

Western Kentucky University

TopSCHOLAR®

WKU Archives Records

WKU Archives

11-1952

UA3/2/1 Western's Old Idealism in a Modern Setting

J. S. Brown

WKU President's Office - Garrett

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records



Part of the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), [Leadership Studies Commons](#), [Mass Communication Commons](#), [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#), and the [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#)

This Transcription is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in WKU Archives Records by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

Cherry

Western's Old Idealism in A Modern Setting

More than forty years ago, H.H.Cherry stood on this Hill and looked upon a Kentucky made up mostly of ~~small~~ people living ~~small~~ small lives, thinking small thoughts and doing small things. And as Moses viewed the burning bush and decided to lead his people out of Egyptian bondage, H.H.Cherry visualized a great institution dedicated to a greater Kentucky and a more abundant life for its people.

My first recollection of this ^{institution} was a picture (or what I thought was a picture) of this Hill crowned with fine looking buildings. Imagine my surprise when in January of 1911, I came for the first time to enroll in Western State Normal. The only building I saw was a castle like structure which is now the Bowling Green College of Commerce. This building I had not seen in the picture at all.

Later I learned, of course, that what I had seen as a picture was not a picture at all, but only an architect's drawing of the picture in the mind of the founder of this college. It was the prospectus of things to come, a vision of the promised-land of educational opportunity.

This vision, expanded, matured, and materialized, is the Western of today. President Cherry was the living, flaming expositor of that Biblical philosophy which says that "Where there is no vision the people perish".

How often have I heard him with the zeal of a ^{missionary} prophet and the fire of a prophet fling out from this platform the admonition of vision-- vision to push back the horizon of ignorance, of stupidity, of lethargy and self satisfaction. And added to vision, the faith and the courage that the vision could be translated into reality. May I submit that Modern Education has no finer philosophy than that.

But vision, faith and perseverance were ~~not all~~ only a small part of the personality of the founder of our institution. He believed that all great human advances were the result of great people. Time after time he would say, "Back of every great achievement is a great soul". Back of all good music, all good literature, ~~good-teaching~~ all good teaching are great souls-- that without such souls there are no great achievements.

How well, all unconsciously, was he describing himself! For without the great soul of H.H.Cherry, we would not be standing on this Hill crowned with structures of Athenian beauty and dedicated to the proposition life and life more abundantly.

Another thing which impressed as a young man was President Cherry's emphasis on the importance of the individual-- some times he spoke of it as the personal touch. So often he would say in substance, know your students as personalities; know

the color of their eyes, know the tinge of their hair, the kind of parents they have, the homes they live in, what they like and what they hate. Know all you can about them : then go on from there. That philosophy is as modern as this morning's sunrise.

And what did he think of the teacher's part in a school ? Why he said the, " The teacher is the school". That the best textbook in the hands of a dead teacher is a dead thing. Isn't that as modern as yesterday's text book *on education?*

Last winter, I participated in a class called the Modern Elementary School. We discussed all the characteristics of a modern type elementary school and agreed pretty well on what it should be like. But we ended like the rat colony which ~~thought-of-the--~~ decided what a wonderful thing it would be to bell the cat. The trouble, of course, was that no rat could put the bell on the cat. Likewise we couldn't think of many teachers who could teach a modern type school. So the significance of the teacher is as modern as it was forty years ago.

Another of President Cherry's ideals in regard to schools was that of community service.- that the teacher owes his community not just so many hours for so many dollars, but all and the best service which he can render for the advancement of the whole community. That the teacher should be willing to go the extra mile in the interest of community welfare. This concept is as old as Jesus and as modern as today. It is one of the ideals which has made Western graduates a bit superior to those of other institutions. It is part of the spirit of the Institution; it is part, at least, of " That other thing" which President Cherry talked so much about, but never defined. And may the day never come when Western's graduates will not have that spiritual fire for service to the utmost.

Now modern pedagogy makes much of the notion that every child in school must succeed. But long before moderns began talking about it, H.H.Cherry was preaching the thrill of achievement. He used to illustrate it by the story of how he taught his daughter to swim. I think the daughter was Josephene, and the story went about like this : He would lead the child out into the water a little way and then they would swim to the shore. The distance was increased from day to day until they were swimming almost from the middle of the river. Then one day President Cherry said to Josephene, that today we'll start from the bank and keep going until I say turn. But they didn't turn. They kept going until they crawled out on the other bank. Then, what had happened suddenly dawned on ~~Elizabeth~~; Josephene and she shouted with great joy, " I swam the river".

I think of an experience of my own when many years ago, I was trying to teach a big strong, awkward boy to play football. He was willing, tried hard and was not afraid, but he lacked something, until one day while playing on a sloppy field, he managed to tackle the ball carrier and practically baptized him in a puddle of water. He arose with a grin on his face-- there a football player was born-- he had succeeded-- he had achieved.- he had arrived.

Another segment of modern thought ~~is~~ relates to Public Relations, and we sometimes think of this movement as something rather new among educators. But H.H. Cherry was a builder of good public relations before others began to talk about it. Those of my age will remember when we moved to the Hill. The students on a certain day in the winter of 1911, put the college on their backs and moved it up college Street to this site. President Cherry with photographs and other publicity made sure that the public knew of this important adventure. So it was that when things happened that would inspire public confidence ~~occurred~~ President Cherry saw to it that the public knew about it.

We remember how that at critical junctures, he would invite the whole legislature to visit the school. When they came, he made much of what he wanted them to see and hear, and the law makers usually returned to do what he wanted them to do. I never heard him use the phrase, public relations, but as we understand the term to day, he was a master of the art.

Another sill under the house of modern pedagogy is that children grow into knowledge, habits and skills. They grow as whole personalities, physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual beings. They do not grow in ~~stages~~ called grades, or by subject fields. They grow as whole integrated beings.

Though, he probably could not have analyzed this philosophy as moderns do, President Cherry understood well its application to the educational progress of the individual. Often have I heard him say, "Education is growth. Keep on growing". He would say to students at his spontaneity chappels, "When you stand on your feet and say something, you grow". So, in this simple, but basic philosophy, President Cherry was a modern.

I shall mention just one more specific contribution of President Cherry to modern education. That was his cry for leadership. "Leadership", he would say, "leadership can revolutionize communities".

And how we need leadership in Kentucky and in the nation today. Without more and stronger leadership, I fear that public education as we know it may not survive the next quarter of a century. It is time that we cry out for leadership, lest we perish.

Up to now, I have spoken of only one personality in relation to the founding of Western, but I know, you know and President Cherry knew that no one person builds a great structure. Whether the structure be an army, a bridge, a Panama Canal, or a school, many hands will be calloused in its erection. So has it been in the founding and advancement of this institution--many are the hands that have laid to the ax, the shovel and the hoe.

Chief among these were his able, loyal and efficient co-workers. I hesitate to mention names, but as I think back to the one gallus days of the instituton, certain personalities always come to mind. There was Uncle Alec, Professor Alexander, whose home spun philosophy was worth more than his mathematics.: Professor John Clagett who could make Shakespeare's character's stand up and speak their parts in person : Then there was Dean A.J. Kinnaman whose boundless sympathy and helpfulness endeared him

to all who knew him ; Miss Mattie reed who symbolized in one package all the dignity of the Hill. A little later Daddy Burton came on the scene to brighten the corners with his wit and humor. Then as now was Dr. A.M.Stickles the apostle of historical accuracy. Oh, yes, he was there too, the best loved man on the Hill, Uncle Billy. Uncle Billy once referred to himself as the unstitution's liar, but, if he ~~ever~~ told any lies, they were white as snow, and harmless as an angel's song. May he stay here until my grandchildren meet him.

These are just some of the personalities who in those early days ~~played the ga-~~ played an heroic part in the foundation of this college.

Others who helped mightily were the students who sounded their trumpets from the four corners of the State. They were loyal and their voices were heard in behalf of their ~~almamater~~ any need of their almamater.

So, we, here today, behold a great institution, the the consumation of the dream of H.H.Cherry, but erected by the hands of a multitude. Our founders gave us not only the structures on this Hill, but the guidons of the future as well. Vision, faith, courage, leadership, service, growth, the ideal of the more abundant life-- these are the pillars of the past and the windows of the future of Western State College.

To all those who struggled for this institution and have passed to the beyond, I would say with Fitz-Green Halleck :

Green be the turf above thee.
Friend of my better days!
None knew thee, but to love thee
None named thee, but to praise.

While memory bids me weep thee
Nor thought nor words are free
The grief is fixed too deeply
That mourns a man like thee.

It would not be fitting to end these remarks without some recognition of the present and a glimpse toward the future. For "He that putteth his hand to the plow and looketh back is lost".

Those of us who have seen this institution evolve from embryo to its present grandeur are pleased and proud of its continuous growth under the leadership of Dr. Paul Garrett and his great staff of men and women. They are moving toward a new day in tune with the ideals of the old days, and the founding fathers, could they speak across the valley of the shadow of death, would say Well Done ! Carry on ! Carry On !