

BOX No. 20

ALFRED UNIVERSITY

College Opening Addresses

by

Boothe C. Davis

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College Public Opinion

We have entered upon the seventy-eighth year of Alfred's educational work. For more than the life time of a generation young men and women have been assembling here each autumn to take up the tasks of education.

Only one man is now living who was a student at Alfred's opening term in 1836. He has now reached the advanced age of ninety-three years.

Men grow old and die but colleges may and should live on forever, growing stronger in character and work and finer in tradition and spirit as the years pass on. The reason that colleges can grow and always keep young is found in the fact that they are composed of young people. If anyone says it is because the college professors are young, I will not dispute him. College professors are the youngest men for their years that I know. Here are Dean Kenyon and Dean Main and Director Binns and "your gallant young leader" and we are all young men, even though the hair and beard (Dean Kenyon's

beard) are silvered. We are young because we have younger colleagues as associates; because the truth we teach is ever growing and enlarging; but, most of all, we are young because our students are young - the brightest and best of the young, too.

The constant stream of college life, like the current of a river, is ever rushing on. The incoming freshmen close up the ranks left broken by the out-going seniors. This is the most important reason why a college is young though it numbers its years by the hundreds or the thousands.

A college opening address may therefore assume freshness in the college and in the faculty as well as in the freshman class. In other words, it may assume that we are all growing; that we have goals ahead of us and achievements toward which we are looking and striving.

In my last college opening address I discussed "College Aims and Ideals." Today I wish to take up some special phases of this broad subject and treat

them under the topic "College Public Opinion."

On the first day of this month there assembled at Montreal a convention known as the American Bar Association. The guest of honor and the chief speaker was the Lord High Chancellor of England, Viscount Haldane. Lord Haldane's subject was "Higher Nationality," a study in law and ethics. In his address he said, "The great force that actuates mankind in the observance of law is not fear of the officers of justice but fear of public opinion and therefore public opinion tends more than the arbitrary execution of justice to restrain men from law-breaking." He declared also that "There is a system of habitual or customary conduct which is ethical rather than legal and which embraces all those obligations of the citizen which it is 'bad form' or 'not the thing to do' to disregard, the penalty for which is a social penalty."

These declarations of the distinguished jurist, pointed out for citizens of the state, are the vital principles that operate in a college community as

well as in the state. The instinctive sense of what to do and what not to do in our student relations and college life, is a source alike of liberty and ease in our relations and is the chief foundation of all decency and propriety, morality and social order. These principles of conduct become second nature when a stage of culture is reached where college life is natural and normal.

Modern psychology has come to recognize the fact that we can not have two sets of ethical principles, or two forms of ethical theory, one for life in the school or in the college, and another for life when we have left the college and are looked upon only as citizens of the state, giving our allegiance only to the state.

It has been the tendency in the past to discuss conduct in college and college public opinion as though the college were an institution apart from ordinary society, and as though its morale could be treated without reference to the general scientific principles of conduct. This is most unfortunate,

and tends to cause conduct to be considered less seriously and less scientifically when related to collegemen and women, than when related to men and women outside of college. Such an erroneous philosophy of conduct and of ethical principles has had much to do with establishing false standards of morals and of moral responsibility in college.

In the state government we have laws against theft and vandalism - laws that protect society against the lawless and the vicious. No good citizen would think for a moment of becoming a party to the crime of theft or the destruction of property or to any conduct that would despoil the good name of the community. Every good citizen would use his best endeavor to bring any offender to justice, to make his crime known and to enforce the appropriate penalty. Public opinion would condemn, in no uncertain way, any one who would become an accomplice to such a crime by actively or passively shielding the offender and helping him to escape detection and punishment.

But college public opinion has been slow to assert itself in such decisive terms. Not infrequently college public opinion has not condemned the act of an individual who would deface or destroy college or public property or who would engage in conduct that damages the good name of the college. College public opinion has often shielded such offenders by making it unpopular for innocent members of the community to exercise an influence to correct the abuses of unruly members.

In college we have, for example, the honor system and in our examinations we accept the honor principle as the highest ethical principle, but it has sometimes seemed difficult to create a public opinion strong enough to encourage or compel a witness to the crime of cheating to use his influence to restrain the offender or to bring him to a just punishment if efforts at restraint are unheeded. Gradually this public opinion is strengthening and with the hearty co-operation of every student, we shall have an honor system which will be efficient

and useful in college life and a valuable asset to character in all subsequent life, but college public opinion is vital in every other form of our college life as well as in the honor system.

We are entering out upon a period of student organization and self-government, of which the student senate is a notable example, and the student self-government rules in dormitories and clubs are also examples in point. All this self-government, to be effective, must be supported by a high standard of public opinion, a public opinion which is created by the student body itself and which breaks down when any considerable number of the members of the student body are not willing frankly, openly and publicly to condemn conduct unbecoming for ladies and gentlemen.

The false and double standard of ethics which does not support a high public opinion in college may be illustrated by supposing a student to have knowledge of the conduct of other students which would not be approved by the better element

of the community; but such a student, though dis-
approving personally the conduct of the offender,
does not feel bound by public opinion to make any
effort to correct the abuse. He becomes an accom-
plice of the offender and covers up the crime. This
same student, however, during the next summer vaca-
tion meets a personal friend who is considering Al-
fred as his college. The moral standards of Alfred
are discussed but it is now outside of college.
These friends are talking frankly with each other's
welfare at heart, and the good student who has had
knowledge of improper conduct on the part of his
fellow students but has become an accomplice to the
wrong, passively or actively; now feels under the
standard of ethics which rules outside of college.
He therefore says to his friend, "There are things
that go on among the students at Alfred that I would
not have you indulge in. I am afraid such things
would be bad for you. I would advise you to find
some other college." In this case the student
doubtless acts conscientiously but he has permdtted

his double standard of ethics to condone offences on college which outside the college he condemns. He himself has therefore injured his Alma Mater not, however, by condemning offences and possibly not by advising a student to go elsewhere but by his failure in the first instance to actively place his influence against wrong conduct of which he had knowledge.

This is a purely hypothetical case but I venture the assertion that it occasionally happens in Alfred and that some of you today could put your finger upon instances where it has happened within a twelvemonth. I submit to you that it is a wrong which is due to a false notion of college public opinion and that we can only correct such errors and maintain permanently the good name of our college when we have a college public opinion that is as strong in the college as it is outside in the condemnation and punishment of all ethical improprieties.

This year, for the first time, two student clubs of young men are being organized with self-government rules, where students room and board in a house which they control. The success of this new movement, in which I am deeply interested, will be wholly dependent upon a student public opinion inside the club itself and among the students of the University. If that public opinion is high and every student actively promotes the high standard of ethics that we would advocate outside the college, these experiments of students' boarding and rooming clubs will prove highly satisfactory and a great advantage to our college. Our dormitories are both full. There has never been so good an opportunity for public opinion to make a high order of conduct possible as we have now. A new set of rules and regulations has been adopted for the guidance of the women students of the University. These have been formulated in order to avoid the criticism which has sometimes been made of the conduct of women students, ^{particularly} ~~both~~ outside ~~and inside~~ the dormitory.

The success of these new self-government rules wholly depends upon the public opinion which the student body itself maintains in regard to the ethics that these regulations stand for.

Student activities during the college year have constituted a serious problem with which we have grappled for many years. During the past year college public opinion has asserted itself in the establishment of a college calendar of activities, a most admirable solution of the problem. The successful carrying out of this reform will be dependent upon the way in which public opinion supports the change. There may be times when even hardship to some organization or interest may seem to be necessary in order to enforce the reform, but it is well launched and by further improvement from year to year will come to be a valuable addition to the regulations of the University.

Amusements and recreations are all admirable and essential so long as they contribute to the preparation of the individual for the more important

tasks of his college life, but when amusements and recreations cease to be the servants of the mind and body and come to be our masters, we are no longer free men but slaves. Excessive participation in any amusement or recreation or college sport tends toward a degeneracy in scholarship and in ethical and moral standards. Student public opinion must be depended upon, more than anything else, to safeguard our student activities against such excess.

Again public opinion should be brought to bear more distinctly than ever before upon student classifications. The university laws of the state prohibit any college in this state from registering a student as a classman in college who has more than three subjects uncompleted in his college preparation. Beginning with the present year, Alfred University has raised its requirements above the minimum provided in the state law and no student is registered as a freshman who has more than two subjects in arrears in his preparation.

Furthermore, the state law prohibits any student from being registered as a sophomore or upper classman who has any unsatisfied entrance conditions.

These regulations make two possible courses open to Alfred University. First, we can prohibit any registration of students in any courses whatsoever who do not satisfy entrance requirements and we can drop from college permanently all conditioned members of the freshman class who do not make up all their entrance conditions during the freshman year. Or we can make a classification of special students who are not eligible to the freshman class and permit these to pursue studies in college only as special students without the privileges of classmen until such time as they remove their entrance obstacles to registration as classmen, and we can permit students who should be registered as sophomores or upper classmen but who lack some entrance work to remain in college only as freshmen, deprived of participation in all class activities except those of the freshman class. For the sake of rendering the

largest service to the largest number, we have chosen the latter alternative and are registering certain students who can not be admitted as classmen as special students, a thing we greatly regret to do but by this concession we hope to encourage them to make up their entrance conditions and get into college or to enable them to do some special educational work along narrow lines though they may never wish to become candidates for degrees; and we have chosen to permit, in some instances, left-overs from previous freshmen classes to remain a second year, or possible a third year, as freshmen, hoping that by such indulgence they may make up the deficiency in entrance and return to their proper places as classmen.

This policy, however, has many disadvantages and it may become necessary to abandon it unless the public opinion of the student body will help the college authorities to maintain the classification which the office makes. When the Dean ranks a student who has been permitted to remain with us

a second or a third year as a freshman because of the failure to make up his mathematics or his language or his English entrance conditions, he is in honor bound under the laws of the state to see to it that that student does not pose as a sophomore or as a junior. College public opinion has not strongly supported the Dean in the past. Individuals have appeared in class photographs and in student rolls and in student meetings who have no right whatsoever to appear there and the college lays itself liable to discipline from the State Board of Regents when it permits such falsification of its class rolls. Student public opinion which will insist that no student attend a ^{freshman}/~~class meeting~~ or participate in class rivalries or festivities who is not legitimately a member of that class is the most effective and ready remedy for this difficulty. College public sentiment which will not permit a student to participate in the activities of the junior class or the sophomore class when his office ranking does not give him that right or privilege

is the surest and most effective corrective of this abuse of privilege from which we have sometimes suffered in the past. Class officers will be given by the Dean of the college a list of the membership of the class as soon as the classification is completed and the seating list made out and it is hoped that college public opinion will support the Dean in the maintenance of this classification.

With the opening of the new library building provision ^{has been} ~~is likely to be~~ made whereby the library will be open for reading and reference purposes on two evenings in the week and on Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon. I trust that the time is not far distant when we can open the library in the evening more frequently than twice a week. The desirability of having evening access to the shelves of the library is so evident that no discussion need be made of it in this opening address. So far as finances or the ability of the administration to secure competent service in the ^{operation} ~~administration~~ ^{will permit} ~~tion~~ of the library, we shall gradually approach

the ideal in this respect. As to the matter of Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon opening, however, there may be some difference of opinion and a fuller discussion of the matter may be desirable.

It is known to all of you that a majority of the citizens of this village observe the seventh day of the week, or Saturday, as the Sabbath and that ~~the~~ student body is somewhat equally divided in the matter of the day which is observed as the Sabbath. It is believed by most people, I think, that the privileges of the library for general reading is ~~combined~~ ^{Consistent} with the highest ideals of Sabbath observance. It has also long been the policy of Alfred University to make no discrimination between the students who observe Saturday, and those who observe Sunday. Consequently, no classes are held on either day and no athletic contests are held on either day. Religious services are provided by the University authorities for Sunday observing students because no such services are pro-

vided by a local church on Sunday. So that in every possible way equal opportunities are provided.

Now if the library should be open to any students on Saturday, it should also be open to students on Sunday and vice versa. It is believed that such opening for the purpose of reading in the library and not for the withdrawal of books will promote the best interests of all concerned and need violate the conscience or religious faith or principles of none. In advocating this measure before the trustees and approving it with the faculty, I have had in consideration both the spiritual and intellectual welfare of our students. I trust that no one will permit this opportunity to enjoy the privileges of the library for two ~~or three~~ hours on the afternoon of his Sabbath to distract from his spiritual observance of the day. In other words, I desire to urge upon you that such use as you may make of the library on the day of your Sabbath shall not be in the line of your regular college classes or anything that can be considered

work in preparation^{so} for class exercises but that it shall be a spiritual and intellectual enjoyment which you will have from the library that shall be apart from any thought of secular labor.

For many years since the consolidation of the libraries of the lyceums with the University Library, a portion of the lyceum tax has been turned over to the University for the purchase of books. This division of the lyceum tax has come to be looked upon as detrimental to the lyceums and it has recently been decided by the trustees and faculty to waive any further collection of a portion of these fees for the purpose of the library.

In the place of this, however, a fee of one dollar per semester, instead of thirty cents per semester, as formerly, will be charged as a reading-room fee, one-half of this sum will be used for the purchase of periodicals and the other half for the binding of magazines and periodicals for permanent preservation and use. This new arrangement will increase the number of available periodicals and

will make the files more available for use.

Also the students are to have access to the library two afternoons each week and two evenings each week in addition to the time heretofore available for library use. It is believed that this change will meet with the hearty approval of the student body and the support of student public opinion.

In conclusion, let me re-affirm the welcome which was expressed on registration day, both to the returning students who come back to continue their college studies and to this splendid class of freshmen who begin this year their college work. Alfred University offers you this year, in material equipment and teaching force, better opportunities and facilities than it has ever been able to offer in the past and we believe that the student body is not only the largest but the best that it has ever been the good fortune of Alfred University to enroll and we look forward to the most successful and happy year in the history of Alfred University.
