Taylor Hall on the campus. As often as possible Dr. Gilson would entice these professional players to come up to the Little Theatre in the afternoon to speak to the students. Recitals in the Little Theatre became a weekly afternoon event. Another very popular attraction in the Little Theatre was the presentation of one-act plays which were the result of Play Construction classes. Introduced in 1929-1930, these classes taught original playwriting, and often the final approved products of the classes were presented to the public. Faculty members were active in playwriting also. In 1932 the Little Theatre also began producing weekly the Dramatic Half-Hour, which differed from the original recitals in that only one-act plays were given, the presentation was at night, and admission was ten cents. After four years of activity, in the 1936-1937 school year the Dramatic Half-Hours were discontinued due to the increased activity of the Gilson Players; but the free afternoon lectures, one-act plays, and recitals continued. With the establishment of radio on the campus in 1940, a whole new area was opened for the production of one-act plays. Another feature added to the list of extra-curricular activities sponsored by the department was the introduction in 1934 of a play involving only freshmen students. The response was so great to the first invitation to try-out that the students

had to be divided into small groups; each group presented a one-act play, and from these plays the cast of the first annual three-act Freshman Play was chosen.

One thing that stands out in a survey of Dr. Gilson's years as administrator is the constant activity of the department. Dr. Gilson liked to see everyone involved in the department, from himself to the new freshmen, busy doing something he considered worthwhile in speech.

As it has already been noted that Dr. Gilson's interest lay in the field of drama, it is obvious that as a teacher his favorite classes were in that area also. He enjoyed teaching interpretation courses and dramatics. He is not remembered as a particularly interesting lecturer in the classroom, but he was considered a very able teacher by those who knew him. His ability to interpret was a source of inspiration and example to his students; therefore, his students remember his classes as interesting. He could be strict, and when he gave a final examination, "He threw every book in the department at you."¹⁵ But, Kenneth Scott remembered him for his talent in drawing out the ability of the students. People benefited in Dr. Gilson's classes because of his skill in helping each student eliminate his inhibitions.¹⁶ Another class that Dr. Gilson frequently

¹⁵Mrs. Williams, interview.

¹⁶Statement by Kenneth Scott, personal interview, June, 1971.

taught was Pageantry. This course was a specialty all his own. One semester in 1933 he even traveled to Kansas City, Kansas every two weeks to teach Pageantry as an extension course there. He taught it on the Kansas State Teachers College campus during the summer sessions, and those students enrolled were each required to write a pageant.

As a teacher Dr. Gilson was concerned with the individual student. He believed that all education must be directed to making that student utilize all his talents to the best of his ability and that it was the function of teachers to educate the whole person. No one can express Dr. Gilson's philosophy of education as completely and simply as he can himself:

In the closing scene of the Russian comedy Squaring the Circle, Sashka, an eight-year-old boy, stands in the presence of adults who ask, "What will become of Sashka?" A wise old officer replies, "That my friends, rests with us."

Let us suppose for the moment that Sashka stands before us here and now. What shall we teach him that when he reaches manhood he may be an educated, cultured, gentleman, in Kansas or Kamchatku, in Maine or Madagascar?

First, he must be taught to prize his body and keep it healthy.

He should choose some activity whereby he may earn a livelihood.

He must be taught to think; to think creatively; to weigh evidence accurately that he may reach logical conclusions.

He must be taught many and various facts, not that his mind may be a storehouse of knowledge, but that he may be equipped to solve problems arising from new situations.

He must learn to like his fellow men; to overlook faults and piccadilloes and find true worth, that he may enjoy the satisfaction of friendship.

He must learn to free his imagination and his emotion in keen appreciation of the fine arts--in music and painting and literature and drama and the

dance. He must be taught that fundamental and everlasting truth is found in the arts because they chronicle the experience of mankind in his relation to man, to nature, and to spiritual forces.

And finally he must appreciate fully the fine art of living, so that, unfettered by creeds and dogmas, he may so order the course of his own life that, without injury to himself or to others he may experience the full measure of joy and satisfaction.¹⁷

When this article appeared in The Bulletin it so impressed Dr. Rich that he immediately wrote Dr. Gilson from Cleveland, Ohio, saying that "I think you have done the best job of defining the aim of education that I have ever seen."¹⁸

Dr. Gilson's success as an educator is obvious from the esteem of his co-workers. Dr. Rich recalled a statement made by President Thomas Butcher in which he declared that all one needs to build a good school are three or four men like Dr. Gilson.¹⁹

¹⁷The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), March 15, 1938. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

¹⁸Dr. Everett Rich, in a personal letter to Dr. F. L. Gilson, March 28, 1938. Contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

¹⁹Dr. Rich, interview.

Chapter 4

DR. GILSON--THE ARTIST

Dr. Gilson devoted his life to artistic endeavor, not merely in one area, but in many. As mentioned in Chapter 2 his earliest venture into the arts was through his music, which he continued to enjoy throughout his life. When the field of speech became his life's work, he excelled in directing and in acting. But, he could not confine his talents there. He expressed himself also in writing, and his literary art is represented in poetry, plays, pageants, and a text book. One popular image of the artist is an individual somewhat sloppy in his life-style, dress, and even his thinking. Artistic temperament frequently is used as an excuse for disorganization. No image could be farther from the truth for Dr. Gilson. Every aspect of his artistic life reflects method and order. From the professional polish of his plays to the careful organization of his written work, his clear and trained thinking is evident.

Dr. Gilson found, in his first few years at Kansas State Teachers College, that his experience and expertise in directing were frequently in demand from outside the Speech Department. Before he even directed his first major play for the Speech Department he came to the aid of the Omegas, a girls' literary society, when he helped direct their play

The Mousetrap in April, 1914. A month later he coached the opera Martha for the Music Department. In the spring of 1915 Dr. Gilson's reputation as a talented director was already firmly established by his direction of the production of As the Fates Decree, the Language Department's Latin play, when his first production for the Speech Department, The Piper, was presented in the late spring of that year. Although his dramatics class presented the farce The Kleptomaniac for the Presbyterian Church in the fall of 1915, the major production of Dr. Gilson's third year with the college was A Midsummer Night's Dream. This production was to be an experiment in community drama. Each member of the cast designed and made his own costume, and the boys of the cast planned and constructed any stage settings in an attempt to prove that fine drama could be presented with minimal expense. Produced out-of-doors, Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream fit the needs of the project since the action takes place in a woodland scene. Shakespeare's play was presented February 11, 1916, followed immediately by Back to the Farm on February 18, 1916, which was directed for the entertainment of the Farm Congress held annually in Emporia. The following comment was made in The Emporia Gazette which signifies Dr. Gilson's growing reputation as an artist: "Mr. Gilson has built up in his classes an amateur dramatic stock company which is becoming one of the most prominent in Kansas."¹ There is no record of plays being taken on the

¹The Emporia Weekly Gazette (Emporia, Kansas),

road from the college at this time, but the words of The Gazette writer were to be proven true within the next few months as Dr. Gilson began organizing the touring group known as the Gilson Players. Although Dr. Gilson was to direct a few more shows for the Language Department such as Der Neffe als Onkel for the German class and The Phormio of Terrence for the Latin class, both presented in March of 1916, the developing interest in theatre within his own department was to consume most of his time.

During Dr. Gilson's thirty-three years at the Kansas State Teachers College, the Speech Department produced ninety-four major productions. This figure does not include presentations of the dramatics classes or the Little Theatre. Nor does it include special productions such as those presented to the Farm Congress and the school chapels, or assemblies. It does not include the summer community plays done in Peter Pan Park. These ninety-four major productions include the early annual Senior Class Plays, later Freshman Class Plays, and the Gilson Players productions. Until the 1927-1928 school year, when Dr. Gilson was in Michigan completing work for his Master's Degree, he personally directed all major productions of the Speech Department from 1914. This amounted to twenty-eight plays in fourteen years. After his return to Emporia in the fall of 1928, he began sharing responsibility for the directing

of major productions with Dan L. Wilhelm. Minick and The Swan, both presented during Wilhelm's first year with the department in 1928-1929, were co-directed by Wilhelm and Dr. Gilson. This situation was also true of The Devil's Disciple produced the following year. Sharing responsibility for a major production was Dr. Gilson's method of initiating new staff members into directing. It assured him that his directors were familiar with his standards. Of the sixty-four plays presented by the Speech Department after 1928, Dr. Gilson directed thirty plays between the years 1928 and 1941. For a year he rested, then returned to direct The Guardsman in 1943, and The Eve of St. Mark in 1944, his last major show. Shortly before his death he directed a one-act play once more called Suppressed Desires.

Many of the plays done between 1913 and 1946 were repeats of earlier successes. In many cases, a show enjoyed by home town audiences would be taken on the road the next season. Often a production would be seen first by Dr. Gilson's out-of-town audiences then brought home triumphantly to a final night in Emporia. After a lapse of several years, a favorite play might be revived for another tour. Her Husband's Wife was the first of these repeaters. Presented first in 1916 as the Senior Class Play, it may have been taken out of town for a showing or two. In 1918 it enjoyed great success on tour to neighboring cities and towns, and so it was repeated in 1919 and 1920.

The dramatic troupe making these tours was called the Gilson Players. There is some confusion as to exactly when the Gilson Players originated. In the thesis written by Miss Kayser and Mr. Fish in 1934 it is reported that

On December 9, 1941, the Dramatic Club was organized that had for its purpose the fostering of good drama The Gilson Players first appeared in the 1918 Sunflower and State Normal Bulletins, taking the place of the old Dramatic Club.²

In a news article recapitulating Dr. Gilson's career to the date, 1926, is stated:

Professor Gilson is also the founder of the "Gilson Players," dramatic organization of Emporia Teachers College, and which, after eight years of successful productions in more than one-hundred Kansas Communities, has become known throughout the state.³

According to these two sources, the official name, the Gilson Players, may not have become known or widely used until 1918. However, the Emporia Weekly Gazette in late 1916 does report the decision to use the name, "The organization will be known as 'The Gilson Players.'"⁴ And for this reason it is generally accepted that the Gilson Players originated in 1916. Even so, if Her Husband's Wife did tour

²Everett Fish and Kathryn Kayser, "An Outline of the History of the Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, 1865-1934" (unpublished master's thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, 1936), p. 192.

³The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), March 16, 1926. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

⁴The Emporia Weekly Gazette (Emporia, Kansas), November 30, 1916, p. 2, col. 3.

during its first production in May 1916, it would not yet have been an official Gilson Players production.

In addition to Her Husband's Wife favorite Gilson Players' presentations included: The Servant in the House, Mary Jane's Pa, Mr. Pim Passes By, and O' Sole Mio. Dr. Gilson also always enjoyed presenting As You Like It and The Merchant of Venice. He usually attempted to update the language making it understandable while keeping some of Shakespeare's most well-known speeches intact. He felt that it was far better to present revised Shakespeare than no Shakespeare at all.

The quality of Gilson Players productions was so appreciated that in the summer of 1926, his group was invited to take the play Give and Take throughout the west and north-western states on the Chatauqua circuit, a touring professional theatrical organization. Special recognition was granted to Dr. Gilson when the company allowed him to chose his own cast, as they usually reserved that prerogative for themselves. This professional tour took the players 12,000 miles in twelve weeks. They presented their play to over 160 audiences. The custom of the Chatauqua companies was to book a variety of entertainments into a town over a three-day period. The Gilson Players were always the last show on the bill; and Kenneth Scott, who made the trip that year, remembered that a man from the Chatauqua company would come onstage between the second and third acts to try to set up

bookings for the following year. It was often quite late before the cast of Give and Take could finish their play and proceed to their next booking.⁵

Undaunted by professional experience, in 1933 the Gilson Players again ventured out on an extended tour. This time they spent four weeks, visited twenty-two cities in Kansas playing approximately thirty engagements. They took two plays which they did on alternate performances--The Miser by Moliere and That's the Ticket by Hilary Baker. After enjoying the enthusiasm with which That's the Ticket was received, Dr. Gilson and his business manager and actor, Kenneth Scott, revealed that Hilary Baker was merely a pseudonym under which they themselves had written the play.

One thing that stands out in any cast list of a Players' production is the number of faculty members acting in the show. Dr. Gilson felt that the presence of faculty in a cast insured the quality of the production. "Students do better work when performing with faculty members who have professional standing."⁶ Objections to this situation occurred with regularity. Many felt that the Gilson Players was too elite an organization, and that it should be open to all students; opinions were voiced that the students would learn more from an actual acting situation than from watching

⁵Statement by Kenneth Scott, personal interview, June, 1971.

⁶The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), February 7, 1936. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

an instructor perform. In defense of his organization Dr. Gilson stated:

There is a misunderstanding as to the purpose of plays given by the Gilson Players and who the Gilson Players are The purpose of the Gilson Players is not only to give students opportunities for acting, but paramountly to produce a high type of drama to be presented not only here but before various other audiences in the State. Many of the engagements played would not be obtainable for an all-student cast.⁷

He explained, too, that the organization was an extra-curricular one, not a school activity, and that students could be elected to this group after participating in the productions of the dramatics classes, for which they could also receive college credit.⁸ The Gilson Players continued to use faculty members until after Dr. Gilson's death in 1946.

A new treat was in store for Emporia audiences in the summer of 1935, when Dr. Gilson arranged to present Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream in Peter Pan Park. No admission was charged, and the audience sat on the sloping ground, stretching away from the stage. The show was produced pageant-style with Dr. Gilson including music written especially for the play by Mendelssohn, performed by the college orchestra of forty-five musicians and a chorus of fifty-two "fairies," from the college Laboratory school.

⁷The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), October 8, 1935. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

⁸The Bulletin, October 8, 1935.

Nearly 10,000 persons attended the two performances coming from twenty-six surrounding counties. Plans were made for the Peter Pan Pageant Association to sponsor this free entertainment every year. In 1936 A Midsummer Night's Dream was again produced in the park to enthusiastic response. An estimated 6,000 people saw the third annual performance in 1937. For its fourth year, although staying with the Shakespeare plan, the play was different. Instead of A Midsummer Night's Dream, a cast of approximately fifty presented As You Like It. As with the original plan the play included music and dance playing to over 10,000 persons. Attention was drawn to As You Like It from as far away as Kansas City when a reporter for The Kansas City Times reviewed the production.⁹ As You Like It was repeated in 1939 delighting audiences again. A complete change of pace was noted in 1940 when Our Town became the summer presentation for the park. This was the first modern play produced in the park's amphitheater, and it was directed by Kathryn Kayser who had presented it earlier in the school year. Nineteen forty-one saw a return to Shakespeare as Twelfth Night became the summer attraction. The crowd totaled about 10,000 for the two nights despite the fact that the play had been presented as a Gilson Players production the previous winter. In 1942 the activity of the Peter Pan

⁹The Kansas City Times (Kansas City, Kansas), July 8, 1938. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

Pageant Association was suspended because of the war. In the summer of 1945 Dr. Gilson suffered a heart attack, and the productions were never resumed.¹⁰

In preparing a play for presentation, Dr. Gilson followed an organized schedule. Beginning with blocking, he directed his actors' movements upon the stage; proceeding into work rehearsals, he aided the actors in developing characterizations; and finishing with polishing rehearsals, he established the pace of his show, so that it ran smoothly, built excitement where necessary, and produced the effect he desired.¹¹ He was always very careful with the smallest details, and he considered nothing to do with a play unimportant including washing and ironing costumes. Perhaps his favorite detail in preparing a play was costume design. He carefully collected garments for his theatre wardrobe, making costumes when possible and begging clothing when necessary. Mr. Roahen recalled that his mother donated her own wedding dress to Dr. Gilson's costume collection.¹² Of least concern to Dr. Gilson was the program for the show. A recurring source of surprise to Dr. Rich, who worked in the school print shop, was Dr. Gilson's lack of ability to visualize the finished program. He finally just left that

¹⁰The attendance figures given were collected from issues of The Emporia Gazette from 1935-1941.

¹¹Mr. Scott, interview.

¹²Statement by Richard L. Roahen, personal interview, April, 1971.

detail up to Dr. Rich and the print shop, and apparently was always satisfied with the results.¹³ Although Dr. Gilson encouraged attendance at the professional road shows' productions on the campus and he enjoyed having the personalities speak to his Little Theatre audiences, he did not make a habit of driving to Kansas City or other major cities to attend productions which would not be performed in Emporia. Although encouraged to go by Mr. Roahen of the English Department, who attended frequently, Dr. Gilson resisted. He didn't care to be influenced by the directing and acting of the traveling companies, and he had complete confidence in his own abilities.¹⁴

In his capacity as an actor Dr. Gilson charmed audiences throughout the state. He frequently appeared in his touring shows often doing two acting roles a year, and one year he acted three roles. In later years when he curtailed his own directing assignments, he still appeared in shows directed by other members of his staff. He had a keen sense of the mechanics of the acting style of the time and was remembered as always appearing so natural. Acting was what he loved to do best, and Mr. Scott recalled thinking that he could have been an outstanding professional actor.¹⁵ Although his performance was always appreciated,

¹³Statement by Dr. Everett Rich, personal interview, April, 1971.

¹⁴Mr. Roahen, interview.

¹⁵Mr. Scott, interview.

one of his best parts was Mr. Pim in Mr. Pim Passes By. Appearing onstage in what might have been his own street clothes with no make-up, he was totally Mr. Pim, according to Dr. Rich.¹⁶ Audiences were shocked to see Dr. Gilson portray the unrelenting father in O' Sole Mio after seeing his whimsical, merry, little Mr. Pim a season earlier.

Dr. Gilson was never a temperamental actor and tolerated no one who was. When the Gilson Players toured they were naturally confined to each other's company for varying lengths of time, and so an unpleasant disposition could keep an otherwise talented actor from making a trip with the group. Dr. Gilson never carried his characterizations home with him, which in many cases was a relief to his family.

The double problem of directing as well as acting in a single show caused some pressure upon Dr. Gilson. Many times he would have his stage manager stand in for him while he was directing because he directed from the house; and, when the company left on tour, he would learn his lines on the way to their destination. If he ever forgot his lines, he was good enough an actor to keep that fact from the audience. Mr. Roahen recalls overhearing Emporia's newspaper editor, Mr. William A. White, congratulating Dr. Gilson on a performance. Denying that he deserved such praise, Dr. Gilson informed the editor that he had forgotten his lines,

¹⁶Dr. Rich, interview.

but was unable to convince Mr. White of that fact though he repeated it again and again.¹⁷

While Dr. Gilson played only twenty-six different roles in major productions during his years at the Teachers College, many of these productions were repeated at least once, and some were repeated twice. Roles that he played twice included: Bishop Armstrong in Romance; Hiram Perkins, or "Pa," in Mary Jane's Pa; Karl Werner, the patriarch in O' Sole Mio; and Mr. Hardcastle in She Stoops to Conquer. He appeared in three separate productions of the following: Her Husband's Wife, playing John Belden, the genial uncle of Irene and Richard; The Servant in the House, appearing as Reverend William Smythe twice, and as James Ponsonly Makeshyft in that production's third showing; The Merchant of Venice, taking the part of Shylock; and Mr. Pim Passes By, playing Mr. Pim. Actually Mr. Pim Passes By was produced only twice by the Speech Department in Emporia, but Dr. Gilson also introduced the Michigan State Normal School to genial Mr. Pim when he directed the play during his year in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

The creative urge was always strong in Dr. Gilson. When not actually hard at work acting or directing, he found time to write. Much of his writing was done for his own pleasure, but his subject matter was often reminiscent of

¹⁷Mr. Roahen, interview.

his work. A trio of poems contained in his scrapbook are all written about his former teachers. "A Favorite Teacher-- Minnie Elwell," "Anna Oelberg," and "Julia Crowe" are all testimonies to teachers who impressed him deeply as a child. Another poem, untitled, describes one of his first teaching experiences, and the lesson he was taught. "Hepatica" is quite different in subject matter than his other poems, but it also reveals a sentimental heart in its description of a flower. "Just My Way" is the only poem extant that displays Dr. Gilson's delightful sense of humor. One of Dr. Gilson's poems became quite famous. Although published for years under his name, it also was frequently printed, "Author Unknown." This poem, "Satis Est," or "I Teach School" was originally written during a meeting in 1919 in which a group of teachers were trying to decide what to put into the upcoming Bulletin of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English. Dr. Gilson jotted the poem down, and it was published on page one. With the exception of "Hepatica" and "Just My Way" there is no attempt on Dr. Gilson's part to write poetry that rhymes. "Hepatica's" rhyme scheme is very irregular, and even "Just My Way's" rhyme scheme is unusual. Neither poem tends to be written in a sing-song pattern. Mrs. Williams revealed that Dr. Gilson had a knack for putting words together. Once, while she was still in high school, Mrs. Williams had to give a poem for a toast in the football season on the subject "Offsides." Mrs. Williams recalled being extremely discouraged, not even knowing what

"Offsides" was, when Dr. Gilson promptly began reciting to the rhythm and meter of "The Song of Hiawatha" a complete poem on that subject:

Should you ask me,
Should you wonder,
Why this story of the offsides,
Story of the mighty high school,
High school of the mighty Roosevelt,
I should answer,
I should tell you
That I seek no glory in it,
Neither fame nor any glory . . .

Together she and her father wrote a toast for her to give, although she admitted that it was only occasionally when he would be searching for a word that she would come to his aid.¹⁸ No copy of this little verse remains, but all the poetry that had been collected in the scrapbook is reproduced in Appendix A.

Dr. Gilson wrote several plays, and some of them were presented by the college. He directed two of his own one-acts, Mr. Father and Over the Hill; and two of his three acts, Bitter Sky, a folk drama, and John Barclay, which was a dramatization of William Allen White's book, A Certain Rich Man. The Gilson Players took John Barclay on tour in 1936. As has been mentioned previously, the Gilson Players' last professional tour presented That's the Ticket which, to everyone's surprise, was a collaboration between Kenneth Scott and Dr. Gilson.

¹⁸Statement by Mrs. Marjorie Williams, personal interview, July, 1971.

Dr. Gilson's textbook The Speaking of English, published in 1935, was the result of years of teaching the fundamentals of speaking class to students who had no background in the subject. The book is a very basic text and somewhat in the form of a handbook. When the book was published, it was recommended for use in high schools or for freshmen in college. It was even used at the junior high school level as indicated in a letter from L. R. Davis, teacher of social studies and speech at Stafford Junior High School, in which he informs Dr. Gilson of his appreciation of the text.¹⁹

The book is divided into four parts: Part One is introductory in nature and explains the process of speech; Part Two is concerned with oral interpretation; Part Three discusses constructive speech; and Part Four studies the mechanics of speech. Dr. Gilson suggests in the Preface of his text that Part One always be used first, then the teacher may take up Parts Two or Three as he desires making assignments in Part Four as the course progresses.²⁰ Negative criticisms of the book by the students who used it

¹⁹L. R. Davis, in a letter to Dr. F. L. Gilson, November 9, 1936. Contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

²⁰F. L. Gilson, The Speaking of English (Boston: Expression Company, 1935), p. x. The table of contents in The Speaking of English is included in Appendix D because it reflects his approach to the subject matter offered in a fundamentals of speech class and those areas he dwelled upon in teaching that class.

centered around the fact that answers in the book were required by the editor to be in ink, thus making it impossible to resell. Also, students felt that since the book was used in high schools, it was not suitable for use in college. Dr. Gilson maintained that the request for use of ink in the textbook was the editor's decision as he had not stipulated so in his manuscript. As for its use in the college, ninety percent of the students taking a course in speech fundamentals had never had any instruction in the subject previously; therefore, it was most suitable for freshman classes. The textbook was generally well received and used for years by the Speech Department.

An area of interest of Dr. Gilson's which is difficult to confine under any one heading of Teacher, Director, or Writer, is his love for pageantry; this was his specialty. As stated in Chapter 3, in the summer he taught a course in pageantry and that class then produced a pageant. Additionally, he was often called to other cities to direct pageants for them. Many of these he wrote. By definition a pageant is "a spectacular exhibition, an elaborate drama, often staged outdoors, celebrating a historical event or presenting the history of a community."²¹ Dr. Gilson often dealt with casts of hundreds when he directed a pageant, and

²¹David B. Guralnik (ed.), Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1970).

a considerable study of the community was necessary in order to write a pageant for them. Nevertheless, he is responsible for over a dozen pageants, either as writer or director, or both. His most famous pageant was written for Medicine Lodge, Kansas, celebrating the signing of the only Peace Treaty between the White Man and the Indian which was ever kept. This pageant became a recurring event, and every five years from its original presentation in 1927, Dr. Gilson traveled out to Medicine Lodge to direct it. The work was so impressive that a huge area of land was set aside specifically for the pageant. Dr. Gilson was well paid by the community for writing and directing this pageant, but he was more impressed by the gratitude of the people. He felt that they truly appreciated his work there.²²

Those who came into contact with Dr. Gilson appreciated him as an artist. The people of Emporia knew his work best, and William A. White summed up their feelings when he wrote: "Frank Gilson knows life and can interpret. He has the understanding heart of genius."²³

²²Statement by Mrs. John DeLong, personal interview, July, 1971.

²³William Allen White, in a letter to Dr. F. L. Gilson, September 23, 1920. Contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Dr. Gilson lived seventy years. A life as rich and full as his was cannot possibly be encompassed in sixty pages, but this thesis attempted to capture the flavor of his personality, to highlight his accomplishments, and to reiterate his philosophies because of the significant position he occupies in the chronicles of the Kansas State Teachers College Speech Department.

Dr. Gilson was devoted to his work and to his family, and neither suffered from his attention to the other. In his home life as well as his school life he was a dominant leader. But, he was not tyrannical; he was simply in command of any situation. When Mrs. Williams stated: "You never fooled him; he always knew exactly what was going on,"¹ she spoke from the experience of being one of his students as well as being one of his daughters.

Importantly, Dr. Gilson--the administrator, the director, the actor, and the writer--always valued the field of education as his life's work. His preoccupation with teaching can be seen in his devotion to his career as a

¹Statement by Mrs. Marjorie Williams, personal interview, July 1971.

teacher. Also, his love of the teaching profession is revealed in his writing through the majority of his existing poems and through his textbook. He was a better teacher by example than by lecture; and as an actor he offered to student actors not only an example to follow but also a challenge and a standard for achievement as a performer. As a director, Dr. Gilson's goal was not only to educate his students but also to bring education, enlightenment, and entertainment to as much of Kansas as possible by means of his many tours of the state. And as an administrator, head of the Speech Department, he was in a position to make his aims in education a reality.

Dr. Gilson was genuinely concerned about his students, and he wanted the best for them as he did for his own family in terms of education. He wanted to expose them to the best experiences he was capable of providing for them that they might be enlightened persons as well as better students. For example, early in January of 1936 the students of the Kansas State Teachers College had an opportunity to see and hear Admiral Richard E. Byrd. To encourage them not to miss this chance to come so close to greatness, Dr. Gilson requested and was given space in The Bulletin to express his views:

To come into contact with a great personality is a chance that comes to most persons only once or twice in a life-time. One of the greatest personalities of this age--perhaps of any age--is Admiral Richard E. Byrd.

When students hear Admiral Byrd Monday evening, they have every reason to expect to have their

knowledge broadened, their emotions stirred, and what is even more important, to have their very souls enlarged.

Many in Emporia are today glad that they saw and heard Will Rogers one can be heard to boast, "I heard Theodore Roosevelt once" Such boasting is not idle. It makes one bigger to come into contact with bigness. It makes one feel himself more heroic to see and hear a real hero.²

From the above statement it becomes apparent why Dr. Gilson chose to teach drama. Not only could he make his students aware of great literature and the great figures in literature, but also he could help them become a part of literature--become the characters themselves. Throughout his textbook The Speaking of English he constantly reminds his reader that when a student is reading a selection aloud, the interpreter must impersonate the characters speaking, think the way they think, feel the way they feel.³

In the classroom Dr. Gilson did not expect all his students to perform at the same level of competence. He had a special ability to draw out each individual, in order to make that student do his own best work. According to The Bulletin:

Professor Gilson follows the philosophy of the late Professor George Pierce Baker, formerly of the Yale School of Drama who said: "Every playwright must work out his own salvation. An instructor must

²The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), January 3, 1936. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

³F. L. Gilson, The Speaking of English (Boston: Expression Company, 1935).

know his man, must manage him in his right direction.⁴

Dr. Gilson personally felt that he was not teaching mechanics in speaking so much as he was teaching an attitude toward learning. He was not as concerned with each student learning dramatic techniques as he was with their simply wanting to learn. In his description of the perfect student Dr. Gilson says:

I like a student to be alert, but not flippant; serious, but not solemn; respectful, but not subservient. I like him to have keen appreciation and a fine sense of values. He should realize the importance of personal appearance. Finally, and most important, probably, the wise student knows that the class period belongs to him, studies thoroughly, thinks creatively, and expresses himself freely.⁵

Dr. Gilson enriched the lives of hundreds of students every year at the Kansas State Teachers College, not only those students he worked with directly but also those who attended his shows. Throughout the state of Kansas people eagerly anticipated a Gilson show. The New York Herald-Tribune called Dr. Gilson "a missionary of the drama" when they published an article concerning his tours.⁶ In a time before television or ready-access to good talking pictures was available, the tremendous task that the Gilson

⁴The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), March 15, 1935. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

⁵The Bulletin (Emporia, Kansas), November 15, 1938. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

⁶The New York Herald-Tribune, May 27, 1927. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

Players performed in filling a void in the lives of thousands of small-town, Kansas people is one of Dr. Gilson's greatest accomplishments. Thus, his work has attained historical significance in the cultural growth of this state.

In May of 1945 Dr. Gilson was seventy years old, an age when only part-time work was allowed. However, Dr. Gilson was retained for an additional year under a special ruling of the Board of Regents as a full-time employee and head of the Speech Department. There could be no greater recognition of his ability and years of achievement by the state. Although Dr. Gilson returned that fall, he taught only one more semester before his death on January 27, 1946. Funeral services were held on the stage of Albert Taylor Hall on the Kansas State Teachers College campus where he had spent so much of his life.

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APPENDIX A

A FAVORITE TEACHER--Minnie Elwell

Among the teachers of my childhood school
You stand supreme. Each day you led us forth
To new adventure, - rich, intriguing, free.
You gave the magic key and we unlocked
The jewelled storehouse of the printed page.
With understanding heart you straightened out
The knotted threads of young perplexities.
Your youth romped in our games, - I hardly know
If we enjoyed the playing more, or you.
Ah, you unveiled for me, like gorgeous paintings,
The way-side wonders of our little world.
The careless pigeons flimsy nest in hidden
Corner of the zig-zag fence. The secret
Of the tumble-bug's mysterious marble
In the dust. The glory of the sunset,
The graceful beauty of the columbine,
The folk-tales of the neighboring country-side,
Throbbing in your heart and in your mind,
Was spark of self-same zest that, long ago,
In Galilee impelled the Perfect Teacher.

ANNA OELBERG

Promptly at nine you rang the bell
for school.

We hurried up the slippery, snowy road
Or left in haste our game of "fox and geese,"
To enter slowly, quietly, as a shrine
The little school house, shining,
warm and clean.

First, there was prayer--
a poem, a song, a tale,
But always with the spirit
of a prayer.

Then the day's routine--all
planned with care,
Not every day alike but always
purposefully planned.

You had drunk deep at learnings spring,
and us
You led to the same source, and gave
us thirst.

How well you knew us all,
and knew our folks!

And far into the future you
could look

So that you tried to plan
for each of us

Foundations for the building
of our lives.

For Tom, the carpenter, a home
to plan,

And Martha furnished it.

And Silas chose

His stock, and built the barns
and planned the crops.

And Victor sang, and Vivian
danced, and Charles,

The doctor, learned to draw grim
skeletons.

For me, who planned to teach,
a world of books.

What mattered if the ripening years
proved vain

For some that you had
nurtured carefully!

For one, at least, the inspiration
fructed,

And he has lived to bless you
fervently.

JULIA CROWE

You taught a happy school
that summer.

The shining of your cheeks
and eyes

Made glad the sober school house
gloom.

You couldn't play real games
with us, though

You tried, but runnings always
made you cough.

In November, my mother took me
to see you,

Lying, thin and white, like the
leafless birch before
your door.

When I gave you the little nose-gay
of red geraniums,

Your ghostly hands could
scarcely hold,

The tears streamed down your
livid cheeks,

And when I turned to go,
you whispered, "Good-bye."

UNTITLED

The winter that I taught the
Lone Oak school,
Came Annie Lander nearly every
morning late.

I urged, commanded, scolded,
jibed,

But all to 'no avail.

I often read aloud first thing,
A poem, but of story, Bible,
news.

Then I began a book, a simple tale

All might enjoy

Reading a portion every morning--

It proved a cure for tardiness--

And even Annie came on time.

But on the closing chapter day,

Annie was late.

When I passed near, she reached a

Timid hand and touched

my arm--

"Did you finish the book, teacher?"

"Yes, and it serves you right."

How we burn with zeal to re-construct

the world!

Her lips quivered, tears in her eyes.

She buried her head upon the desk.

I'd thought her stolid, dull,

without imagination!

"If you'll stay in at noon, I'll

read it to you."

The story finished, "Annie, why are

you late so much,

Couldn't you get up a little earlier?"

"Why I get up at six o'clock, but

there's so much to do!"

"What!" - "First I milk--

I milk two cows,

Then I help Ma get breakfast,

then wash the dishes.

And then like as not I have to

tend the baby,

And sometimes help Pa with some chores

at the barn he can't do

alone.

I try to hurry--but it don't seem

no use."

After that I did my reading in

the afternoon.

Sometimes understanding gives us

wisdom.

SATIS EST¹

I write no poem men's hearts to thrill

No song I sing to lift men's souls,
To battle's front no soldiers lead,

In halls of state I boast no skill,
I just teach school.

I just teach school, but Poet's thrill,

And Singer's joy and Soldier's fire
And states man's power, all, all are mine.

For in this little group where still
I just teach school.

Are Poets, Soldiers, Statesmen, all,

I see them in the speaking eye,
In face aglow with purpose strong,
In straightened bodies, tense and tall,
While I teach school.

And they uplifted gaze intent

On cherished heights they shall reach,
And mine the hand that led them on!

And I inspired! Therefore, content,
I still teach school.

¹Bulletin of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English (Emporia, Kansas), December, 1919. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

HEPATICA²

Hepatica, loved nursling of the Spring,
The fairest floweret of the wooded hills,
You heard the Easter music of the rills,
And woke from Winter's sleep Christ's
praise to sing.
But, lacking voice your flight of song to
wing,
You speak the joy your laden heart
that fills,
In these chaste flowers; more sweet
than sound that thrills.

²Southwestern Collegian (Winfield, Kansas), November, 1903. A clipping contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

JUST MY WAY

When Father Temps comes down the
street,

With snowy locks and halting feet,
He only nods, but as we meet,

I touch my hat.

Then Mrs. Ames afar I spy
A friendly look in her bright eye,
I smile, and as I pass her by,

I tip my hat.

Now dainty Mae usurps my view,
A dream of beauty sweet and true,
She smiles on me, then I tell you

I lift my hat.

APPENDIX B

VENEERING³

Many articles of furniture appear at first sight to be of finest mahogany, but closer examination reveals the fact that they, in reality consist of cheap pine framework covered with a mere shell of that beautiful wood. This covering of something crude or gross with a thin layer of fine material is called veneering.

But furniture is not the only object that may be thus made to appear beautiful.

In the surroundings of our everyday life we find far too much that at first seems beautiful to be merely a fine covering to something coarse or even vicious.

When we first see a person we form an opinion of him by his general appearance. Upon closer acquaintance we find some people true to their outward appearance but how many there are who are like Tennyson's "A rogue in grain/
Veneered with sanctimonious polish."

It is in that oldest of histories that we read of the wolf who dressed in sheep's clothing, and today we find the same. It is merely another name for veneering.

In some cases we do not detect the real character of a person, so deftly is it concealed under the false

³Given at Mt. Vernon, Iowa, Academy Graduation at Cornell College, 1895. Original copy contained in the Gilson Family Scrapbook.

covering, but in others the real self is plainly visible though the individual has attempted to conceal it. We enter fashionable society and find people gathering from all directions, to show off the beauty of their gilt veneer.

This is true to a certain extent in all grades of society, but the falseness is exhibited to a larger degree in some than in others. Let us enter some beautiful church and see if we find anything here that is other than it seems.

Surely not here - yet, who is that opulent gentleman yonder who murmured "Amen" so distinctly that it was heard throughout the room?

"A pillar of the church" is the answer, "who lives on his income."

Yes, my friend, but are you aware that he is a silent partner of a large liquor firm in the neighboring city, and thence comes his income?

You may well look shocked, but similar cases would be found to exist in many more churches if the truth were known.

Come and examine with me yonder huge structure. "American Politics" is written in bold character upon its front.

The exterior is shining and beautiful, but as we look, a strong wind rises, the noble edifice totters and falls and reveals the interior, decayed and crumbling.

But the stone foundation still stands solid, and upon it a new framework may be built, staunch and strong, and to the erection thereof, let each lend a helping hand.

It is not what organizations do, that brings about the most good, but what each person does.

Then tear off the veneer the world has so long beheld you and appear as your true self; cleanse and upbuild your character with all that is pure and holy and you will not only ennoble your life, but will upward guide humanity.

APPENDIX C

MAJOR PRODUCTIONS--SEPTEMBER 1913-JANUARY 1946⁴

- 1913-1914 Nathan Hale
- 1914-1915 The Piper*
- 1915-1916 Midsummer Night's Dream*
Her Husband's Wife*
- 1916-1917 Everywoman*
Man of the Hour* canceled
A Man From Home*
One-Acts*
- 1917-1918 One-Acts
Her Husband's Wife*
John Belden
Romance*
Bishop Armstrong
- 1918-1919 Romance*
Bishop Armstrong
Her Husband's Wife*
John Belden
One-Acts*
As You Like It*

⁴* indicates that the production was directed by Dr. Gilson alone; ** indicates that he directed the play in co-operation with other members of the department. Those plays which he appeared are indicated by the name of the character he portrayed.

- 1919-1920 Her Husband's Wife*
John Belden
- The Severant in the House*
Rev. William Smythe
- 1920-1921 The Servant in the House*
Rev. William Smythe
- Mary Jane's Pa*
Hiram Perkins
- 1921-1922 Mary Jane's Pa*
Hiram Perkins
- One-Acts*
He played 3 parts
- 1922-1923 A Prince There Was*
Charlie Martin
- One-Acts*
- 1923-1924 Merchant of Venice*
Shylock
- The Little Godmother*
- 1924-1925 Mr. Pim Passes By*
Mr. Pim
- 1925-1926 Candida*
Mr. Burgess
- O' Sole Mio*
Karl Werner
- 1926-1927 Give and Take*
Was cast
- O' Sole Mio*
Karl Werner
- 1927-1928 He and She

- 1928-1929 Minich**
The Swan**
 Was cast
 One-Acts
- 1929-1930 The Old Soak*
 Clem Hawley
The Devil's Disciple**
 Gen. Burgoyne
Merchant of Venice*
 Shylock
- 1930-1931 Merchant of Venice*
 Shylock
Torchbearers
Midsummer Night's Dream**
- 1931-1932 The Queen's Husband*
 King Eric VIII
Loose Ankles
- 1932-1933 The Miser*
 The title
That's the Ticket*
 John Betterly
The Millionaire**
- 1933-1934 The Servant in the House*
 James Ponsonly Makeshyft
 D. D. Lord Bishop of London
Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm
Taming of the Shrew*
Gammer Gurton's Needle

- 1934-1935 The Blue Bird**
Late Christopher Bean
The Old Homestead**
- 1935-1936 She Stoops to Conquer*
John Barclay*
Man From Home
Butter No Parsnips
The Piper (Postponed)*
She Stoops to Conquer*
 Mr. Hardcastle
- 1936-1937 She Stoops to Conquer*
 Mr. Hardcastle
The Piper*
Remember the Day
Rip Van Winkle**
 Rip Van Winkle
Hell Bent fer Heaven*
 David Hunt
- 1937-1938 Two by Shakespeare*
 Jaques (As You Like It)
Growing Pains
Squaring the Circle
Bitter Sky*
- 1938-1939 Christmas Carol*
 Scrooge
Cradle Song
Fly Away Home
Penny-wise

- 1939-1940 Our Town
Ah, Wilderness*
 Nat Miller
- The First Mrs. Frazier
Spring Dance
The Twins*
- 1940-1941 One-Acts
Twelfth Night*
Family Portrait
Song of the High Plains*
- 1941-1942 The Bishop Misbehaves
Ladies of the Jury
Big Hearted Herbert
The American Way
- 1942-1943 The Guardsman*
 Jewish creditor
The Whole Town's Talking
Brief Music
- 1943-1944 The Eve of St. Mark*
 Ralph West
Letters to Lucerne
Papa Is All
 Papa
- 1944-1945 Listen, Professor
 Professor Vassily Okayemov
Love From A Stranger

Mr. Pim Passes By
Mr. Pim

1945-1946 Kiss and Tell

APPENDIX D

THE SPEAKING OF ENGLISH

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