

Vol. XVIII.

October, 1924

No. 2.

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BULLETIN  
OF  
**The College of William and Mary  
in Virginia**



ADDRESS TO THE ALUMNI  
OF THE  
COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY  
JUNE 10, 1924

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# ADDRESS TO THE ALUMNI

By JAMES SOUTHALL WILSON

**T**WENTY years ago I received a degree from William and Mary: in the thirteen years of my service here, worthy or unworthy, I gave to the college that which is a man's best gift, his youth. Now after five years of absence, it is not without emotion that I meet again those who taught me, or who studied with me, and many whom I taught or who have passed through a cycle of college life since I left these places. The first lustrum of a new era in the history of William and Mary closes today. Its achievements are their own truest record: its appraisal and its history will be witnessed by those who bore a part in the burden of the day. As a visitor now I lift my hand in salutation and make my congratulations to the President and his co-workers for the material progress and growth of those five years. Old memories, too, throng upon me. I long to tell over old familiar tales, to recall to you wraiths from the long ago that we loved, to touch with a just record of appreciation old loyalties that can never fully be paid, such as those for which this college owes to its faithful registrar, to its Galahad of courtesy who may leave to others the teaching of chemical formulae but will always teach the manners and the standards of a Virginia gentleman, and to the scholarship of its dean. But I shall speak to you neither of the past of William and Mary nor its present. I may not speak at my first alma mater again for a long time and this opportunity is a precious one. I have thought how best use might be made of it. I have chosen to invite you and through you all alumni of Virginia colleges, to consider two opportunities: one a material, the other a spiritual one, and to pledge each with himself to aid as each may in their realization.

The first is the gaining for our State colleges a fair

share of support from the revenues of the State: the other is the arousing of an intellectual and aesthetic interest at these colleges in the literary and artistic expression of our own times.

Virginians have been justly proud of the colleges of their State. You will not read an invidious distinction into my words if, for illustration, I name four of the State institutions: William and Mary, the South's oldest college, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, virile in its adaptation to the practical needs of the State, Virginia Military Institute, not ineptly called "the West Point of the South" and the University of Virginia, long so representatively the leader of Southern education that throughout the Southern states "The University" meant Virginia's university. To call the roster of the men whose lives have touched those four makers of men is almost to summarize the history of the South and no small part of the history of the nation. Out of all the living heritages from the past, Virginia has nothing so full of the glamour of beautiful traditions, so rich in vital helpfulness for the present, so exhaustless in possibilities of contribution to the future as its colleges. They are splendidly invested endowments from the noblest past that any American State has known. But their rich vitality of today, their ripe associations of the past will not help them in the future if in the fierce competition of the road of modern education they cannot keep stride with younger and wealthier institutions. A college like a lamp must be fed and trimmed or the light dies. The time has passed when education can mean a boy at one end of a log and Mark Hopkins at the other. Great teachers are as priceless as always, but the boy must be also at one end of the expensive microscope and a germ at the other: at the end of the great telescope and the stars at the other. If in the next twenty years other Southern States continue to treat their colleges and universities as they are now treating them, and Virginia has not opened her hands more generously to hers, it

will not be necessary to gaze into a crystal globe to foresee the passing of leadership southward. Education is an intellectual and a spiritual factor, yet like all things human it rests upon a physical basis and has material necessities. The college most adequately supported will in the long run tend to become the best college for it can in the main secure the best wisdom and learning to direct its affairs as well as the equipment without which even wisdom and learning cannot go far today. Students formerly came from the South to Virginia: it is natural that with the development of good Southern colleges the flow should be at ebb; but it would lift the shout of "Ichabod" should Virginia students turn southward. I am raising no cry of "wolf" to frighten you: I wish merely to arouse your attention that you will bear with me in the citation of a few statistics which would be dry statistics were they not so startling. I do not give the figures themselves on my own authority but as the careful work of an expert statistician. They are drawn from a recent carefully made survey of educational facts from eleven Southern States: Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

Of all these States Virginia was found to give 30 per cent less than the average to higher education for each dollar spent upon the public schools, 23.4 cents are spent from the tax revenues for higher education as compared with an average of 37.7 cents in the eleven States. The State's share of the cost of maintenance of its State colleges was 11 per cent less than the average and the value of the property of these Virginia institutions, though there are nine of them to an average of four in the other ten States, was 10 per cent less than the average of the property values of State-supported colleges for each of the eleven States. Among these eleven States Virginia ranks fifth in appropriations for capital outlay—buildings and permanent improvements, West Virginia, Louisiana, and North and South

Carolina exceeding it; Louisiana by nearly a million dollars in the single session of 1923-24 and North Carolina by more than two millions. Though only fifth in rank in the property value of the nine institutions as compared with these ten States which average only four institutions each, the estimates of an expert accountant show that less than one-half of the money invested in this property was provided by the State funds of Virginia. The disproportion becomes more astonishing when we leave averages and talk in terms of particular States. In 1923-24 Virginia appropriated for the nine institutions of higher education which it supports \$1,557,209, a goodly sounding sum to long ears that hear in terms of little personal pocketbooks. Louisiana for two institutions appropriated \$1,889,000 and our nearest neighbor North Carolina to its four colleges granted \$4,180,000! Note also that when Louisiana in one session granted three hundred thousand dollars more to these two institutions and North Carolina over two and a half million more to its four colleges than Virginia gave to its nine, the former State was providing for a college attendance of slightly over two thousand students and the latter for forty-five hundred students while Virginia was providing for over six thousand.

Not only then is Virginia not giving its colleges as much as some of the other Southern States, but the division of funds is greater and the number of students in the colleges much larger. Virginia of all the eleven States studied has the largest enrollment of students in tax-supported colleges. There are 40 per cent more students in these colleges for every ten thousand of white population than the average of the States we are considering and one-third more for every hundred students in public schools than the average of the eleven States. For every hundred students in the public high schools of Virginia there are sixteen students in the State-supported colleges as compared to twelve to a hundred as the average in the eleven States. Though Virginia is only fifth of these eleven States in population, it has not

only the largest enrollment in State colleges, but the largest enrollment not only in proportion but in actual numbers in high schools: in 1921-23 there were 38,191 students in Virginia high schools to 28,899 in Georgia which leads in population and only 18,017 in Louisiana which is next to Virginia in population.

The future, therefore, unless there is a change of State policy, looms more portentous than the present. The numbers in the high schools indicate with fair definiteness the number who will go to college and as the State develops the one it increases the burden to be carried by the other. The money spent upon public education in Virginia is greater in amount than in any other of the eleven States. Attendance is increasing with opportunity. Virginia went from second rank to Maryland in high school attendance in 1920 to first place in 1921-22. Already the writing is red on the wall: in ten years plant and property values, despite inflated rather than depressed real estate estimates, have increased only 77 per cent for the total of State-owned colleges in Virginia while the corresponding increase in enrollment was 120 per cent.

It cannot be said then that Virginia's colleges are smaller, nor fewer in number nor that their growth is less rapid, nor that the youth of the State seek education in the North. It is true that 1900 students from Virginia attend colleges outside of the State, the highest number from any of the eleven States, yet the percentage of all students from Virginia attending colleges who are in institutions within their own State is higher than in any other of the eleven States on our list. And yet in spite of all this extra burden, proportionately and in actual numbers, the money appropriated from tax revenues to these institutions is below the average of our eleven States whether we consider it on a basis of estimated wealth, or a basis of per capita of white population or a basis per student enrolled—and much less than the maximum. If it is proposed to meet the situation

by increasing student fees, the reply is that already Virginia is next to Maryland in percentage of income received by her tax-supported colleges from this source. If living expenses become disproportionately high, Virginia students will be driven to institutions in adjoining States.

Sometimes it is counseled that Virginia meet the needs of higher education by appealing to the charity of Northern States. Virginia may be proud of the splendid philanthropy from home or abroad that has aided the growth of its colleges, if it adds to this the State's own full power in developing them, but I cannot believe Virginians would have this proud State cringe like a mendicant for money-gifts in order to shift the funds that would otherwise go to the colleges to save its citizens from paying for the roads they build or the cost of officials of their government. Already Virginia is only one per cent below Kentucky which in per cent of income receives most of the eleven States from outside sources and we have seen that it is estimated that one-half of the value of property of the State-supported colleges of Virginia was not paid for from tax funds.

I have shown that with the largest number of State colleges and the heaviest burden in number of students and in prospective growth in numbers through the growth of the high schools, Virginia is below the actual average in its appropriations to higher education and therefore is lower yet in proportionate standing among the other Southern States. Among some practical men the answer is given, "If you can't buy a Packard you must be content with a Ford." The State can appropriate no more than it has. Let us see what is the situation as to Virginia's reputed poverty.

Virginia, among the same eleven States that I have named, stands first in amount received from State tax revenues, second in bank deposits (being exceeded only by Maryland according to 1922 figures) and third in estimated wealth (exceeded by West Virginia and Georgia). The

State is fifth among the eleven in total population, in white population and in value of farm property; it is sixth, that is above five and below five, in area and in production. Its State indebtedness is greater, it is true, than that of most of the States in our group, but less than the average of the total indebtedness of the eleven. Its debt is only slightly larger than the debt of Maryland or of Louisiana and is only one-third of that of North Carolina, with greater estimated wealth than any of the three to offset the indebtedness.

What then becomes of Virginia's money; for though it occupies the sixth or mean position among the eleven States in total taxes paid, including Federal taxes, it leads in revenues from its own taxes? The answer is that more than the average amount is spent of its current revenues on general government expenses, on roads, and on public schools while only 6.8 cents of each tax dollar goes to higher education as compared with 9.6 cents spent as an average by the eleven Southern States, though the other ten have fewer tax-supported colleges and fewer students in them.

A State is no better than its leaders. If Virginia is to retain her leadership in material resources and in public education it must see that leadership does not pass from the colleges that have so largely made the State what it has been and is. The college men of Virginia if they arouse to the facts and needs of the situation can put the State fully and fairly behind its colleges. By organized effort of the alumni of all the colleges the State's lack of adequate support should be made known and fuller provision for development demanded.

I am unwilling to speak to you only of material interests, essential to progress as they may be. I have something to say of another phase of Southern and particularly of Virginia education. It is the proud and proper boast of

the University from which I come and the college at which I speak that together they have furnished a long succession of public men unequaled in fine vision and substantial contribution for the building and guidance of the nation. There is in history, I think, no record of a teacher equal to that of your George Wythe who taught Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, James Monroe and, in his Richmond office, Henry Clay—to mention only the most famous of his students. The great John B. Minor at Virginia taught a larger group of distinguished men and in Woodrow Wilson at least one to rank with Wythe's splendid roster. The old South, Virginia especially, occupied a strategic position in national statesmanship. That situation has changed. Her statesmen must win their leadership in spite of their Southern nativity. Woodrow Wilson may in part have been made the man he was in Virginia, but political expediency chose him from New Jersey to his party's leadership. To lead a party today a Virginian would need to be strong enough to overcome the shifty arguments of geographical strategy. Such considerations may this year keep from a presidential nomination that strong man of his party, Carter Glass.

No American colleges have surpassed or can surpass those of the South in the historic field of statesmanship. But civilizations are rightly remembered most not for political leaders or successful generals nor even philanthropists and millionaires but for the great creative thinkers and artists. I point to a field that lies fallow before the colleges of today and tomorrow. The beauty of our land, the richness of its traditions, the ripeness of its older culture, the sweet sincerity and charm of its life invoke to song, invite to art. No political expediences hem in the artist's soul; no inequalities of material resources stifle the thinker's brain. Rich beyond dream will be the contribution to the South's welfare of those colleges who first light the

torch of enduring literature or original art. Call again the roll of the great men of your past and what poet, what painter, what novelist, what philosopher, what musician of note outside of the borders of his State is upon it? And yet the record of its colleges is as good as the record of the State. Edgar A. Poe, Woodrow Wilson, Thomas Nelson Page for a hundred years are the men from the University of Virginia whose writings are known across the waters: Thomas Jefferson and James Branch Cabell in the two centuries and a quarter of the history of William and Mary; and one of these from each institution was a statesman before he was a man of letters. A man of genius, as Joyce Kilmer said of a tree, is made only by God, but a man of genius can come only to a people who in part at least are ready to receive him. The colleges can create the aesthetic receptiveness, the intellectual alertness and liberality that are the soil from which good art has always sprung. Southern colleges should have fuller courses and more vital interest on the part of the students in history, in economics—I mean the great fundamental studies, not merely bookkeeping and accounting—and especially modern phases of the arts,—music, the plastic arts, literature. Young men catch the fire of inspiration quickest when they feel the fresh flames of their own day. The virile leaders of new ideas in poetry and the novel, in painting and sculpture and music should be brought to our Southern colleges to speak. The West is awake and expressing itself in literature and it is significant that fellowships in creative art are being established in their colleges to bring poets and artists to live among their students with no duties except to express their own art. John Masefield, Joseph Conrad, Hugh Walpole, important writers from England, have recently visited America: to how many of the Southern colleges did they go? Walter de la Mare, master poet and novelist, comes in the fall; will our students have the chance of being awakened to his

vision of beauty face to face with him? There is a current literature notable in strength and lovely in form; our students can be brought into personal touch with its makers; they can be introduced to it through publications at their own institutions and through courses in contemporary literature. Young men have a right to know something of the best that is thought and expressed in their own day.

As I come to the close of my appointed time the thought presses upon me that Virginia, oldest of North American States, is today, as much as the youngest of the forty-eight, in the making: that this old College of William and Mary, oldest of Southern colleges, born before the republic, of royal lineage, is, as much as the newest freshwater college, also in the making. Kings and bishops and humbler men of mind have labored to make it great in centuries gone; presidents, governors, and wise good men, perhaps often greater of soul than they, have been the fruit of its growing: its book of hours is more colorfully illuminated than any parchment of old time. William and Mary has the unpurchasable endowment of two and a quarter centuries of great names and beautiful memories. Yet they are in the making, the oldest Commonwealth and its oldest college. The old order has changed; the new has but built its first foundations of material success and physical progress. Perhaps I stand a belated dreamer seeing visions through the mist of tears for a dead past, but I remember that old cities were built to music and old empires have survived through song. Therefore I am bold enough to hope that into the new Virginia and her new-old college that are in the building, the spirit of beauty will enter bringing a love of all things fresh and fair and a liberal fearlessness of all things true. In these ancient places of learning where a new civilization is to be fashioned, Modern Thought, Modern Science, Modern Art should sit enthroned beside their sister, Antique Lore.