12-9-1963

UA37/44 Western Big Events in Late 1963

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So many things have happened lately that Western needs an active historian. Of course, the central event has been the dedication of the great new building, for that event has probably made Western known to more people than any other happening in years on end. The coming to our town of so many distinguished people is in itself a great event; I can think of no occasion other than the funeral of President Cherry that drew so many from so great a variety of places and positions. And I am greatly pleased at their presence and the programs that they witnessed. In every way the dedication was worthy, dignified, forward-looking, prophetic of many other great programs that can and will become associated with the building. Since it is here, we can count on often being asked for its use by large groups of prominent clubs and annual or even national meetings. Just how much that will be in keeping with the policy of the college I do not know; but it is astonishing how few places in the state, as I have said before, can be chosen for a three-day meeting by even a small club or organization. Our smallish Kentucky Ornithological Society has, until very recent years, been hampered in selecting a place for our fall meeting, when some 70 to 125 people attend. Now we can begin to cover other areas, but for some time we were almost forced to choose among these few places: Kenlake Hotel, Kentucky Dam Village, Cumberland Falls, and Mammoth Cave. Next fall we expect to have our meeting at Lake Cumberland, where the new lodge is big enough to take care of us. I have mentioned this as a mere sample of how the big auditorium may be sought after.

It was fortunate that so many phases of the college had a place on the program. The high-grade training in all our fields was obvious every minute of the time. And, as you so well know, literally thousands who could not be present sat by their TV's or radios and
felt themselves a part of such a wonderful day. A shut-in telephoned us today to say how much she enjoyed seeing the faces of people whom she has known or known by name for so many years. She has hardly been out of her own house for months, but she lives for the world that comes to her by TV, radio, and the newspapers. My own personal opinion is that, viewed purely as a means of letting the world know that there is a place called Western, this big day has done more than barrels of ink and whole weeks of speeches. And, I like to believe, hundreds who were there or got a look-in by remote control will be easy to convince when Western needs to be helped in its growth and in its rounding out some of its dreams. I was especially impressed by Willson Wood's frank, simple, honest review of how unbelievable has been the growth of the college since his own first days here, in 1929.

Sometimes it is necessary to stop and take stock. That is what the college and its friends and well-wishers did on Saturday, December 7. We get so accustomed to the growth of our college in buildings, in faculty, in students, in curricula, in importance to the educational world that we begin to regard our phenomenal growth as something that takes place naturally, like the rising and setting of the sun. It nearly overwhelms us when we actually begin to name the evidences of our growth in every way.

Nearly a week before the great day, I was the guest of a visiting "old grad" at lunch. If I ever find myself showing so many signs of the hardening of brain cells as he showed throughout our entire meal and visit, I hope that I will have sense enough to retire to an old man's home and stay there until I am taken to the cemetery. Frankly, he did not comprehend a tenth of the growth and the necessary buildings. He lamented the good old days in true old-man fashion, when everybody knew everybody else, when everything was in apple-pie
order, when bread and meat seemed to just waltz on to the tables of
the faculty, when everybody was skilled in his line and well paid for
his efforts, when there was no dissatisfaction among the students.
I punctured some of his bubbles, but did not feel that it was a worthy
cause to tell him how far from perfect the good old days were. Since
he draws a big salary and is very important in his field, he almost
shuddered when I told him that I raised my family on a yearly salary
of $3700, with not a cent's change for seventeen years; even allow-
ing for the change in the value of money, even he could see that
it took some careful financing to meet the monthly bills. I agreed
with him that there were some wonderful young people here in his
day and proceeded to mention a lot of them who have done exceedingly well.
But, I reminded him, a very large percentage of the freshmen in the
years he was here never got beyond first base in their education and
that some of his wonderful fellow-students are still coming back,
nearly a generation later, to make up what they childishly failed to
do while they were so young and so avid about living in a carefree
world. His whole conversation reminded me of a speaker at our
chapel of ages ago, when my generation was trying to make ends meet
and hoping to get our life certificates—at least, some of us were
doing that, for the dropouts were many and often senseless. This
suave orator assumed that we were highly-privileged young people,
with an inexhaustible bank account or some very generous parents,
and with nothing to do but play college pranks and sing college songs
and somewhat forget that there was any other world. And as he spoke,
he was probably addressing an audience where 80% of the students were
here on borrowed money or had just got back from teaching one-roomed
rural schools at $50 or $60 a month at best, some of them getting
far less than that. That speaker smiled his bland smile, proud of
himself for his having sized us up properly, and then he vanished
over the horizon, like some erratic comet that comes rushing into our world, throws out a gush of light, and then takes off for some other part of the Milky Way. You will excuse this outburst, but I could not say it to the fellow himself, especially when I was eating the lunch he (or his company) was paying for. Somehow I feel that many people allow their college days to put a stamp upon them and never grow beyond that stamp. I have always resented that very term "college stamp," for it has so many ugly sides. A true college career opens up doors and presents maps of discovered and undiscovered lands; to a great mind college years are great but great only in starting us or helping us on our way to places where we could never go alone.

At the risk of being tiresome, I must say again that my former student who lamented the passing of the only days that ever mattered reminded me also of the tedious old fool who used to testify in Methodist experience meetings just about every week about the glorious night when he got religion at a small rural church. I wanted to say then and still do: "So what?" How much have you got since then? Did that mountain-top experience give you all the vision you have ever had? Have these five or six decades since your great experience meant nothing? Your exultation then in seeing, as it were, into Eternity was great, something to remember and to cherish. But do we live always for some one moment when we saw or felt or understood and then shut ourselves up in our selfishness and hugged our vision to our bosoms until we died as a living part of humanity? Here is a confession that I made not long ago to one of my former classmates at Indiana: I get very little out of meeting again with the typical old grad, for he is so likely to go off at a tangent, forgetting that both he and the rest of us have lived since the day we got our diplomas. My friend did not understand, but you will.