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December 8, 1967

Just before I landed here, the boys who stayed in the old Williams Dormitory, which stood on Twelfth Street at the corner of Center Street, asked permission of President Cherry to rename the old building Cherry Hall. It was at Cherry Hall that I roomed in 1908, again in 1909, again in 1910-11; and I took my meals there most of my early days here. Though the food was far below present-day standards, it was edible; the association with students was worth more than the sums we paid for rooms and board and books. In fact, I believe that the terms I ate at Cherry Hall diningroom meant more, basically, in my education than anything else that I can think of. Some of us made a great event of our meeting three times a day for hash or grub or whatever was the current term for boarding-house food. We discussed everything that was going on, in school or out. We soon knew a lot about each other and thus had a good start on any conversation. For example, Miss Nettie Depp, who was to become one of the outstanding teachers and county superintendents of the state, sat across the table from me for weeks and weeks. Each of us tried to catch the other one in any kind of ignorance. She got accustomed to bringing a small dictionary to the table to check on my new words or new pronunciations that may varied slightly from the Barren County standard. The younger students, largely some of her own whom she had taught between spells of coming to Western, listened in and formed an audience. The only bad feature about this Autocrat of the Breakfast Table stuff was that the boys who waited on the tables sometimes got disgusted with our slowness in devouring our hash. This period was the only time in my whole life when I ate deliberately, to lengthen out the club-like atmosphere of the boarding-house table. Several of the others, now great-grandparents, have spoken of this time lovingly when I have met them again or have written about those days.

Having from three to five classes each day with the same people, seeing them regularly at chapel, and then sharing three meals a day with them, often with literary-society programs after school or in the evening, gave us some of the advantages of the English colleges, with the added values of having girls who were just as bright and snappy as we as friends and companions. So far as I can tell, that phase of coeducation has never been praised enough. We were not courting the girls; we had no desire other than being good pals with each other. I can recall no instance when any boy overstepped the conventional bounds of good society. We just liked each other, and we liked to banter, to compare ideas, to do a lot of growing up.

It took generalship to conduct those large classes, and we soon learned which teachers were born officers and which were not even good non-coms. Most of the teachers called on as many students every day as possible; and a grade was put down right there. To keep the roll-books from being understandable if they were lost--or stolen--, some teachers, notably Mr. Leiper, devised schemes of recording grades that nobody, probably including the teacher himself, could fully unravel. When Mr. Leiper had to be away from class, even long after I began teaching, I would have his roll--book to keep in touch with what was to be done, but I never found out his system. A diagonal line with a 3 on one side and a zero on the other might mean something or nothing. When a student recited, he stood up. Thus we got to know some more fellows besides those who stayed in the dormitories. Professor R. P. Green used to call on a student thus: "George Alexander Green, rise and shine." Thus introduced, a fellow sometimes could not have called his county's name or maybe his father's. Years later, just for fun, I told one of my classes, in which I still had the students to rise and recite, about Professor Green and his "rise and shine" rigmarole. I picked out some backward boy with a long name and said, "James McDaniel

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Carpenter, arise and shine," after I had asked the question. He got up awkwardly, giggled a bit, and then bowled us over with "I've done rose but I ain't shone." And he didn't.

Several years before I came to Western, I had got interested in Tibet and had read everything--not much was available at Fidelity--on that mysterious country, that Shangri-la. When Professor Green asked for suggestions of what we students in his Physical Geography class would like to do some reading about and then speak to the whole class, I chose Tibet. I doubt whether I ever felt any more important than I did when I took a pointer and indicated where Tibet was and is, how inaccessible it has been in all historic time, and how an English army officer had penetrated the country only a few years before, thus adding an almost new world to the imagination if not to tangible fact. Captain Younghusband, of that expedition, seemed like a personal friend ever afterward. I should add that I had been taking, for several years, a monthly digest of news somewhat like TIME of this generation. Geography seemed to me a very real thing because of my reading, and Professor Green made it more so.

This same professor took us on several outings. In that way I made my first trip into Lost River Cave, the first cave I had ever visited. My father had been reared in cave country, down south of Nashville, but his stories seemed pretty wild to us children, who had never seen any limestone or caves or sinkholes. I remember how we would laugh among ourselves when Father's sister, Mrs. Eli Nelson, who visited us when I was a boy, referred to a small holler near our house as that sinkhole. Little did I know then that I would become almost a resident in sinkholes, for I have walked and climbed and camped among them. I felt a sudden rise in my feeling for Aunt Ann when I first came to Bowling Green and began to explore sinkholes and caves and cliffs.

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Miss Mattie Read, who was to teach until here until I succeeded her for sure in January, 1918, had many fascinating qualities as a teacher, though she was a bit too formal. Maybe her height helped her develop these oddities, for she was tall for her generation and rather queenly-looking. Some of her students, even those who did not like her, could not help liking her stately walk and manners. It was years before I found her to be rather human. Much of the respect I have for her developed even after she ceased to be a teacher at Western. I came to know her ^{great-}nieces, who were so pious that they fairly dripped piety. They were studious and good-mannered, but I doubt whether a single one of them ever learned anything new, at college or elsewhere. One of them, long after I was a man in early middle life, wanted me to tell her about her Aunt Mattie, whether she was, as the legend in her family had it, an infidel; whether she was cynical. I certainly rose to the occasion then, and I said some plain words about how thinking people are so often misjudged by unthinking ones. I went so far as to say that, if Miss Mattie Read was an infidel, then I was another one. Mrs. J. R. Alexander, who was one of Miss Read's closest friends, often told me of Miss Read's very orthodox, narrow background. I regret that I did not get to see Miss Read in the last twenty years or so that she lived after 1918; I wish now, as we all wish when we did not say the right thing at the right time, that I could have told her some of the values she had acquired as I grew older and maybe a little wiser. I happened to be one of her pets, according to many of the students who did not like her; but I never tried to cash in on this, even though I knew she was a close friend of the H. H. and T. C. Cherrys. Mrs. T. C. was kind enough to say that Mrs. Sewell, in her last days, as she lay dying of internal cancer, rejoiced that I was the head of the department and that I was teaching some of the very courses that she had taught in her years here.

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--- Though I did not have Mr. Leiper in my first time here or even in my second, I started, in the spring of 1910 a career of studying Latin under him that was to run for ten terms and to give me what would now be regarded as a full major, though I never called it that, for at Indiana much of my Latin taken here was credited to high school work. Leiper, Stickles, Miss Read, R. P. Green, Dr. Fred Mutchler--these, to me, are the forces that made and kept the old Western. Mr. Clagett was decidedly in the second group, for his aloofness from everything, in a time when the school needed promoters, somehow dampened my enthusiasm for him and his courses; but I must say that he had not sunk into a mere grade-giver then, the teacher that the obvious deadheads sought as if he had some sort of magic to hand out. It is well to forget most of the others, even though one became the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and did fairly well in that office. As a batting average, I suppose that we had more than a fair share of the best teachers then, maybe as high a degree of good ones as we have ever had since then.

When some old-timers start a conversation by remarking that the students used to be better morally than they have been lately, I have to say that I knew the students then and do not know them very well today, though I probably know fifty times as many as the average griper about degeneracy. In older days I knew them all, and some were sorry spectacles, just as ornery as any later group here. Some were horribly dissipated, many were diseased, and a very great number were almost lacking in desire to improve themselves. As I have so often lamented, most of them became dropouts, some of the very best ones so far as minds are concerned. A tough small group hung on, but they were very much in the minority. It took a lot of courage to hold on.