

CONSIDER
the
COLLEGE PRESIDENT

by

CARL GREGG DONEY, Retiring President



WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY

Salem, Oregon

June 11, 1934

FOREWORD

The ninetieth commencement of Willamette University was held on June 11, 1934. At that time Carl Gregg Doney's long term as its president came to a close. Nineteen years he has held and ably administered that office. Few presidents hold office so long; few, through personal qualities and administrative abilities, bring themselves and the university to such preeminence. At the close of the commencement exercises President Doney read the paper which is printed here, "Consider the College President." It takes the form of retrospective remarks on the experiences which go to make up the days of a college president. It is so characteristic of the president that his many friends will welcome it in a form which may be preserved. It reveals his whimsical humor; his discriminating understanding of human nature; his fine philosophy of life. In inimitable form it gives expression to the scholar's estimate of a busy life spent in close association with books and men.

F. M. Erickson.

June 15, 1934.

Consider the College President

By CARL GREGG DONEY



At the close of an extended college administration when shadows have long been turned toward the east, it may not be amiss to appraise the experiences that have filled the passing years. One has a natural wish to know if a voyager has fared well, if the seas were kind, if he discovered aught of value, and if he deem the enterprise a failure or success.

Though there are only four or five college presidents for each million of the population, they have a relatively large place in public thought. That is to be expected because of the commitments they receive, though the cynic will say that six frogs can vocalize a widespread pond. College presidents do not boast of their small number; they do not boast of themselves after they have served a year or two; they do, however, boast of their colleges to the point of endangering their souls, as each will testify of all except himself.

Like the wild turkey and Indian corn, the college president is indigenous to the Western Hemisphere. He has never been organized and the federal government presents him with no code. He is *sui generis* and beyond the range of scientific categories. Supposedly he is chosen for his wisdom, but the Son of Sirach says, "The wisdom of the learned cometh by the opportunity of leisure." Wise the president possibly is when first invested with his office, for he may have a stored reservoir of wisdom which, with initial plentitude, he sprays upon the campus and beyond; but too soon the fountain begins to trickle unless he learns the art of thinking while asleep and of reading when he eats. Leisure and he were divorced when he said to his trustees, "I accept the office." In his inaugural address he pledged the full measure of devotion to the college, thinking this a customary euphemism and little knowing that he would keep the pledge to its utmost jot and tittle.

Immediately he became a crusader, burning with zeal as he saw afar the shining towers that he must capture. Endowment, buildings, faculty, students, trustees, alumni, and the public signalled with white banners, and he fashioned ideas into weapons by which to make the conquest. Day and night he offered sacrifices to Minerva as he sought to be an educator, administrator, author, orator, financier, judge of men, counsellor, seer, and prophet. A hundred years ago, Arnold of Rugby, a man of uncommon conscience in the use of words, spoke of his work as affording "infinite employment." No wonder the Arnolds, Dwights, Angells, Eliots, Tuckers, and Hopkinses are counted on the fingers. No wonder the average duration of a college administration is three years and a fraction, evidence perhaps that men rush in where angels fear to tread.

Still it remains true that a committee, seeking a new president, never feel themselves neglected, rather be it said that they never venture out alone. They make it known to the candidate that the election will not mean a Bradstreet rating. Candid friends will tell him that if the honor tempts there will also be teeth that gnash and alumni who are sure that something must be done about something. If he expects the gratitude of students to cover him like gentle dews of heaven, he will learn that those of lean and hungry marks will in their poverty refuse to do him reverence. The faculty that rise up to call him blessed may also bless him in the market place and at the going in of the gates. And the trustees whom he assembles to give approval to his plans can prove to be possessed of evil spirits.

Undaunted the aspirant does not withdraw his name and for that I lift a cheer. It rejoices me that he wants the job; it shows that there still are men of vision who see that this is the richest, loveliest work that God and man together have contrived. Let all that the misanthrope declares be true, there are yet other truths so enchanting that no single soul has touched their limits.

Who after all are trustees, faculty, alumni, public, and president but adjuncts to the campus? Necessary they are, like workers who store honey in a hive that other generations may be nourished. The college campus is the

objective center, the bubbling spring of life; as exciting as a menagerie, as filled with hope as the babyfold in a hospital, and as wholesome as manna dropped from heaven. There youthful visions like searchlights play along the wide horizons while truth breaks out of darkness to affirm that those who seek shall find; there is the whiff and wind of growing greatness; there is the grace of culture which depressions never dissipate, no enemy destroys, no thief removes, no force enslaves; which fills leisure with beauty, alleviates the ills of flesh, and gives delight to age.

In this presence the college president lives. For him as well as for all others the soul of progress is progress with great souls. There is warmth for him who blows the coals of youth into a living flame. He who carries up the education of another is himself instructed, for a guide will study well the path that lies ahead, and from those who journey with him come nuggets of pure gold. He is not condemned to spend his life in dropping buckets into empty wells and drawing nothing up.

The star ascends for him whom you will choose to take this place; nor shall I be the nightingale that dies of shame should it hear another bird sing sweeter. I shall wish for him the joy of realizing that to bring an annual accession of students to the college is to plant selected seed corn for the race. An educator, he will already know the college student, but those who greet him here will have an added grace or two that make them doubly prized. Let him be heedless of the critic's judgment of the college faculty; these men and women, Christians and scholars everyone, are "friends who make salt sweet and blackness bright." Nor will I promise less for the trustees: they are friends whose kindness makes one wise, whose confidence makes one better. They are a goodly company whose transactions are with ways and means, but whose unsparing selves must needs have commerce with the things unseen. Those who in the offices perform the routine tasks; who warm and clean the rooms; who make the campus lovely; and those who serve the creature comforts—all alike are servants of a spirit that gives the touch of fineness to their work. And everywhere are

friends, in city, town, and countryside; alumni in every state and continent whose loves and hopes are centered here. The prayer of Democritus that he might meet only the good and the propitious would have been well-nigh answered had he been a college president.

Still it must not be thought that a man so wise as Woodrow Wilson could be wholly wrong when he affirmed that a college president can be very happy if he have a love for strife. A man who has a work to do must needs strike hard sometimes and often there are persons standing in the path of the rebound; then it may seem for the moment that their absence would be like being present with the Lord. However, a certain amount of immovability can become a blessing: a match breaks into light when there is friction and grace is a vain possession if it be unused.

It is in order to wonder why this enriching tenure should not be continued to the last expiring gasp; and the reason is that a man should not keep his work until he gasps. Death is often a friend of progress, and to retire may be a friendly act. There is Scriptural warrant for a man not to think too highly of himself, for it is probable that another can do his work still better. After twenty-seven years of administration I deem it fair that the University have a younger man and it is fair that he shall have this splendid opportunity. Moreover, with age the ties of children far away grow strangely strong, and one should have the leisure to do some cherished things as well as sort his baggage before the final curtain falls. It is not easy to speak these words; to be "in a strait betwixt two" has a meaning that I comprehend. It is no trivial thing to guide the moving finger as it writes the judgment, for a man who leaves these scenes and friends can take but half himself away. In all the world there is no finer satisfaction than to see the sinews of a college strengthen; in all the world there is no higher, holier privilege than to place a hand upon the tiller of a thousand living ships as they put out to sea; no lordlier brevet than to voice the ways and farings of safe voyage to multitudes of youth in school and out who give expectant hearing. A president has children everywhere and the sun has

never set upon the kingdom where his affections have no home.

These friends and privileges are interwoven with the fabric of my life, but I am told that the experienced hunter turns from the chase before he fires the final cartridge at his belt for on the homeward way he still may find a deer or flush a flock of quail. The bow too long strung taut will lose its power. One turns the log to make the fire burn brighter and I shall look for shining mercies at the eventide. This face is not the map of days outworn, but rather is it lined by cheerful prophecies of fruitful days to come. The furrows of my life have long been sown with seeds the kindly hands of others scattered and many plants have grown that are perennials. The discipline of education has given me a love for children and flowers and all things beautiful, for books and quiet thoughts, for a sheet of paper and a pen; maybe the rested field will yield another crop.

Thousands of elderly men are at this moment growling about the dismalness of life. Their stomachs need a pinch of soda and their ears an openness to a thousand hallelujah choruses that each day fill both earth and sky. They lack the spirit of adventure and invention and of faith in God. No man need sit in the rainy corner of his life; he can patch the roof and light a lamp. A street has two sides and one may walk where the sun is shining. "A man of cheerful yesterdays and confident tomorrows," I shall have no need to ask forgiveness for my being gloomy in a world so full of joyous interests. Like Stevenson, I thank God for giving me the chance to earn a living on such pleasant terms.

Yes, I should like to live the same life over, having the privilege of an author to make corrections in the new edition, and provided the same wife journeyed with me. Since this is not to be, then let me have the word:

"They say he parted well, and paid his score;
And so, God be with him."

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