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May 20, 1965

ACROSS MY STREET

Every day now I hear or see something about the prospective building on the Ogden campus. I at first did not understand the significance of the numerous stakes, but Marvin Russell, last Sunday, gave me a pretty good briefing on the building-to-be. Today Gordon, Jr., showed me the floor plan of the top floor or whichever one is for chemistry. Every little mark interested me, for I am sold on the importance of that building and its future contribution to Western and Kentucky. My son told me about the infinite number of small details that had to be checked again and again, to be sure the rooms and laboratories and offices are properly equipped.

It somehow seems queer that all this is going on within a few yards of my study, on an area that changed very little for many years and then started developing like a genuine university campus. The little college that used to occupy the campus across the street was a fair representative of education of a kind for a half century, and it seems to have changed very little in that time. It was post-Civil War in outlook, a sort of rallying point for the Lost Cause. At first and for long after it had some really distinguished men on the faculty, men who represented a high type of early-American education. With the coming of better support for state schools, with the demand for some sort of standardization, with the recognition of degrees as a type of qualifying of colleges or academies, the little school attracted fewer prominent people and gradually declined in favor. It was a strange bit of wisdom when Richard Thomas decided to affiliate with Western, a college that had been scorned by earlier Ogden students and by most of the people of Bowling Green who made any pretension to learning. If, in 1908-1920, I had been told that, some day, the name of Ogden would come to mean only a portion of the state college,

I would have refused to believe even a recognized prophet. And most of the local boosters for Ogden would have fainted then and there.

When I arrived here, on January 19, 1908, there were five so-called colleges here, not one of them being accredited as a four-year college by anybody. Long ago, as you so well know, Potter College died of inanition, no matter what the faithful might say about it. Potter Bible College was turned over to the Potter Orphan Home. Then, in 1928, came the affiliation or merger of Ogden with Western; and the long-anticipated demise of the Bowling Green College of Commerce occurred just recently. It is a bit of good policy as well as a tribute not wholly deserved to perpetuate the names of the three whose campuses or faculty or traditions we inherited. Certainly they will thus have a much longer life than was ever possible when they were private schools. In many ways they served their time and simply could not find enough plain cash, "the one thing needful," as the Shakers used to say, to keep up with the procession. And it must never be forgotten that Western, on its initial day, was a descendant of the Southern Normal School and was, though an infant, already old, like the elves in many German fairy stories. And, going away back to 1892, when Mr. Cherry resuscitated a school that had actually gone out of business, the long traditions of the Glasgow Normal School were still very much alive, with whatever accretions there had been after the school was moved to Bowling Green and had starved to death. Strictly speaking, the Southern Normal School had two lives: before 1892 and after that date. When I entered Western in 1908, the imprint of that older time was everywhere, so much so that it was hard to believe that it was not still the Southern Normal School. All this revives the medieval debate about which comes first, the egg or the hen. In our case there have been several eggs, at least, in the almost a century that our school has lived under various names.