

PRESIDENT McBRIDE'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29, 1942

PRESIDENT PARK in her opening address to the College in 1940 talked of the civilized life. In her conception, she said:

"The civilized life relies on reason as its tool: it connects the individual with the group, recognizing a perpetual and delicate balance between the two; it is sympathetic in that it does not condemn the individual to isolation or shut him up to his own resources; on the other hand it is a full life and cannot force him to submit his concerns to domination by a master or group of masters. It rests on justice and mercy for which our modern version is probably imagination about other people. It provides the means for growth into a still better form of itself."

Those qualities of a civilized world—reason and sympathy, freedom and justice, and the possibility of growth—are foundations so deeply rooted that peril does not undermine them. It mobilizes our forces—very slowly, many think—but it does not change our assumptions. We who in the nature of things must plan ahead, making plans for students just beginning their training, assume these qualities in the world for which they will work. It is not shortsighted of us to overlook alternate plans. There are none for colleges and universities,—no other plans. For them all the eggs are indeed in one basket.

What is the character of the planning now going on for colleges and universities? The terms we use come easily from the war, and we ask whether this is an educational defensive, whether our effort is toward the preservation of liberal arts colleges and graduate schools as we have known them. Partly it is, for we like this education; we have grown in it. In a very real sense we are also bound by it; taking off from the known for the unknown is as hard for the educator as it is for any man, and his flights are likely to be short affairs.

But an educational defensive has not

been characteristic of colleges in the last ten months. They are clearly on the offensive; they have the vigor, sometimes even the violence, of the offensive. Like industry, they have thrown their effort into rapid production. Acceleration is widespread, though still too new to judge for its effectiveness. Like industry, they have arranged shifts which bring the kinds of production into line with the greatest needs of the war. Sections are multiplied in mathematics and science; laboratories are used beyond what was once called their capacity.

This new vigor in mathematics and science is of course the bright side of the picture; the dark side is the limitation in the humanities. The darkness there is great in the men's colleges, where the humanities have often had to be compressed into brief hours not otherwise allotted or omitted entirely. It is not so great in the women's colleges. If the experience and present plans of England can be considered a guide, it is probable that women will continue to take the opportunity—and the responsibility—of college training in science or in arts. In science they will not be alone; there will be men who remain for special training, which is however differently directed from that of ordinary times. In arts the women will be almost entirely alone. As we think of that situation, the immediate responsibility of the women in arts, great as it is, is overshadowed by the further responsibility to carry on in these fields in which few others of the particular college generations are prepared to enter.

This further responsibility looks toward a post-war world, and some of the college officials have been laughed at for their concern in this direction. It was said of them last spring that they were indeed making progress, for they were ready to

turn from winning the peace to winning the war. That is a sharp comment on the absurdity of overlooking present for future problems; but few of us would feel in the circumstances now prevailing that we could delay directing some of our efforts and some of our students to these future problems. Such work is a part of our educational offensive, and perhaps the most difficult part.

In the disorganization of the present we know our purposes fairly well. In the disorganization that is probably piling up ahead of us our purposes will be less clear. We must train not only the students who will be ready to deal with the technical problems of the post-war period, but students who can help define our purposes—and the understanding which is basic to such a task comes only slowly. It requires more than six-week courses or twelve-week courses. It requires still more than time; it requires new methods of teaching, with a co-ordinated approach to economic and social problems which we are only beginning to try out. Can we strike the nice balance which will give us this training without reducing too much our immediate effort? The only point of such a question is to put the problem. It has one answer, that we must.

The colleges and universities have a third form of attack in the work of their faculties on war jobs. At no other time have such large groups of university men been on leave for war service away from the college, and at no other time has so much research directed toward the war been allotted to college departments and laboratories. Inside most colleges, behind the regular work of the classes, behind the pressure of substitution for men on leave, is the great pressure of research on which the course of the war may depend. With the special demands of the teaching there is again the problem of nice balance—how much for teaching, how much for research or special studies

for the war—and heavy stakes demand care in the weighing.

When we talk of an offensive in education we reflect the fact that we read and think little but the war. There is always an offensive for the college or university, however. There is always an active as opposed to a passive role. That dichotomy exists, and is easy to state; it can never be held under the glass for inspection, however, for no college finds itself in a passive role. We are all active!

We are indeed active in so far as we select what directly advances our purposes. Brief statements about the purposes of a college are likely to be dogmatic to the extreme, but even at such a risk I want to talk a little about Bryn Mawr.

First of all I should say that Bryn Mawr has been active in the selection of students, but less active in searching for them. In the matter of selection, our method for undergraduates is no longer that of a special sieve of Bryn Mawr examinations. Nevertheless we select as carefully as we can in accordance with our purposes. The emphasis in the selection rests chiefly, I think, on intelligence and seriousness of purpose. We must of course have also a basic preparation which means that the work of the college years can be entered easily. We want diversity in background and in interest and point of view, but the qualities without which our plan would fall are the intellectual power which will enable the student to undertake work in her major field and the seriousness of purpose which will make her carry that work productively. For those qualities we should be willing to search far and wide, and especially whenever we can by searching add to the diversity in the background and interest of the student body.

The admission of each season's group of students is in ordinary years our most important step. It is as I have indicated a matter of active choice. With that ad-

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mission we are saying not "You may come and try it and leave if you fail," but "You are in our best judgment likely to succeed; when you come we shall do everything we can to insure your success." That is a serious commitment, but it is not the only one we make to the entering student. We are to my mind committed to a plan for the College which will make for the most favorable development of the student as a person, emotionally and socially, as well as intellectually. I stress this point because of its complexity. In the first place, it is a responsibility we could never undertake if we were not most careful in our selection of candidates. Only by restricting ourselves in the beginning to fairly well-directed students of intellectual power could we set as our objective the best development of the student as a person. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the broader the commitment to the student the more rigid the selection must be. In the second place, it is well to be certain about this broad purpose because it is a point the "progressive" educators raise. We want no less than they an education which is a development of the whole person; we are just as interested in having as graduates students who are effective individuals; but we can meet this broad purpose only by careful selection of our group. We could not bring up under one roof, so to speak, students of the kind we try to choose and students of mediocre ability and indeterminate interests; the kind of teaching and the kind of life which would make for the best development of one group would not help the other.

In relation to the instruction in the College the minds of Bryn Mawr alumnae turn first of all to members of the faculty; they are the focus, not any particular academic plan. But behind them was the plan established by President Rhoads and Dean Thomas, a plan bold in its conception, and yet so considered that

it stood for many years with little change. The plan embodied the "university idea," with instruction from the freshman year straight along to the doctorate and with a range of teaching in the humanities and sciences as broad as could possibly be managed. Its more particular arrangement was a group system, striking a balance between rigidly prescribed programs and free electives. Electives are chosen to a greater degree now, but the emphasis on a coherent program remains. So too does our interest in advanced work and in departments ready to teach for the doctorate as well as for the A.B.—and to my mind teaching the better for the A.B. because they are also teaching for the doctorate.

The College of the first few years had some fourteen departments. Art and archaeology, geology and pedagogy were added in the nineties; but no further additions were made until the Department of Social Economy was organized in 1915. Music was added in 1921. The College thus has not tried to follow the university in the number of its departments; it has limited itself to those fields considered most important for most of its candidates: philosophy, history and the social sciences, most of the physical and biological sciences, literatures and languages of major influence in the western world, art and archaeology, and finally music in so far as it could be financed—and I hope increasingly. To ourselves I suppose we rarely seem limited, but we must be just as clear about what we do not do as about what we do. We do maintain fully developed work in many fields; we do not cover all the fields of the university. We can not, for instance, accept students who want to specialize in astronomy or botany or far eastern languages. We are in a better position in making these limitations than we should be in spreading our resources too thinly. At the same time the distribution of resources we make today

may not be exactly what we want to make tomorrow; we must of course allow room for change.

Within our departments and sometimes beyond the fields we teach at Bryn Mawr, we have great new possibilities in our relations with Haverford and Swarthmore. When Bryn Mawr professors left for war service this fall Haverford and Swarthmore helped us with five courses, but beyond these emergency calls is the continued co-operation which will help all three of us to extend our frontiers.

After the first years there was little further action on the academic plan of the College until the twenties, when honours work was instituted by many departments for their best seniors, and when the single major took the place of the old double major. A little later President Park and Dean Manning developed for all seniors a system of reading and conferences especially directed toward an integration of work in the major field and comprehensive final examinations on it. Then the College had a schema for the more advanced work which the single major field made possible; it had a new way of helping students toward a maturity of thought which is part of the goal of undergraduate instruction. I speak of this aspect of the work with special emphasis, for it seems to me unquestionably a part of the preparation for the A.B. degree. We hear it said that first-year courses open for the student a door on a new world. Of course they do, and we should want students to push back some of these doors; but that work is not enough for students such as we try to select. Their ability must be nurtured by the very different experience of searching beyond the door, of doing the intensive work which brings a more realistic conception of the world and of the students' relation to it. We are having now a striking demonstration of the value of such advanced work; it is that more than

any other single part of the training that has enabled many graduates with no more than an A.B. to take and hold war jobs of first importance.

The plan for the integration of work which carefully chosen courses and reading and conferences of the senior year makes possible seems to me well established, though special aspects of it need change from time to time. Bryn Mawr is now active in developing a new kind of integration, co-ordinated teaching in related fields or newly defined fields. That plan is probably of first interest to those who sit down to the seminar table, but its significance goes beyond any particular class. It started in 1938 in the co-ordination of teaching and research within the sciences. There courses introduced in the borderline fields, bio-physics and bio-chemistry, for example, gave students a new possibility of advanced work and a new insight into the unity of natural science. It is important to recognize first of all that these joint courses are at an advanced, sometimes a very advanced stage. They are not by any means orientation courses, so-called, in physical or biological science. They come at a time when the student, through her training in one or more sciences, is able to take an active part in the co-ordination.

In the social sciences there are also courses given by one department for the benefit of students in several. There is in addition a new approach to co-ordinated teaching, with special subjects—the eighteenth century, the theory and practice of democracy, the individual and society—chosen for joint study and presentation by a member of the faculty from each of the fields most closely involved in the problem. This plan seems to me excellent, and open to further use, but it must not hide from us the fact that we have no fully developed co-ordination in the social sciences. We have there great possibilities, even pressing needs; for co-

ordinated attack in this area would strike where human understanding lags far behind and where it is now most crucial. New work is in immediate demand on problems the war has raised; its further progress will increase these problems. We know little about them but we do know that they cannot be solved unless we co-ordinate all our efforts, using any resources at our hand in their solution.

I have talked of Bryn Mawr—active or passive—in relation to its selection of students and in matters of its academic plan. There is a third part of its character I should like to consider briefly, that is, the nature of these groups which constitute the College—directors, faculty, students, alumnae. You must not suppose it is my newness to this office which makes me think they are the most active groups of this kind I have heard of anywhere. I had the same opinion earlier, as a member at one time or another of three of these groups. They are self-governing, strong, independent; and Bryn Mawr's strength comes from their qualities and their ready interest. As the tragedy of the war mounts and we as a college face new tests of our character, we are increasingly glad for the qualities of these groups. We are also finding a new factor of co-operative action among groups which have heretofore been characterized rather by their independence. The joint courses and seminars bring small groups of faculty and students together in their consideration of mutual problems; thus they add a new kind of inter-relationship to what has always been one of Bryn Mawr's strong points, the close co-operation of individual students and individual professors. Another illustration of a new kind of co-operative action—perhaps the best illustration—is the work in civilian defense. There the need for division of responsibility is obvious, and so are the advantages of co-operation; but we should be alert to other ways in which we can

act not as a series of interested groups but as a community.

With the war too we are seeing more clearly the importance of our relations to the community beyond the College. We have often acted or wanted to act as host to that community. Some of our departments have created the more important working relation with organizations and groups beyond the College. We are not handicapped by the antagonism which has sometimes grown up in college towns, but we are far from realizing the full place of the College in the community. The war is helping us, I think, to a better understanding of that place.

It is certainly helping us to a better understanding of the place of higher education in the social structure more generally. For many students we have thought of it in terms of training toward the professions; but without fully realizing two points we now see: first, how far-reaching the group of professions is in modern life, and, second, how in time of crisis the right hand of the professional man can be extended by the employment of assistants, who lack professional training but stand well on the systematic and intensive work which precedes the first college degree. We have needed all the training of these kinds there has been in the last years. It is in large part the force which is fighting now, and there is call for much more.

For all students we have thought of college education as a favorable source, if not the most favorable source, of cultural development. We have thought that the freedom the human spirit can attain through the liberal studies would be built into the civilization of our best conceptions. If the building has been well done that freedom should withstand the great pressures on it now. We are in the midst of the test. We cannot be serene about the outcome, but we can be resolute; and we can build for a new and stronger structure.

So though I pile up mileage being generally non-resident
I am the very model of a modern college president!

But damaging as much absence may be to the direct contact of the president with the institution which is his chief responsibility, it is not the only damage. Expression of opinion on issues which divide men sharply alienates some members of the alumni body, the very public whom, by stepping outside his more definitely prescribed duties, the president is supposed to reach. A very difficult problem arises at this point, for a president, as citizen, has a responsibility which he cannot wholly disregard to stand up and be counted when grave issues are at stake. Moreover, even though he may be well aware that the weight of his opinion is chiefly that given by the position he holds and the institution he represents, he cannot always decline to use that advantage if he believes that the public good is threatened. The furrows in the brow of many a college executive have come from efforts to balance wisely and fairly the scales in which such obligations as I have mentioned are weighed.

It is also expected, and rightly, of course, that the president should be an expert in educational matters and should be guided by a matured theory in the many decisions he has to make. Such theories in respect to education in general, and in respect to the needs of his particular institution, often take shape in new plans, methods, schemes for expansion and improvement by which his administration is finally known. Sometimes such definite objectives are identified and declared early in an administration. For purposes of public understanding this is an advantage to be weighed against the smoothness with which changes may come about if they evolve slowly and without flourish of trumpets. The elective system, the development of graduate schools, the tutorial system and the house or college

plan, the breaking up of the four-year liberal arts course are all examples of policies to which administrations, some of them very long, have been or are being devoted. A president may find a college notably lacking in necessary plant and equipment or in endowment, or in efficient internal organization, or—most important of all and most difficult to remedy—in intellectual and scholarly distinction and leadership. To know what the principal objectives of his administration are is an absolute essential if the executive is to proceed with any sense of direction or is to inspire those around him with confidence that his judgments are more than personal. They cannot always be declared; but their presence, if they are at all aligned with the natural bent of the institution, is pervasive and reassuring, and the best possible means of securing co-ordinated effort.

In speaking of the identification of objectives, we approach, to my mind, the essential function of the president. Though it sometimes seems that the world, both on the campus and outside it, conspires to prevent him from exercising it, failure to perform it is recognized as quickly as ill health in the individual. That essential function is simply organic leadership in the college itself.

Such leadership is sometimes thought to consist of maintaining a harmony among the elements of which the college is composed—trustees, faculty, students, and alumni. Harmony, however, is not the test. A certain genius for persuasion and compromise, a facility in human relations, may bring about a kind of equilibrium in which no one is violently dissatisfied, but in which nothing of importance happens. There is something unnatural and even unwholesome about such a state in an institution built to develop and, indeed, to fuse two of the most incendiary forces on earth, the spirit of knowledge and the spirit of youth. They

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can be overlaid by tradition and inertia, by the activities sometimes called the side shows, by group and departmental and personal rivalries, by the intrusion of politics, both student and faculty, into the college life, by all the sins, in other words, which beset the human soul, and, in larger and more complicated form, the human institution. The most fundamental task of the president, as I see it, is to be untiringly at work to bring about collaboration, vivid, and eager, by all the elements of the college in realizing its deepest objectives.

If that is so, the president must be thoroughly and discriminatingly committed to what I take to be the chief purpose of a college, the development of the human spirit by the acquisition of knowledge and the laying of the foundations for wisdom. There is much ground for discussion here, and I must not be seduced into venturing upon it—only recalling an occasion when the proponents of education as a means of character development used as an epithet the phrase, "Those Platonists from Cambridge." E. M. Forster, in a recent essay on Virginia Woolf, says of her, "She respected and acquired knowledge, she believed in wisdom . . . she had very profoundly the conviction that mind is in action against matter and is winning new footholds in the void." I am not wholly sure that I know what is meant by mind in action *against* matter. I think I should have said, "by *means* of matter;" but it is not easy for me to believe that the college president is rightly placed who does not hold with something like passionate intensity the belief that developing the capacity of the human mind to apprehend truth and possess it is the chief function of the college.

Yet there is no fixed pattern for the exercise of this function. There must be sagacity in the one who would help a given institution to pursue this objective most successfully. Its history, its tradi-

tions, the point it has already reached, its peculiar advantages and drawbacks have to be taken into account. One of the blots upon our general academic history of late years has been an imitativeness which led to the widespread adoption, or ostensible adoption, of devices and offerings which originated elsewhere. There are tides in the affairs of colleges; there are roots in the soil; there are favoring winds; and it is the president who takes circumstances and conditions into account who goes farthest and most rapidly in the never-ending pursuit of the great objective.

Most important in that awareness of circumstances is responsiveness to the presence in the whole academic community of vigorous and fruitful ideas. It is a good thing for a president to be original, but it is much more important that he should have a mind which recognizes the originality, the fecundity, the potential strength of other minds, and which is ingenious and determined in giving them their chance. Not all the ideas will be good. To evaluate them is a primary task. To correlate them with other ideas and to produce a harmony of effort is the administrative feat required.

In every college, of course, there are some defects which a new eye can see, and which must be corrected. Sometimes drastic measures have to be taken. There must be, from time to time, a recruiting of new strength. Of Miss Thomas, who used to make an annual trip to some of the universities in search of young instructors, it used to be laughingly said that "she came to renew her youth." There must always be explanations and interpretations, both inside and outside the college, of what is going on. Sometimes—and today offers the supreme instance—a college must lend itself to an emergency purpose; and the president must take whatever responsibility comes to him as leader. But in general the task which belongs most truly to the president

is that of creating within the college an atmosphere in which the honest and eager pursuit of knowledge absorbs the energies of young and old. No college is so small that the full time of the hardest-working president may not be devoted to this task. No college or university is so large as not to miss such direction. It is a task of infinite detail, but detail vitalized by a clear purpose. It is an unobtrusive task, and the one performing it may not be like a lamp set in a window. The light in the house is what matters, and the little lights that are carried out as the sons and daughters go forth. Those who love a college and believe in its president are often desirous, naturally, that acclaim should be audible and far-reaching. It is not essential. It is even dangerous to the utter integrity which should be the cornerstone of all our endeavor by its over-emphasis on one person, one set of ideas.

There are many ways of being a good college president, and the formula I have been stating may not suit the new president of Bryn Mawr. I have not talked it over with her in these terms. Whatever her formula, I feel sure that in this college which has nurtured her she will be given freedom to apply it. One thing I know of her—that the gift for what I have called organic leadership belongs to her in an unusual degree, by nature, and by education. When I was inducted at Radcliffe, President Neilson declared to the Radcliffe and Harvard audience that if I were not given scope, the doors of Smith College—the old home—would always be open to me. I cannot repeat that invitation exactly, for Miss McBride is coming home today. Yet she made for herself another home at Radcliffe; and as she goes from strength to strength, we shall always think and say of her, "She is partly ours."

COLLEGE CALENDAR

Sunday, November 29th—7.30 p.m., Music Room of Goodhart Hall

Evening service conducted by the Reverend Rex Stowers Clements, minister of the Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church.

Friday and Saturday, December 4th and 5th—8.30 p.m., Goodhart Hall

Hotel Universe by Phillip Barry, presented by the Varsity Players of Bryn Mawr College and the Cap and Bells Club of Haverford College. All seats reserved. Tickets (including tax): Friday, \$.77 and \$1.10; Saturday, \$1.10 and \$1.65. (On sale at the Publicity Office, Bryn Mawr College.)

Sunday, December 6th—7.30 p.m., Music Room of Goodhart Hall

Evening service conducted by the Reverend David Braun, minister of the Swarthmore Presbyterian Church.

Friday, December 11th—8.00 p.m., The German Wing (Denbigh)

German Christmas play.

Saturday, December 12th—8.00 p.m., The French House (Wyndham)

French Christmas play.

Sunday, December 13th—7.45 p.m., Goodhart Hall

Christmas service by the combined choirs of Bryn Mawr College and Haverford College and instrumentalists from both colleges.

Wednesday, December 16th, to Wednesday, January 6th

Christmas vacation.