James Russell Trotter, Professor of Law at West Virginia University, died at the West Penn Hospital in Pittsburgh on July 5, 1925. He was born in Washington County, Ohio, November 11, 1866, the son of James Trotter and Elizabeth (Stock) Trotter. When he was ten years old, his parents moved from Ohio to the village of Aurora in Preston County, West Virginia, where a homestead was acquired which is still in the possession of the Trotter family. He received his early education in the common schools of Preston County, later studying in private schools and in the West Virginia University preparatory school. He received the degree of A. B. from West Virginia University in 1891. His first position after leaving the University was that of substitute teacher of Latin for the academic year 1891-1892 at the West Virginia Conference Seminary, now West Virginia Wesleyan College. At the termination of this temporary employment, he became principal of the Clarksburg High School, a position which he filled for the years 1892-1894 and which he relinquished in order to enter Harvard University, where he received the degree of A. B. in 1895 and the degree of A. M. in 1896. In the fall of 1896, he was the Republican nominee for the office of State Superintendent of Free Schools, to which office he was elected, serving from 1897 to 1901. During this incumbency, in the year 1898, he was married to Miss Persis H. Heermans, of Kingwood, the county-seat of his
adopted county, thus becoming connected with one of the pioneer families of the state. Upon the expiration of his term of office, he again became a student, entering the College of Law at West Virginia University where, in 1902, he received the degree of LL.B. and at the same time received from the University the degree of Ph.D. He thereupon established offices for the practice of law at Buckhannon, West Virginia, where he practiced until 1907 when he accepted the position, at Charleston, of attorney to the State Tax Commission, in which capacity he served during the year 1907-1908. In the year 1908, he was elected a member of the faculty of the College of Law, a position which he filled actively and continuously to the time of his death, with the exception of a period of approximately two years during which he served with the Food Administration and thus contributed his services in the prosecution of the World War. In addition to the positions and offices mentioned, he was president of the Board of Regents of the State Normal Schools in 1897; and was a member of the Board of Regents of West Virginia University from 1901 to 1909 serving as president of that body four years of that time; and was secretary of the School Code Commission in 1907-1908. In spite of all these activities, he did not cease to be a student. As late as the years 1910 and 1911 he was enrolled in the law school of the University of Wisconsin, where he did special work as a student during portions of those years.

Mr. Trotter was a charter member of West Virginia Alpha Chapter of Phi Kappa Psi, established at West Virginia University in 1890, and remained active in the alumni councils of the chapter until the time of his death. He was also a charter member of the local chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, established in 1911, and a member of Franklin Lodge at Buckhannon of the Masonic Fraternity.

Mr. Trotter was a loyal and active member of the First Methodist Episcopal Church and for the past twelve years had served as superintendent of the Sunday School in that church, having in that capacity succeeded the late William P. Willey, a former professor in the College of Law.

Mr. Trotter, at various times in his long career as a teacher in the College of Law, taught the subjects of criminal law and procedure, persons, personal property, damages, sales, wills and administration of estates, insurance, partnership, private corporations, and constitutional law. During this time he became the privilege of three of the present members of the law faculty to attend his classes as students. He will always be remembered as
a considerate, careful and tactful instructor. Intensely practical
in all the ordinary affairs of life, he was equally so in his teaching.
He had a peculiar capacity for selecting and emphasizing the es-
sentials of a subject and for avoiding the confusion which often
comes from leading the student too far afield into the multitude
of details associated with most legal doctrines. Yet with all his
earnest efforts to lead his students to a practical knowledge of the
law, he will never be remembered as a taskmaster. In his class
room there was always room for a smile, and, when the occasion
was appropriate, for the play of wholesome repartee. Another of
Mr. Trotter’s most prominent characteristics which he carried into
the class room and into all phases of his teaching activities was
modesty. This virtue he practiced himself most assiduously and
in turn expected it from his students. It was perhaps his per-
sonal dislike of display in the form of setting himself up as an
authority, coupled with the too modest estimate which he placed
on his own abilities, which, more than any other factor, caused
him generally to refrain from writing on legal subjects. Leaving
such writing to his colleagues he sought to compensate for this by
shouldering other burdensome tasks connected with the conduct of
the law school or the university, always willing to assume any
task assigned to him and never urged by any such stimulus as
comes from the love of display or from the hope of public acclaim.

As a friend, Mr. Trotter’s loyalty was a rock of trust. He was
one of the staunchest friends the Law School ever had, and was
perhaps a closer friend of the students than any other member of
the law faculty. He is much missed by all. But a man is not
measured solely by the sorrow he leaves in his passing. He is meas-
ured far more by memories. And among all the memories of Mr.
Trotter the most grateful to his old students and confreres will be
his unwavering friendship for them.

Perhaps the most essential quality of a great law teacher, a great
lawyer or a great man, is character. And Mr. Trotter’s outstand-
ing quality was a character par excellence. His influence as a
law teacher was indelibly stamped with the hall-mark of character.
While he had a keen sense of humor and a ready repartee that
often gave him the upper hand in a critical situation, he never
took undue advantage of that position, but was, without fail, tact-
ful to the point of diplomacy, a gentleman and a noble example.
The faculty, the students, and the community are saddened by their
loss, but are gladdened with memories of an unaltering friend-
ship and a noble influence that are forever theirs.