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May 21, 1965

This afternoon's paper announced that the old Bowling Green Business University building is to be torn down soon. That marks an era in the life in Bowling Green and in my own life. That building was the one that was first associated with my memories. I stayed for several terms in a rather excuse for a dormitory next to that building, the old frame building that burned many, many years ago. It had been called the Williams Dormitory and then, just before I began rooming there, Cherry Hall. From the porches, especially the one upstairs, could be seen some rather romantic views of the old round tower. I first got interested in Norman architecture from looking at its battle-mented towers, and I always managed to see a moonrise or two each month over that building, for that made it seem more than ever a castle. If it had been in a less crowded place or had been on our hilltop, it would have attracted a great deal of attention because of its imposing front and its towers.

Even in my earliest years here the building was already far out of date; some of its rooms were perpetually shabby; no amount of paint could make them look otherwise. But I always admired the front and somehow hate to see the building go down. The little chapel, which looked so big to me in January, 1908, brought us very near to the small faculty, sitting in a single row on the long, narrow stage. In some ways that chapel was best suited to the type of school we then had; it took us a long time to get adjusted to the new, big auditorium after we moved to the top of the hill on February 3, 1911. The acoustics interfered with our hearing all that was going on; even several inches of padding on the ceiling did not make things too good; only the coming of a microphone guaranteed that a speaker would be heard back under the balcony. Somehow there was never the intimate, small-school atmosphere after we left the crowded little building

at the foot of the hill. Some of the group felt lost as long as they were around and never seemed to adjust to a bigger world. This must seem pretty ancient to you, for our school had been in its present location nearly seventeen years when you arrived here. Gradually those of us who remained here almost forgot the old building and even the old school, for Western when I came was still considerably more than three fourths Southern Normal School and only one fourth or so Western Kentucky State Normal School. Cornette's thesis certainly shows this gradual blending of the two schools; he does well for an outsider, who was not even born when the private school was made a state school.

To us old-old-timers that place was a sort of memory of youth, a far-off isle in a tropical sea. Poor, struggling for even bread and meat, working hard to even up our education to fairly low standards, for we were far past high school age, we somehow found in that quaint institution a clarion call to do and be. Say what you will, a sort of camp-meeting air pervaded the old school, for it was something on trial. Local hostility was obvious, out-in-the-state hostility was even greater. Every cross-roads town had what it called a college, though few of these institutions were even respectable high schools. Our "free" college constituted a dangerous rival. Hence it was almost chronic criticism that we had to meet. When we had been here and had returned to our places to teach, we ran into this hostility and prejudice. Hickman County, when I taught there in 1907-1910, was dominated by a Methodist school--Marvin College-- and a Baptist school--Clinton College. Each one fought the other; both fought the public high school as if it were a training school for criminals. A few of the county teachers turned up their noses at Western because they had attended a summer term or two at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, State Normal School. Poetic justice or not, I lived to see some of those very snooty ones come, like a modern Prodigal Son, to get forgiveness and actually

graduate from our Life Certificate course or, later, from our four-year course.

How far away all this must seem to you! But you are an unconscious heir to all this series of events, the good and the bad alike. The old families of Bowling Green, now so pitifully outnumbered by outsiders like you and me, still feel that the glorious days of Potter and Ogden represented the best educational traditions of the city, before the invasion of the barbarians. I can never cease laughing at the tradition, maybe actually untrue, that one of the big property owners on College Street, or his wife, lamented the moving of the college to the top of the hill, for that meant that tacky, unwashed barbarians from the outer provinces would be coming by their fine colonial mansion. At least, this is what we heard several times, and the woman of the family certainly looked like someone who could and would have said just this. When I later taught her only son, I could not help wondering whether cramped finances or a recognition of the value of Western or the boy's defiance of his snooty parents had brought him to the school of barbarians.

Among the archives are pictures taken the day we moved. We made quite a spectacle of the day and remembered it, as I now do, as a big part of our young lives. I was really sick that day, but I got up out of bed and helped move the library books, a two-horse load of them, from down in the valley to the top of the hill. It was necessary to come around by State Street because of the steepness of College and the non-existence of any street from the Russellville Road to the three buildings on the hill. For a long time Fifteenth, between College and Center, was a gullied path, where even a cow would have had unsure footing. And thus we came, somewhat like the Egyptians, on our way to the Promised Land but casting our eyes and our memories back to the old place in the valley. And now that building will join many another memory of things that used to be.