

1969

William Edward Dodd and the Progressive South, 1900-1908

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<https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-a3jp-8333>

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WILLIAM EDWARD DODD AND THE PROGRESSIVE SOUTH
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1900 - 1908

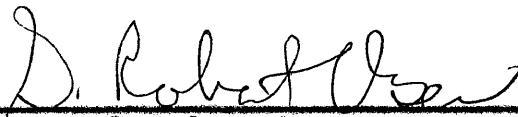
A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
G. Robert Orser
1969

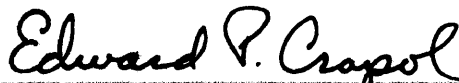
APPROVAL SHEET

**This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**



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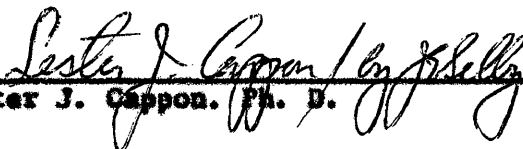
Approved, August 1969



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes first to thank Doctors Crapol, Sherman, and Cappon for their patience and helpful criticism. Especial appreciation goes to Miss Kristi Brown, Miss Emmy Alexander, Miss Elaine Battistello, Miss Jane Brett, Mr. Paul Ritchie, Miss Sue Neale, and Mrs. Linda Wyman who all helped in a great way.

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WILLIAM EDWARD DODD AND THE PROGRESSIVE SOUTH

1900 - 1908

INTRODUCTION

In the past fifty years, a generation of American historians have made notable advances in a systematic study of the early twentieth-century South. Many of these historians have taken Southern progressivism as their main field of interest. Men such as C. Vann Woodward, George B. Tindall, Wendell Holmes Stephenson, E. Merton Coulter, and Deway Grantham, Jr., head the list of capable historians who have opened up the paths to understanding the Southern progressive movement. Not only have they dispelled Robert M. LaFollette's hasty contention of 1912 when he said, "I don't know of any progressive sentiment or any progressive legislation in the south,"¹ but they have also proven that Southern progressivism did exist as a unique and integral part of a broad national movement. Some have gone so far as to assert that the Southern variety of progressivism quite often was more reform-minded than its Northern counterpart.² The white Southern middle class did confront the inherent evils of American bigness. Railroads, public utilities, insurance companies and various other "trusts" were attacked for their so-called "base" exploitation of the Southern people. Attempts were made at electoral reform, child labor legislation and slum clearance.

¹Robert M. LaFollette in Arthur S. Link, "The Progressive Movement in the South, 1870-1914," North Carolina Historical Review, XXIII (1946), 173.

²George B. Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945, (Baton Rouge; Louisiana State University Press, 1967), p. 4.

Even after so much work has been done by so many in such a productive field, there is still one problem that confronts the student of the Southern progressive movement. Most of the work done thus far has centered almost exclusively around one of two groups. Historians have studied either the specific careers of the leaders of the movement or great groups of Southern society. Very little has been done to explore the thoughts, motives and actions of the typical or atypical middle-class Southern reformer. It is quite possible and highly probable that a study of the individual and combined actions of these secondary leaders or followers could shed a new light on the impetus of the entire movement.³

The subject of this paper is the activity of one Southern reformer, William Edward Dodd, a middle-class, Southern, progressive educator whose individual actions, though not of great national or regional historical importance, do perhaps offer a key to the understanding of the backbone of the Southern progressive movement. William E. Dodd, the so-called "democratic historian," was just that, an historian who was concerned with the workings of democracy in a seemingly undemocratic society. Furthermore, as Robert Dallek, his most recent and most prominent biographer, has pointed out, Dodd was representative of a twentieth-century Southerner caught between the century of his existence and the century of his birth.

³This approach is similar in principle to the one that Jesse Lemisch advocates for the study of the American Revolution. See Jesse Lemisch, "The American Revolution Seen From the Bottom Up," in Barton J. Bernstein (ed.), Towards A New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, Inc., 1967), pp. 3-45.

Faithful to an America of yeoman farmers, small towns and popular control, Dodd is an example of the Jeffersonian democrat who found it difficult to understand the problems generated by an urban, industrial society.⁴

How Dodd faced the new problems of the twentieth-century South is the subject of this paper. Like most of his fellow progressives, he was not afraid to speak out on the many and complex problems that plagued his geographic section and the nation. Along with other progressive educators of his generation, he addressed himself to the problems of the trusts, civil service, railroads, education, child labor, industrialism and race. Indeed, at times, Dodd pushed too hard. Often he let his "middle-class sense of obligation" and his blind idealism cloud his historical writing and win him enemies in his community.⁵ But all in all, Dodd's reaction to the many and diverse dilemmas of his age and the remedies he proposed make him a bonafide Southern progressive, a man well worth studying for the historical relevance that his life brings to our generation. It is hoped that the understanding of the early Southern progressive movement will thus be enhanced by this study and others similar to it.

⁴Robert Dallek, Democrat and Diplomat: The Life of William Edward Dodd (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. vii.

⁵Frederick Rudolph, The American College and University: A History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 357.

CHAPTER I

DODD'S EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

William Edward Dodd was born in the small Southern hamlet of Clayton, North Carolina on October 21, 1869. Reminiscing in 1918 Dodd described the Clayton of his boyhood experiences as a small, rural, lower to middle-class community. Most of Dodd's acquaintances were "poor people, small farmers who owned their homes but who paid interest on loans," and were desperately striving to adjust to the devastating economic impact of the Civil War.¹

Dodd's father was an uneducated Baptist preacher-farmer who was particularly interested in state and local politics and history. A life-long Democrat, John Dodd was also a staunch believer in the greatness of the democratic ideal. Dodd's mother, Evelyn Creech, was a frail, sensitive woman to whom Dodd was quite close until her death. Her strong, unquestioning belief in the Baptist Creed was to have great impact on the future historian.²

Partly because of geographic location and partly because his family was unable to afford travel, Dodd's early experiences were confined to Clayton and its environs. He attended Clayton Elementary

¹W. Alexander Mabry, ed., "Professor William E. Dodd's Diary, 1916-1920," The John P. Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College, (March, 1953), Entry of 13 Aug. 1918, p. 67.

²Lowry Price Ware, "The Academic Career of William E. Dodd," (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1956), University Microfilms: Ann Arbor, Mich., Mic 57-1346, p. 4.

School and Clayton High School and described his years at the latter as quite valuable because of its excellent instruction.³

In 1889 Dodd applied for a scholarship to the United States Military Academy at West Point, took competitive examinations and tied with another North Carolinian for first choice. Despite the fact that he had recommendations from two North Carolina state senators and Josephus Daniels, the progressive editor of the Raleigh News and Observer, the appointment went to his rival.⁴ Accordingly in the next year he entered Oak Ridge Military Institute in Winston-Salem and was graduated from that institution first in his class in 1891.⁵

In 1891 Dodd received a scholarship to Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, Virginia. During a very active four years at V.P.I., he became first lieutenant in the corps of cadets, debater for his society, president of the Y.M.C.A., and editor of The Gray Jacket, the college literary magazine.⁶ Dodd also became quite involved in church affairs and was described as being "always at Sunday School, church service and prayer meetings, and ready to take an active part." He also taught a class of girls in Sunday School.⁷

Dodd's academic record at V.P.I. shows little actual historical activity. He pursued a liberal arts course with a major in English,

³W. E. Dodd to George H. Denny, President of Washington and Lee University, May 24, 1902, The Dodd MSS, Library of Congress.

⁴Wendell H. Stephenson, The South Lives in History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), p. 29.

⁵Dodd to Denny, May 24, 1902, Dodd MSS.

⁶Ibid.

⁷J. Hartwell Edwards to the Reverend C. C. Brown, February 13, 1900, Dodd MSS.

but took only three hours of history.⁸ However, he was greatly influenced by the head of the History and English Literature Department, Professor Edward E. Sheib, who taught Dodd German and English Literature. Sheib had attended the University of Leipzig in Germany in the 1880's and can be credited with interesting Dodd in the study of formal history.⁹

Dodd received his Bachelor of Science Degree with distinction from V.P.I. in 1895 and from 1895 to 1897 remained there and taught general history while earning his master's degree in French, German, and English literature.¹⁰ After receiving his degree with honors in 1897 and after consultation with Sheib, Dodd made the important decision to travel to Germany to do doctoral work in history at the University of Leipzig. The fact that during his entire collegiate career he had taken only three hours of work in history seemed to disturb him little.

While at Leipzig Dodd, like many other American students who studied in Germany, was saturated with the current German method of historiography that prevailed. He was most influenced by Erich Marcks and Karl Lamprecht with whom he carried on continual correspondence in later life. In 1902 Lamprecht described Dodd as an ideal student, "far and above average."¹¹ Marcks felt Dodd was an "industrious and enthusiastic gentleman with a scientific turn of mind."¹² Though Lamprecht was to be an inspiration to the young historian, he also seems to have

⁸Ware, "The Academic Career of William E. Dodd," p. 8.

⁹Ibid., pp. 9-10.

¹⁰Stephenson, The South Lives in History, p. 31.

¹¹Karl Lamprecht, Testimonial for Dodd, April 28, 1902, Dodd MSS.

¹²Erich Marcks, Testimonial, Nov. 13, 1899, Dodd MSS.

introduced Dodd to a bad habit in methodology. For all his pretense to the scientific method Lamprecht advocated the study of social history and was often more interested in interpretation than fact.¹³

Dodd left Leipzig in November of 1899 with a Ph.D. degree awarded summa cum laude, but only magna cum laude in history. His dissertation, Thomas Jefferson's Rückkehr zur Politic, 1796, was a rather unpretentious description of Jefferson's return to politics in 1796. However, it was quite important in his later development as an historian and as an interested Southern citizen because it did show that Dodd was quite pro-Jefferson in thought.¹⁴ It quickly became obvious that Dodd's ideas of politics and social interaction were almost synonymous with those held earlier by Jefferson.¹⁵

Before he left Leipzig Dodd received a letter of congratulation from his cousin, H. H. Horne, professor of philosophy at Dartmouth College. Horne felt that Dodd "was now to be ranked among the world's scholars, whose opinion is to be reckoned with."¹⁶ This illusion was soon to be shattered. Dodd returned home saturated with the teachings of Lamprecht and Marcks, but "with little tangible background either for a study of southern history or for an interpretation of American democracy."¹⁷ Accordingly, he found that he could not obtain a good job.

¹³Ware, The Academic Career of William E. Dodd, p. 17.

¹⁴Jack K. Williams, "William Edward Dodd: Historian of the Old South," The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association, 1950 (Columbia: The South Carolina Historical Association, 1951), p. 18.

¹⁵Jack K. Williams, "A Bibliography of the Printed Writings of William Edward Dodd," North Carolina Historical Review, XXX (1953), p. 73.

¹⁶H. H. Horne to Dodd, August 18, 1899, Dodd MSS.

¹⁷Stephenson, The South Lives in History, p. 13.

As early as 1898, while still at Leipzig, Dodd had planned to return to Blacksburg and teach there at a more advanced level, but V.P.I. could not use him.¹⁸ Later in that year he pondered a career in the foreign service in Germany, but his heart seemed to be set on either further study in history or the teaching of that subject at the college level.¹⁹

Upon his return to North Carolina in 1900 Dodd immediately began to apply for teaching positions at colleges and universities throughout the South. He applied to the University of North Carolina in early 1900 without success. Then he applied for the vacant presidency at Greenville Female College in Greenville, South Carolina. He was turned down there primarily because he was unmarried. One of his sponsors, J. Hartwell Edwards, attempted to remedy this fault by describing Dodd's religious activities in his days at V.P.I.: "I was particularly impressed with his unusual and admirable discretion in the treatment of young ladies. He is a high-loved Christian gentleman."²⁰ But even with this glowing recommendation, Dodd did not receive the appointment.

In April of 1900 Dodd applied for the chair of history and philosophy at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. Again he was turned down. By August of 1900 he was so desperate that he wrote Herbert Baxter Adams and asked for a research assistantship at Johns Hopkins University.

¹⁸H. H. Horne to Dodd, February 27, 1898, Dodd MSS.

¹⁹H. H. Horne to Dodd, July 10, 1898, Dodd MSS.

²⁰J. Hartwell Edwards to the Reverend C. C. Brown, February 13, 1900, Dodd MSS. It is humorous to note that Dodd's former sweetheart who had refused his offer of marriage in 1899, was quite amused by the wife question at Greenville and wrote Dodd asking if "they did not offer to supply one along with the position?" Ella Gray to Dodd, May 4, 1900, Dodd MSS.

Adams advised Dodd that he would be welcome but no funds were available.²¹

Finally in August of 1900 Dodd received the following letter from the Chancellor of the Randolph-Macon College System of Virginia:

Resolved, that the committee under the authority conferred upon it by the Board engage the services of William E. Dodd (Ph.D. of Leipzig) of Raleigh, N.C. as Professor of History and Economics for the session of 1900-1901 at a salary of \$700, it being understood that nine recitation hours per week shall be expected of him in these courses.²²

Randolph-Macon in 1900 was a backward Southern college. Dodd's starting salary was quite small and his work load heavy. Although he was to spend a highly frustrating first year at Randolph-Macon, he was now a professor and that was his one desire in 1900. More important, this job that began in 1900 in Ashland was to be Dodd's stepping stone from obscurity to national prominence.

²¹Herbert Baxter Adams to Dodd, August 31, 1900, Dodd MSS.

²²Copy in Dodd MSS, n.d.

CHAPTER II

TEACHING AT RANDOLPH-MACON COLLEGE

The Randolph-Macon College from which William E. Dodd launched his historical career showed little evidence in 1900 of sustained academic excellence. The college, chartered by the Methodist Church in 1830, was named after two distinguished statesmen of the time, Congressman Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina and Senator John Randolph of Virginia.¹ The college began operation in 1832 at Boydton, Virginia, at a point located almost exactly between the homes of Macon and Randolph. There the college lazily progressed until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861.

The War almost destroyed the college. The number of students and faculty dwindled and at the close of the war the college premises were occupied by Federal troops. According to Richard Irby in his History of Randolph-Macon College, Virginia, the "main building was used as headquarters of the Freedman's Bureau" and damage done to the college by Federal troops amounted to "about five thousand dollars."² Because of these and other problems the Board of Trustees finally decided in 1863 to seek a different location for the institution.³

¹William E. Dodd, The Life of Nathaniel Macon (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton, 1903), p. 378. It is interesting to note that neither Macon nor Randolph ever "openly professed faith in the Nazarene" nor contributed one cent to the operation of the college.

²Richard Irby, History of Randolph-Macon College, Virginia (Richmond, Va.: Whittet and Shepperson, 1898), p. 160.

³Ibid., p. 172.

After lengthy deliberation, Ashland, Virginia, was chosen as the new site for the college facilities. Located on the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad, sixteen miles north of Richmond, Ashland had been the boyhood home of Henry Clay from 1777 to 1791. During the early nineteenth century the town was popular as a summer resort "distinguished for healthfulness and accessibility."⁴ The Civil War ended this tourist trade and so in 1868 the college officials proceeded to remodel and repair a resort hotel, a ballroom, a bowling alley and various other buildings for academic use. They then opened the college with five professors and sixty-seven students.⁵

From its re-opening in 1868 to Dodd's arrival in 1900 Randolph-Macon saw the construction of only a few new buildings; academic progress was negligible. Under the leadership of Chancellor W. W. Smith from 1886 to 1900 the Randolph-Macon System of Virginia was established, consisting of Randolph-Macon College (Ashland), Randolph-Macon Woman's College (Lynchburg), Front Royal Academy, Bedford City Academy, the Blackstone Female Institute and the Danville Female Institute.⁶

William E. Dodd's initial reaction to Randolph-Macon was one of great disappointment and disillusionment. The faculty of the college had slowly increased to fourteen by the turn of the century and the student body numbered only 150. The college library consisted of a meager 10,000 volumes. Under these unfavorable conditions it was

⁴"Annual Announcement and Catalogue of Randolph-Macon College for the Collegiate Year 1887-88" (Richmond, Va.: J. W. Fergusson and Son, Printers, 1888), p. 3.

⁵Irby, pp. 187-195.

⁶Ibid., pp. 316-317.

Dodd's assignment to establish the first chair of history and economics. Wendell H. Stephenson, one of Dodd's biographers, writes that he probably looked upon Randolph-Macon in 1900 as a "small Sahara rather than an intellectual oasis."⁷

It seems that Dodd's early troubles at Randolph-Macon began before his arrival. In his first year the Board of Trustees asked him to teach sixteen semester hours and organize courses in history and economics, all for a minimal salary of \$700.00.⁸ Even so, Dodd came to Randolph-Macon with the enthusiasm of a typical novice educator. Unfortunately he received little cooperation or encouragement from either his colleagues or the administration. To most of them Dodd's methods seemed a little radical. Chancellor W. W. Smith immediately criticized the young professor's tendency to "allow the fundamental mastery of the elements to be neglected." He felt that undergraduates should be "made master of the accepted textbooks rather than to indulge in excursions after new knowledge."⁹ This type of criticism led Dodd's cousin and continual confidant, H. H. Horne, to sympathize with Dodd and state: "All modern history to you there must seem medieval." But Horne went on to warn his cousin not to "queer" himself with the President and his sparse supporters.¹⁰

Dodd's dissatisfaction with conditions at Randolph-Macon is illustrated by his applications for positions at no less than sixteen colleges and universities from December of 1900 to June of 1903.

⁷Wendell H. Stephenson, The South Lives in History, p. 33.

⁸Elliot H. Goodwin to Dodd, Aug. 27, 1900, Dodd MSS.

⁹W. W. Smith to Dodd, Dec. 7, 1900, Dodd MSS.

¹⁰H. H. Horne to Dodd, Nov. 2, 1900, Dodd MSS.

Furthermore, in 1901, he applied for jobs with the publishing firms of Dodd, Meade and Company and Ginn and Company and with the Library of Congress.¹¹ Fortunately for Randolph-Macon Dodd was turned down in each of these attempts and after 1902 his applications decreased. There were several reasons for this change. The first was the inauguration of a new president, Dr. R. E. Blackwell, a progressive educator who, while not always in agreement with Dodd, was at least willing to listen to his problems. Destined to become one of the most influential presidents in that institution's history, Dr. Blackwell gives a good indication of his concern for education in his state and section in the following statement:

It is essential that our schools shall be as good as those of any other part of the country . . . Unless then our Southern young men are to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, they must have as good training.¹²

After our discussion of Dodd's concern for the poor quality of educational institutions in the South in the next chapter it will be quite obvious that Dodd began to work more freely under the new president than he had under Blackwell's predecessor.

¹¹There follows a list of institutions to which Dodd applied and the approximate dates of application: Davidson College, December, 1900; Adelphi College (Brooklyn), January, 1901; The State Normal and Industrial College (Greensboro, N.C.), January, 1901; Tome Institute (Port Deposit, Md.), January, 1901; University of North Carolina, January, 1901; Carson-Newman College, January, 1901; Dodd, Meade and Company, January, 1901; Ginn and Company, January, 1901; Georgetown College, February, 1901; Library of Congress, February, 1901; Ottawa University (Ottawa, Kansas), April, 1901; Washington and Lee University, March, 1902; University of Arkansas, April, 1902; Territorial University Preparatory School, April, 1902; University of Kansas, April, 1902; University of Wisconsin, April, 1902; Virginia Polytechnic Institute, June, 1902; Greenville Female College (Greenville, S.C.), February, 1903; Furman University, June, 1903. Copies in Dodd MSS.

¹²R. E. Blackwell in Louis R. Harlan, Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915 (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), p. 253.

Another factor that contributed to Dodd's growing appreciation for his new job was his marriage to Martha Johns of Auburn, North Carolina, in late 1901. As Dodd's old friend Elliot H. Goodwin wrote, "I was led blindfold by your letter into the belief that your time and thought were given up to history and history alone. Well there are better things to be devoted to than history."¹³ Perhaps that was the one thing the young historian needed--an escape from his continual research and teaching. Furthermore, "Mattie" as Dodd called her was to give him the love and understanding that he so desperately needed in his first years of collegiate teaching.

Probably the most important factor contributing to Dodd's eventual satisfaction at Randolph-Macon was the growing appreciation and acceptance of the new methods and techniques that he brought to the college and the work that he did to foster historical activity there. Along with this acceptance came a steady rise in income from the college, from \$700.00 in 1900 to \$1500.00 by 1905.

Though Dodd was important as a writer of historical literature, probably his most positive contribution to Randolph-Macon College and to the historical profession from 1900 to 1908 was his inspirational teaching. This point is proven by the fact that many students under his tutelage became capable historical scholars.¹⁴

In his first year Dodd taught courses in history, government and political economy. And he had definite ideas about how these courses should be taught. He sincerely felt that the object of education was to

¹³Elliot H. Goodwin to Dodd, Oct. 7, 1901, Dodd MSS.

¹⁴Wendell H. Stephenson, "A Half Century of Southern Historical Scholarship," The Journal of Southern History, XI (1945), p. 28.

develop in the student "a sane knowledge of self, of external conditions and of the best method of adjusting one's self to these conditions."¹⁵ Therefore, the old method of lecture and learn was not applicable to his concept of a modern world. He would rather conduct a seminar and send his students out into the field to solve their own problems. This was the nature of Dodd's first quarrel with Chancellor Smith and some of his other colleagues.

Smith felt that the undergraduate was not capable or mature enough to participate in an historical seminar or write a scholarly research paper. He felt that a seminar would allow the student to "express crude opinions that cost them no labor instead of doing the drudgery of mastering texts." In other words, "nothing should be substituted for getting their lessons."¹⁶

Dodd reacted against Smith's concept of higher education. He desired seminars and research for his students and designed his courses to that end. His experiments worked rather well, but he himself admitted that there was a possibility that a student could loaf in one of his classes.¹⁷ The fact remains, however, that few did loaf, probably because of the enthusiasm that Dodd was able to bring out in most of his students.¹⁸

To further historical work and interest on the part of his students Dodd established the Randolph-Macon Historical Society in 1901. The

¹⁵William E. Dodd, "Another View of Our Educational Progress," South Atlantic Quarterly, II (1903), 325.

¹⁶W. W. Smith to Dodd, Dec. 7, 1900, Dodd MSS.

¹⁷Dodd, "Another View of Our Educational Progress," p. 329.

¹⁸Jack K. Williams, "A Bibliography of the Printed Writings of William Edward Dodd," p. 75.

main purpose of the society was to search for the raw materials of history. Dodd felt that valuable historical documents were rotting away in many parts of Virginia in attics, courthouses and other places. One can imagine Dodd's neophytes running around Hanover County, rummaging through moth-eaten boxes in courthouses and asking amazed citizens permission to explore their attics.¹⁹

Dodd and his students needed funds to purchase various manuscripts and other acquisitions for Randolph-Macon's inadequate library. To accomplish this end Professor Dodd was almost forced to beg. In search of funds for historical research he would approach any likely (or unlikely) individual or foundation. In 1904, with the help of Josephus Daniels, he petitioned William Jennings Bryan for a grant from the Bennett fund, a large trust fund for which Bryan was the executor, but because the fund was tied up in court, Dodd's request received a negative response from Mr. Bryan.²⁰ In 1905 Dodd petitioned Rockefeller's General Educational Board (N. Y.) for \$5000 for "the purchase of up-to-date books" and "the best journals of Economics."²¹ Dodd also continually prodded Virginia's representatives to Congress, asking for surplus books from the Congressional collections. These requests did receive some satisfaction.²²

Charles Francis Adams gives us a prime example of how some of Dodd's "victims" must have felt after being solicited. In 1904 he wrote Dodd a typical Adams letter refusing to contribute anything to the

¹⁹Stephenson, The South Lives in History, pp. 34-35.

²⁰W. J. Bryan to Dodd, Nov. 1, 1903; W. J. Bryan to Josephus Daniels, Nov. 1, 1903, Dodd MSS.

²¹Dodd to W. W. Gates, Oct. 3, 1905, Dodd MSS.

²²Thomas Nelson Page to Dodd, Dec. 13, 1901, Dodd MSS.

Randolph-Macon College Historical Society. He sympathized with Dodd's cause, but felt that a small gift would be to "fritter away one's sources."

Appeals for small sums lead to a practical loss of self-respect on the part of the applicant, and the result accomplished, so far as the institution to be aided is concerned, is never satisfactory.

The moral of all this is, that the institutions of education at the South must exercise patience, as, in their time did those of the North, and wait until their alumni are able to meet their necessities through general benefactions.²³

As it happened, the most important contributor to the Randolph-Macon Historical Society was John P. Branch, president of Merchants National Bank in Richmond and son of Thomas Branch, former President of the Board of Trustees of the College and the prime supporter of its move to Ashland in 1868. After a little pressure on Dodd's part John P. Branch was to donate fifty dollars for the first issue in 1901 of the society's first publication, "The John P. Branch Historical Papers."²⁴

The initiation of an historical publication naturally followed from the earlier research and field studies carried on by Dodd and his students. The main purpose of "The Branch Papers" was to provide a medium of expression for Dodd's brighter students and at the same time print copies of newly found letters. The response to the first edition of the "Papers" was mixed, but generally favorable. Dr. Smith still worried that this sort of activity might detract from the classroom work, but on the whole he was happy.²⁵ William P. Trent felt that it was a

²³Charles F. Adams to Dodd, Dec. 6, 1904, Dodd MSS.

²⁴Thomas Branch and Company to Dodd, May 22, 1901, Dodd MSS.

²⁵W. W. Smith to Dodd, May 27, 1901, Dodd MSS.

valuable contribution to the history of the South and hoped that Dodd would continue the good work.²⁶

Some found fault with "The Branch Papers." There had been some criticism of Dodd's methods from the beginning at Randolph-Macon. Some of his critics felt that he conducted his history courses a little too much like a graduate school seminar.²⁷ In the July, 1902 issue of Publications of the Southern Historical Association, the editor, Colyer Meriwether, expressed this opinion in reviewing the June, 1902 edition of "The Branch Papers." He praised the work but suggested that perhaps Dodd was "really introducing university training in a college."²⁸ Then in September, 1903 "Reviews and Notices," pointed out three drawbacks to Dodd's "Branch Papers."

There is danger to the course of history in this pre-empting a claim, half developing it, and yet waiving off others. For prentice hands these sketches, two at least, are very creditable, but as contributions to history they are hopelessly inadequate, practically useless.

This is danger to the writers themselves in puffing them up with exalted notions of themselves without furnishing the correction of subsequent articles or a genuinely laborious research.

There is, thirdly, the loss of valuable space which could have been devoted to original material like the matter in the second half of the pamphlet.²⁹

Despite this criticism and some others like it, after eight years at Randolph-Macon William E. Dodd's achievements can only be termed a success. By 1908 he had received the praise of notables such as

²⁶W. P. Trent to Dodd, Dec. 3, 1905, Dodd MSS.

²⁷Ware, "The Academic Career of William E. Dodd," p. 29..

²⁸"Reviews and Notices," Publications of the Southern Historical Association, VI (July, 1902), No. 4, 354.

²⁹"Reviews and Notices," Publications of the Southern Historical Association, VIII (Sept., 1903), No. 5, 387-88.

W. P. Trent, Albert Bushnell Hart, R. E. Blackwell, John S. Bassett, Andrew C. McLaughlin and J. Franklin Jameson for his work at Randolph-Macon College. But more important were the future careers of the students he had sent on their way into the historical profession. This list includes men such as Clarence Johns (brother of Martha), Professor of History, Wake Forest College; Henry Ellis, Professor of History at Randolph-Macon College and Mayor of Ashland; William H. Ellison, Professor of History, University of California; William L. Cheney, editor of Colliers Weekly; Wilmer L. Hall, editor of Virginia State Records; Alfred P. Jones, Professor of History, University of Pittsburgh; Edward J. Woodhouse, Professor of History at Yale, Smith and the University of North Carolina; and Dice R. Anderson, Professor of History at the University of Richmond and ultimately President of Randolph-Macon Woman's College.³⁰ Most of these students followed Dodd to graduate school at the University of Chicago.

These names attest to Dodd's ability as a dynamic teacher of history, but perhaps his greatest realization of that came in July of 1908 when he received a letter from Dice R. Anderson announcing a recent addition to the Anderson household, a boy who "Answers to the name of 'William Dodd'."³¹

³⁰Ware, "The Academic Career of William E. Dodd," pp. 33-34.

³¹Dice R. Anderson to Dodd, July 9, 1908, Dodd MSS.

CHAPTER III

WORKING FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND HISTORICAL STUDY IN THE SOUTH

As a teacher, William Edward Dodd was one of a distinguished new group of Southern educators who saw the inherent evils of their own society in the early twentieth century. As Albert Bushnell Hart described him, Dodd was:

One of a numerous company of Southerners who feel the enfranchising power of the truth; who believe in looking things squarely in the face and working from what is to what may be.¹

In this context, Dodd could be classified most definitely as a solid member of the so-called Southern progressive movement.

Dewey Grantham, Jr. and other historians have described the typical Southern progressive as a middle-class individual interested in civic reforms, humanitarian endeavors, better government and economic equality or the curbing of the "vested interests."² William E. Dodd was interested in these same problems and spent a good part of his energy working toward their solution. And, as a Southern educator and historian, his interests were expanded and his ability to cope with Southern problems was enhanced.

Dodd's early career in Virginia reveals the progressive "middle-class sense of obligation" that Frederick Rudolph discusses in

¹Albert Bushnell Hart to Dodd, July 11, 1905, Dodd MSS.

²Dewey W. Grantham, Jr. (ed.), "The South and the Politics of Sectionalism," in The South and the Sectional Image: The Sectional Theme Since Reconstruction (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), p. 41.

The American College and University: A History.³ As Robert Dallek puts it, Dodd, like hundreds of other educators of American colleges and universities, experienced a "desire to put his expertise at the service of the state."⁴ That he was often confused as to the causes and remedies of the problems his generation faced is evident after a close study of his life. Again, as Dallek points out, Dodd's life has something very important to say about a nineteenth-century American living in a twentieth-century setting or an old, democratic agrarian facing a new industrial, urbanized world.⁵

Though Dodd often was confused and frustrated and pursued the wrong goals, he did believe in self-involvement. He was quite critical of his fellow Americans, who, as he said, think that they "can withdraw themselves into a sort of virtuous retirement and wash their hands of all that goes amiss."⁶

Dodd, himself, however idealistically, was willing to grapple with contemporary problems and, as stated previously, held certain advantages over most other Southern progressives. His was a three-pronged attack:

(1) He worked for the principle of academic freedom and increased study of history in the South through historical societies, publications and personal persuasion;

(2) He worked actively in local, state and national political

³Rudolph, The American College and University: A History, p. 357.

⁴Dallek, Democrat and Diplomat: The Life of William Edward Dodd, p. 41.

⁵Ibid., p. vii.

⁶"Public Morality," Commencement address delivered by William E. Dodd at Oak Ridge Military Institute, North Carolina, May 21, 1903, Dodd MSS.

campaigns;

(3) Dodd injected his personal ideas concerning progressive America into his interpretations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America in his formal historical writing.

As an enlightened Southern educator, William E. Dodd was continually interested in furthering historical study in the South and at the same time establishing the principle of academic freedom at Southern colleges and universities. During his eight-year tenure at Randolph-Macon College Dodd seldom compromised in reaching for these goals and his activities in achieving them earned him both admiration and denunciation from his fellowmen. Looking back in 1920 at these early years of activity at Randolph-Macon, Dodd wrote: "I was always charged with being untrue to the South, whereas I felt I was only writing the truth."⁷

Dodd was numbered among a group of young Southern historians who worked for great changes in the educational attitudes of their section, changes from the conservative, provincial attitudes of the post-Civil War South to the new liberality of the progressive twentieth century. Included with Dodd in this group were men such as Woodrow Wilson, William P. Trent, Edward Mims, William Garratt Brown and John Spencer Bassett.⁸ One of the faults that these "liberals" fought was the established Southern prejudice against complete academic freedom. As Walter B. Hill, Chancellor of

⁷Dodd to Lyon G. Tyler, Oct. 21, 1920, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Lyon G. Tyler MSS.

⁸Thomas J. Pressly, Americans Interpret Their Civil War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 154.

the University of Georgia, wrote:

Have we freedom of opinion in the South?
Most every man who thinks above a whisper does
so at the peril of his reputation or his influence,
or at the deadlier risk of having an injury inflicted
upon the institution or the cause he represents.⁹

A very interesting approach to the study of the activities and ideas of the Southern liberals at the turn of the century is the co-operative efforts of Dodd of Randolph-Macon and John Spencer Bassett of Trinity College. It is most interesting because in the period of Dodd's tenure from 1900 to 1908 both he and Bassett became fast professional and personal friends, fought for what they believed and shared the consequences, both large and small.

Bassett's career at Trinity closely resembled that of Dodd at Randolph-Macon although the former began much earlier. Like Dodd Bassett organized an historical club, the Trinity College Historical Society, with the hope that it would "put a new spirit with the historical work of the South."¹⁰ Like Dodd he recognized the need for great work to be done in collecting available materials in the South for historical study. He also hoped that these materials would be used in the most unbiased manner. In 1897 he launched the Historical Papers of the Trinity College Historical Society as a medium through which to present the work of the society.¹¹

Bassett and Dodd, who first met each other in 1900, became regular correspondents. At the American Historical Association meeting

⁹Virginus Dabney, Liberalism in the South. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1932), pp. 337-338.

¹⁰Wendell H. Stephenson, "A Half-Century of Southern Historical Scholarship," p. 9.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 9-10.

in December of 1900 they discussed the problems of the historian in the intellectual climate of the South. Partly through their insistence one morning at the associational meeting in 1901 in the nation's capital was set aside for the reading of papers on exclusively Southern history. Bassett read a paper on the relations between the colonial Virginia planters and the London merchants and Dodd on "The Place of Nathaniel Macon in Southern History." An informal meeting was held afterward and a committee was chosen, led by Frederick W. Moore of Vanderbilt University, to investigate the conditions of written and taught history in the South.¹²

At the meeting in Washington Dodd invited Bassett to visit Randolph-Macon and lecture to the Randolph-Macon Historical Society. Accordingly Bassett went to Ashland on January 18, 1902, and lectured on "The Need of Scientific Method in the Study of History in the South," a subject close to Dodd's heart.¹³ At this meeting Bassett advised Dodd of his plan to establish The South Atlantic Quarterly at Trinity, a publication designed to foster literary and historical activity in the South. Bassett hoped to use the Quarterly to provide a medium for discussing the Southern Negro problem, politics, and for promoting "toleration and critical, independent thinking."¹⁴

On August 7, 1902, Dodd's first national article on Southern education, "The Status of History in Southern Colleges," appeared in The Nation. Dodd had offered the article to Walter Hines Page, the editor of The World's Work, perhaps because Page was a graduate of

¹²American Historical Review, VII (April, 1902), 430-432.

¹³J. S. Bassett to Dodd, Oct. 11, 1901, Dodd MSS.

¹⁴Stephenson, "A Half Century of Southern Historical Scholarship,"

Randolph-Macon, but he had turned it down because it, to him, was "of interest to a more limited class of readers than some other phase of Southern educational work."¹⁵

Dodd's article in The Nation was a telling criticism of the lack of historical study in Southern institutions of higher learning. After research he concluded that possibly only two institutions, Trinity College and Randolph-Macon College, had given the subject enough recognition. He felt the reason for this was the fact that the Southern people did not understand history. The South allowed old soldiers to tell her history, usually with no thought for objectivity or accuracy. "It simply decries everything which is not laudatory, and does not seek to know the real facts in the case of which no one need be ashamed."¹⁶

Walter H. Page may not have been interested, but many other Southerners were after reading Dodd's rather controversial article. The reaction was mixed. Georgia-born Ulrich B. Phillips of the University of Wisconsin, heartily approved and hoped that a "better time" was "probably coming" for history in all parts of the nation.¹⁷ Albert Bushnell Hart of Yale wrote to Dodd "simply to express gratification at the tone of the article which prepares the way for progress by admitting defects." He felt that was what was needed in America and especially in the South.¹⁸ There were other congratulations from historians, but all were not pleased.

¹⁵Walter H. Page to Dodd, May 23, 1902, Dodd MSS.

¹⁶William E. Dodd, "The Status of History in Southern Education," The Nation, LXXV (1902), 109-111.

¹⁷Ulrich B. Phillips to Dodd, Oct. 3, 1902, Dodd MSS.

¹⁸Albert Bushnell Hart to Dodd, Sept. 30, 1902, Dodd MSS.

George P. Garrison of the University of Texas felt that Dodd had failed to point out the progress in historical work in the South.¹⁹ Professor John H. Latane', former head of the history department at Randolph-Macon College, was much more critical of Dodd's article. While he agreed that there was much truth in it, he felt the article as a whole was "misleading, and certainly not calculated to do any good in the South-- and as far as the North is concerned, I am not one of those who think it necessary to apologize for conditions existing in the South." He felt that The Nation was a Northern paper that enjoyed seeing the South exploited by Southerners and felt Dodd had made himself a part of this conspiracy. He ended by writing:

I certainly think any Southern man, who would say that under the conditions as they existed in 1861 he would not have followed Lee and Jackson ought to be kicked out of a Southern School, and so do you, I imagine.²⁰

And C. H. Ryland, Secretary of Richmond College curtly desired to know if Dodd had his college in mind when he published the following in

The Nation:

To illustrate the insignificance of the subject (history) as viewed by some College Trustees, one of the largest denominational schools in the South has just given its Professor of Latin the new department of history, and in order to better advertise their indifference the Trustees elected a specialist in history to the Chair of English.²¹

But Dodd also received some criticism from his "liberal" friends who believed he had not gone far enough in his criticism of historical

¹⁹George P. Garrison to Dodd, Aug. 13, 1902, Dodd MSS.

²⁰John H. Latane' to Dodd, Aug. 9, 1902, Dodd MSS.

²¹C. H. Ryland to Dodd, Sept. 5, 1902, Dodd MSS.

conditions in the South. His cousin, Herman H. Horne, felt that Dodd's method of promoting change in the South "must be as 'harmless as a dove.'" He thought that open criticism was worthless as opposed to hard internal effort. He believed Dodd would be much more successful by "taking a situation just as it is and by leavening influence from within, attempt to change the whole to something more live."²²

Bassett was generally impressed by Dodd's article in The Nation but he warned his friend against getting pessimistic. He wrote that instead he and Dodd should "get to doing something ourselves." He felt that they should see the true task as "positive work and not contemplation. Let us write history and let us also stir up the fellows--both of which you are doing well." In closing he asked Dodd to contribute an article to his South Atlantic Quarterly's October, 1903 publication.²³

The article which Dodd submitted to Bassett entitled "Another View of Our Educational Progress" was a description of the merits and faults of the Southern system of public education. In the article Dodd criticized elementary schools because the teachers therein were quite ill-trained and private schools because "the teachers of these schools, or family tutors, are absolutely dependent on the good will of their patrons."²⁴ In the public schools he felt the teacher to be "the slave of the community and the child is the master."²⁵ Dodd saw the same trend prevalent in Southern colleges where the President and his faculty tend

²²Herman H. Horne to Dodd, Aug. 27, 1902, Dodd MSS.

²³J. S. Bassett to Dodd, n.d., Dodd MSS.

²⁴William E. Dodd, "Another View of Our Educational Progress," The South Atlantic Quarterly, II (October, 1903), 327.

²⁵Ibid.

to make the student feel "as though the very existence of the institution depended on his good will and personal favor."²⁶

Dodd's first article in the Quarterly would probably have caused a great discussion in Southern educational circles had not Bassett, himself, in the same issue written "Stirring Up the Fires of Race Antipathy," an editorial that caused severe repercussions in the South and almost cost Bassett his job. The Bassett Case at Trinity College in 1903 is one of two usually cited to prove that academic freedom in the South was just as restricted after the Civil War and Reconstruction as it had been during the ante-bellum period. From the 1890's through the 1920's in the South various Southern educators attempted to break this tradition.

In 1902 Professor Andrew Sledd of Emory College had published an article in the Atlantic Monthly entitled "The Negro: Another View" in which he violently criticized the lynching of Negroes in the South and the Jim Crow laws as humanly unjustifiable.²⁷ Although Sledd stated in the article that the Negro was of an inferior race and that he in no way advocated social equality of white and Negro, Sledd was summarily dismissed from the Emory faculty, termed a "Boston nigger-equality citizen" and threatened with tar and feathers.²⁸

Bassett's editorial in the Quarterly caused an equal uproar but with different results. He had always been interested in justice for the Southern Negro and in his editorial deplored the restrictions placed on Negro voting, the passage of Jim Crow laws, lynching and the general

²⁶Dodd, "Another View of Our Educational Progress," p. 327.

²⁷W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 331.

²⁸Dabney, Liberalism in the South, pp. 338-339.

feeling of hatred for the Negro in the South.²⁹ But what mainly outraged Southern sentiment was Bassett's statement that Booker T. Washington was a "great and good man, a Christian statesman, and take him all in all the greatest man, save General Lee, born in the South in a hundred years."³⁰

The demand for Bassett's dismissal in the South was instantaneous and loud. Josephus Daniels, editor of the Raleigh News and Observer and supposedly the warm liberal friend of Dodd, was most outspoken in his cry for Bassett's head. He lashed out at Bassett in editorials, constantly spelling his name bASSett.³¹

It would seem, with so much against him, Bassett would have been fired, but instead of acquiescing, as the Emory faculty had done, the President of Trinity, John C. Kilgo, and the faculty saw this case as a fight over academic freedom. Accordingly they let it be known to the Trinity Trustees that all would resign if Bassett's resignation were accepted. Because of this stand and despite tremendous pressure put upon them, the Board refused by a vote of 18-17 to accept Bassett's resignation and the fight was won.³²

It is most interesting to note Dodd's reaction to the Bassett affair at Trinity. Though not necessarily agreeing with Bassett's statements he saw the affair as one for the cause of academic freedom. On Bassett's behalf he wrote to Daniels pleading with him to be more objective concerning Bassett's utterances in the Quarterly.³³

²⁹John S. Bassett, "Stirring Up the Fires of Race Antipathy," The South Atlantic Quarterly, II (October, 1904), 297.

³⁰Ibid., p. 299.

³¹Dabney, p. 340.

³²Ibid., pp. 340-341.

³³J. S. Bassett to Dodd, Nov. 24, 1903, Dodd MSS.

Next he wrote to President Kilgo, requesting him to support Bassett with the Board of Trustees. Dodd received satisfaction from Kilgo when the President wrote him on November 23: "If the South cannot survive the blunder of two or three little sentences then it is a field without hope."³⁴ And finally he wrote a letter of support to Edwin Mims, professor of history at Trinity and vice-president of the Quarterly, that was used to good effect privately with members of the Board before they made their decision to reject Bassett's resignation.³⁵ Bassett expressed his thanks to Dodd for his help by asking him to accept "the blessings of one who admires your manliness and who looks to it for the herald of our brighter day of reason and liberty."³⁶

Dodd and Bassett continued their fight for historical activity and academic freedom in the South. In March of 1903 they had learned that at the American Historical Association meeting in New Orleans in December, one session would be devoted to "The Study and Teaching of History in the South, Past, Present, and Future." Both Dodd and Bassett were invited to give short fifteen-minute talks.³⁷

Bassett chose to speak on "The Relation of History Teaching and Southern Political Ideals" and Dodd on "Some Difficulties of the History Teacher in the South." Both agreed it was time someone in the Association told the truth about conditions in the South. Bassett felt that the Moore Committee that had been appointed at the Washington meeting

³⁴John C. Kilgo to Dodd, Nov. 23, 1903, Dodd MSS.

³⁵Edwin Mims to Dodd, Dec. 8, 1903, Dodd MSS.

³⁶J. S. Bassett to Dodd, Nov. 24, 1903, Dodd MSS.

³⁷William A. Dunning to Dodd, March 9, 1903, Dodd MSS.

in 1901 to investigate conditions for the study of history in the South had been too conservative and therefore ineffectual. Therefore he hoped that he and Dodd would be as "sassy" as they chose.³⁸

Dodd was rather "sassy" in his talk. He deplored conditions for the teaching of history in the South.³⁹ He found that in the combined states of Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina, with a total population of five million, there were only seventeen college teachers of history and of that seventeen, fifteen devoted as much as one-half of their time to economics, sociology and political science.⁴⁰ And if that were not enough the few were prevented from doing their work free from restraint. Some subjects could not be discussed because of Southern public opinion. "To suggest that the revolt from the Union in 1860 was not justified, was not led by the most lofty minded of statesmen, is to invite not only criticism but an enforced resignation." And "according to Southern public opinion the whole race question is finally settled never to be opened again."⁴¹

To enforce this code in the colleges and universities Dodd accused the "Old Guard" of having history committees in every congressional district of the South "whose business is to keep watch and put out of the schools any and all books which do not come up to their standard of local patriotism."⁴²

³⁸Bassett to Dodd, March 25, 1903, Dodd MSS.

³⁹The American Historical Review, IX (April, 1904), 443.

⁴⁰William E. Dodd, "Some Difficulties of the History Teacher in the South," The South Atlantic Quarterly, III (October, 1904), 117.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 119.

⁴²Ibid., p. 120.

Because Dodd's talk at New Orleans did stir up some controversy among the members of the Association, Bassett felt the talk would be good as an article in his Quarterly. Bassett believed therefore it would be best to publish it in the Quarterly where criticism and controversy abounded.⁴³

"Some Difficulties of the History Teacher in the South" appeared in the April edition of the Quarterly and if controversy was what Dodd and Bassett wanted, that is what they got. A barrage of criticism poured forth on Dodd from newspaper editors and concerned citizens who felt that Dodd's statements were not true and that Dodd himself had been a traitor to the South and an ally of Northern critics.⁴⁴ In the face of this opposition Bassett saw fit to come to Dodd's aid just as Dodd had aided him in 1903.

In "The Task of the Critic" in the Quarterly Bassett was very careful not to make it look as if, in supporting Dodd, he was actively defending himself in relation to his earlier troubles. But, as he assured Dodd, he felt it was time for him to set up certain general principles while Dodd's article offered him a supreme opportunity to do so.⁴⁵ Accordingly in his article in the Quarterly Bassett refused to say whether he agreed with Dodd's evaluation of Southern conditions or not. What he did say was that it was good that we have critics. We can debate our problems. "That there should be in the South a man who can state the proposition caustically and arouse discussion upon it ought

⁴³Bassett to Dodd, Feb. 2, 1904, Dodd MSS.

⁴⁴John Spencer Bassett, "The Task of the Critic," The South Atlantic Quarterly, III (October, 1904), 297.

⁴⁵Bassett to Dodd, Nov. 2, 1904, Dodd MSS.

to be considered a favorable omen of intellectual progress."⁴⁶

In 1905 Bassett resigned his duties at Trinity and a year later began teaching at Smith College. He gave as his reason for leaving too heavy a work load and "an accumulation of other labors," but it is highly probable, as W. J. Cash points out, that he left because he was discouraged with the fight for academic freedom in the South.⁴⁷ Whatever his motives Bassett's leaving the South in 1905 more or less put him out of the fight in the South. But Dodd continued on.

By 1907, after seven years of deliberation, Dodd finally felt he had found the reason for a lack of historical objectivity and more important, the lack of academic freedom in the South. Like other progressives Dodd was finally convinced that the industrial "interests" of the South were the root cause of censorship of Southern educators. To publicize this idea he sent an article arraigning the current industrial abuses in the South to Edwin Mims, the successor to Bassett at The South Atlantic Quarterly. Mims refused to publish the article because he felt it to be too abusive.⁴⁸ Incensed, Dodd sent a scathing letter to The Nation which was printed April 25, 1907 and entitled "Freedom of Speech in the South."

In his article in The Nation Dodd proclaimed again that freedom of speech in the South was just as restricted in 1907 as it had been in the days of slavery. He felt that the new slavery in the South was industrial monopoly that had been unsuspectingly anchored on the Southern

⁴⁶Bassett, "The Task of the Critic," pp. 300-301.

⁴⁷Stephenson, "A Half-Century of Southern Historical Scholarship," p. 160; Cash, The Mind of the South, p. 332.

⁴⁸Bassett to Dodd, April 28, 1907, Dodd MSS.

people. As proof he offered the following evidence:

In Virginia the names of four railway counsellors of high rank appear on the roll of the executive committee of the Democratic Party.

An excellent institution whose faculty lays especial emphasis on the utmost freedom of opinion on the race question has never said a word about the scandalous bribery and tyrannical conduct of certain great corporations operating under its very nose.⁴⁹

The implication of the latter statement was clear. Dodd was accusing Trinity College and The South Atlantic Quarterly of passive domination by the North Carolina Duke Tobacco Trust.⁵⁰ Dodd had finally found the real cause of his troubles, the power of the economic interests in the South--political power. The battle was just beginning and as it began Bassett wrote Dodd from Smith: "I shall watch your battle with great interest; and I believe you will not lose your life in it."⁵¹

⁴⁹William E. Dodd, "Freedom of Speech in the South," The Nation, 84 (April 25, 1907), 383.

⁵⁰Bassett to Dodd, April 28, 1907, Dodd MSS.

⁵¹Bassett to Dodd, May 7, 1907, Dodd MSS.

CHAPTER IV

FIGHTING THE MACHINE

The same man who finally concluded in 1907 that the "interests" were stifling educational progress in the South had earlier concluded that great corporations had caused other disorders in his section and in the nation at large. In his denunciation of great pools of wealth, Dodd was but one of a great movement in the South, but he was an activist and did have great influence in limited cases.

C. Vann Woodward tells us that Southern progressivism was essentially made up of members of the urban and middle class who embraced reform as a last alternative to giving in to the growing pressure of commercial and industrial monopoly. In doing this, they broke with the Southern tradition of old-time conservatism. But the enemy, according to their thinking, was based in the Northeast--railroads, corporations, insurance companies, oil companies, banks and public utilities. Therefore, their base of reform was traditional because the South had voiced its concern over economic domination by the Northeast since the American Revolution.¹

In Virginia in the first decade of the twentieth century, the foremost "interest" which the progressives attempted to thwart was the railroads, most of which were controlled by Northeast investors. This was natural for the agents and lobbyists for the great railroads were

¹C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), p. 371.

in most cases allied with the political machines of the Southern states-- the very machines the progressives were hoping to overthrow.² For example, as Allen Moger points out, by the early years of the twentieth century, most of the railroads of Virginia had become part of the Morgan monopoly and were controlled by capitalists from the Northeast.³ And, if that were not bad enough, it seems that the railroads were a major source of campaign contributions and reputedly controlled some of the greatest leaders of the Democratic Party in the Old Dominion.⁴ Furthermore, the railroads' great use of "lucrative retainers, highly paid lobbyists, subsidized newspapers, free passes, high rates and discriminatory freight charges" made them a natural enemy to the progressive mind and, therefore, a natural focal point for opposition.⁵

William E. Dodd fitted the mold of the average pre-Wilson Southern progressive almost perfectly. Early in his life, one can recognize a growing concern on his part for the future of democracy. At Leipzig, Lamprecht had taught him to be ever searching for group conflicts in history. The conflict that he discovered in American politics was the same that his hero, Jefferson, had recognized at the founding of the Republic--the conflict between property rights and human rights. And⁶ returning to the United States from Germany at the turn of the century, Dodd recognized great concentrations of wealth as being the greatest

²Woodward, Origins of the New South, p. 379.

³Allen W. Moger, Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925 (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1968), p. 347.

⁴Ibid., pp. 347, 99, 120.

⁵Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., The Democratic South (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1963), p. 51.

enemy to the fulfillment of his brand of democracy.⁶

A commencement speech given by Dodd at his alma mater, Oak Ridge Military Institute, in 1903, gives us some idea of his fervent desire to reform conditions in the South so that that section could eventually really achieve full "democracy." In the speech entitled "Public Morality," Dodd enumerated the great problems of the South as he saw them--crooked political machines, industrial control and the disenfranchisement of the Negro. Then he went on to say that he was afraid that most Southerners suffered under the notion that they could "withdraw themselves into a sort of virtuous retirement and wash their hands of all that goes amiss."⁷ Instead, Dodd continually urged his fellow Southerners to involve themselves in the many and complex problems of the early twentieth-century South and seek solutions to those problems. He criticized the apathy of the typical white Southerner and encouraged his fellow citizens to speak out on issues, seek reform, attack corruption and wrongdoing in state and local government and become active in elections.

If Dodd felt that his fellow Southerners were not involved sufficiently in instituting reform, such cannot be said of him. If ever there was a political activist, it was William Edward Dodd. Though he often tended toward being too idealistic in his search for the solution of the many problems that faced the South, he did become involved and did work actively toward reform. And, he began the moment he arrived in Ashland in 1900.

⁶Charles A. Beard in William E. Dodd, Jr. and Martha Dodd, editors, Ambassador Dodd's Diary, 1933-1938 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941), p. xii.

⁷"Public Morality," commencement address delivered by William E. Dodd at Oak Ridge Military Institute, North Carolina, May 21, 1903, Dodd MSS.

The Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad which operated between Washington and Richmond and through Ashland had long maintained the policy of presenting free railroad passes to Randolph-Macon faculty and students for the run between Ashland and Richmond. When Dodd arrived in Ashland, he caused a mild uproar by refusing to accept his pass. Citing his dislike of the railroad interests, he thanked the R. F. & P. and informed them that, in the future, he would pay his own way.⁸

Dodd did not become actively involved in Virginia politics until 1905 when he campaigned for Governor Andrew J. Montague in his fight against Thomas S. Martin for the Democratic nomination to the United States Senate. Dodd's support for Montague in 1905 is significant because it involved him indirectly in two other state political fights--the Fox-Fleet Affair of 1906 and the Gravatt-Wickham Campaign of 1907.

Andrew Jackson Montague, Governor of Virginia from 1901 to 1905, is usually grouped with other progressive and reform-minded governors who served the South at the beginning of this century, such as Charles B. Aycock of North Carolina, Hoke Smith of Georgia, Braxton B. Comer of Alabama, and Ben Tillman of South Carolina.⁹ Montague was elected Governor in 1901 on a progressive platform favoring the popular senatorial primary, improved schools and roads, and legislation to protect workers from employers. The important thing though was that he was elected as an anti-machine candidate.¹⁰ And the machine that he defeated in 1901 was that of Thomas S. Martin, who had ruled Virginia's Democratic Party

⁸Ware, "The Academic Career of William E. Dodd," p. 86.

⁹Thomas D. Clark and Albert D. Kirwain, The South Since Appomattox: A Century of Regional Change (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 111.

¹⁰William Larsen, Montague of Virginia: The Making of A Southern Progressive, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 89.

since 1893.

During his four-year term as governor, Montague relentlessly fought for railroad legislation. During his gubernatorial campaign, he had pointed out that the hierarchy of the Martin machine, including Congressman Harry D. Flood, Senator Claude A. Swanson (Montague's rival for governor), James Hay and William F. Rhea, had accepted payments from various railroad companies for favors done in the state legislature.¹¹ A fact also pointed up in the campaign was the reminder that Thomas S. Martin, himself, was counsel for the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway when he was elected United States Senator in 1893.¹² Because of indignant public opinion over these issues and a deal with western Virginians to disenfranchise the Negro in 1902, Montague and his independent Democrats were able to procure a State Corporation Commission especially designed to regulate the railroads.¹³

Other reforms promoted by Montague during his term as the Old Dominion's Governor included child labor legislation, improved education, popular primaries and better roads, but his success in these endeavors was severely limited by a conservative state legislature that was still controlled by the Martin machine. As Governor of Virginia, Montague became nationally known and was frequently mentioned as a possible Democratic candidate for Vice President in 1904. His greatest accomplishment in the Governor's Mansion was the fact that he dared to point to the evils

¹¹Larsen, Montague of Virginia, pp. 101-102.

¹²Moger, Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925, p. 99.

¹³Dallek, Democrat and Diplomat, p. 40.

in his state and, thus, pave the way for reform.¹⁴

Dodd openly supported Montague and when the latter decided to run against Thomas S. Martin for the Democratic nomination to the United States Senate in 1905, Dodd was one of the first to announce his preference for the Governor. Dodd and Montague had been corresponding since 1904 when Montague invited Dodd to the Governor's Mansion for a formal dinner.¹⁵ From that occasion they corresponded frequently, discussed political happenings in Virginia and obviously found that they agreed on most subjects. Both were intent on doing away with the railroad's influence on Virginia politics and, therefore, they opposed the Martin-Ryan machine.

Robert Dallek sees Dodd's support of Montague in 1905 as an example of what he calls the young historian's progressive "middle-class sense of obligation." Although he attempted to form an "Ashland for Montague" club without success, nevertheless, he corresponded with Montague throughout the campaign offering him words of encouragement and lengthy analyses of the political climate of his thirty-second district which included Caroline, Hanover and King William Counties.¹⁶ Montague continually appreciated Dodd's interest and support and hoped for a victory, but in the election of 1905, it appears that the machine was too well-oiled for Montague and his poorly organized Independents.¹⁷ The final tally left Martin with 46,691 votes, or 56% of the total votes cast, and Montague with 36,307 votes, or 44%--a clearcut victory for the Martin

¹⁴Moger, Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925, pp. 203, 212.

¹⁵Invitation, Montague to Dodd, for Saturday evening, December 10, 1904, Dodd MSS.

¹⁶Dallek, Democrat and Diplomat, pp. 41-42.

¹⁷A. J. Montague to Dodd, July 18, 1905, Dodd MSS.

forces.¹⁸

Dodd, of course, was quite embittered over his fellow progressive's defeat and attributed the loss to corruption and manipulation by political bosses.¹⁹ But his bitterness was to turn to open defiance of the local Republican Machine because of a relatively minor political development in Ashland following Montague's defeat in 1905. In fact, Dodd was to go all the way to the White House to right a wrong done by the Machine.

In March of 1906, J. R. Fleet, Assistant Postmaster of Ashland and Acting Postmaster since the death of Postmaster James M. Taylor in 1901, was removed from office by a coalition of the local Democratic and Republican machines on a charge of malfeasance in office and was replaced by Thomas H. Fox, lieutenant of the local Democratic machine in Ashland. To complicate matters, it seems that Mr. Fleet had voted for William Jennings Bryan in 1896 and 1900 and had openly supported Montague in 1905. Fox's nomination to succeed the deceased Taylor was received by the Senate on March 26, 1906.²⁰ Dodd and his "liberal" friends at Randolph-Macon immediately cried "foul" and touched off a two-year pitched battle between themselves and the conservative local machines.

Dodd began his attack by writing to Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts and requesting him, in the name of justice, to block Fox's nomination in the Senate. Dodd had previously consulted Lodge on historical matters and, therefore, must have felt the New Englander would

¹⁸Moger, Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925, p. 210.

¹⁹John Lamb (MC) to Dodd, January 22, 1906, Dodd MSS.

²⁰Executive appointment, "Thomas H. Fox to be Postmaster at Ashland Virginia - J. M. Taylor deceased," Congressional Record (59th Congress), v. 40, Part 5, p. 4285.

help him. Dodd pointed out in his plea to Lodge that Fox had had no experience in post office work whatsoever and, more important, he had never supported a Republican candidate in his life; therefore, he felt Fleet should be reinstated.²¹ As might be expected, Lodge refused to embroil himself in what obviously appeared to be a purely local dispute and Dodd was forced to seek other means of promoting Fleet's cause.

Elliott H. Goodwin, Dodd's good friend from his Leipzig days, by 1905 had become Secretary of the National Civil Service Reform League. On April 27, 1906, he paid a social visit to Dodd in Ashland.²² Goodwin had long felt that the State of Virginia had done practically nothing toward securing civil service reforms and, therefore, when Dodd related the Fox-Fleet affair to him on his April visit, Goodwin expressed tremendous interest and promised to pursue the matter on Dodd's behalf.²³

After Goodwin had investigated the matter in Ashland, he informed Dodd that while he sympathized with Fleet's cause, there was really very little he could do because the post office positions lay outside of the jurisdiction of the United States Civil Service Commission. As he wrote Dodd:

Postoffices like kissing go by favor and this case is simply an object lesson of the necessity for extension of classification for without it there is no remedy for such injustice except personal against political appeal.²⁴

²¹Dodd to Henry Cabot Lodge, March 30, 1906, Dodd MSS.

²²Elliott H. Goodwin to Dodd, March 15, 1906, Dodd MSS.

²³Elliott H. Goodwin to Dodd, March 9, 1905, Dodd MSS.

²⁴Elliott H. Goodwin to Dodd, May 15, 1906, Dodd MSS.

Goodwin concluded by saying that while he was powerless to offer any constructive help, Dodd might find Alfred W. Cooley, United States Civil Service Commissioner in Washington, D.C., helpful for his cause.²⁵

Dodd finally decided to go straight to President Theodore Roosevelt about the matter on May 16, 1906. The President granted Dodd an interview with him at 12:00 noon on that day. Dodd carried with him a written statement and explained to the President that he felt that a dedicated public servant had been unjustly removed for his political views.²⁶ Roosevelt expressed sympathy with Dodd's views and promised a full investigation, assuring him that if Dodd's accusations were true, indeed, Fleet would be reinstated.²⁷

The Fox-Fleet matter was turned over to Frank H. Hitchcock, the First Assistant Postmaster-General, and the nomination of Fox was immediately withdrawn on May 22, 1906, but Fleet was not reinstated.²⁸ Nevertheless, Dodd steadfastly pursued Fleet's cause. On May 18, he had written Roosevelt stating that at least ninety-five per cent of the patrons of Ashland preferred Fleet as their postmaster.²⁹ But Dodd was convinced that the machines were the cause of the failure to re-evaluate Fleet and on May 29, he again approached the President.³⁰

²⁵Elliott H. Goodwin to Dodd, May 15, 1906, Dodd MSS.

²⁶Telegram, William Loeb, Secretary to the President, to Dodd, May 15, 1906, Dodd MSS.

²⁷Dodd to Roosevelt, n.d., Dodd MSS.

²⁸Fox nomination withdrawn from the Senate, May 22, 1906, Congressional Record (59th Congress), vol. 40, Part 8, p. 7236.

²⁹Dodd to Roosevelt, May 18, 1906, Dodd MSS.

³⁰Dodd to Slamp, May 30, 1906, not sent, Dodd MSS.

In his second visit to the White House in May he was unable to see the President because of the rush of business in Roosevelt's office; but he did leave a written statement with William Loeb and he was informed by the latter that Mr. Fleet's re-appointment had merely been "delayed" and would be upcoming.³¹ Nevertheless, Fleet's appointment was not upcoming even after continued agitation by Dodd, Albert Bushnell Hart, Cooley, Goodwin and others.³²

Dodd remained convinced that a conspiracy of local conservative Democrats and Republicans was determined to undermine Fleet and place Fox in the post office. The Federal Government seems to have held a "hands off" policy in this matter. The Roosevelt administration had weathered a post office scandal just two years before and probably did not want to become involved in what seemed to be a purely local struggle.³³ Hitchcock continually apologized for being so busy he could not look into the Ashland matter.³⁴

Dodd dropped the Fleet matter until March of 1907 when he wrote to Roosevelt and complained again about the "great injustice" done by Mr. Hitchcock by not reappointing Fleet to his former post. He reiterated his belief that the Ashland community was behind Fleet and opposed to the local political bosses and further charged that the action concerning Fleet was aimed at himself "and the college people who defy the 'Machines,' at least the bad ones."³⁵ Again, Dodd asked to speak with the President,

³¹Dodd to his wife, May 29, 1906, Dodd MSS.

³²Albert Bushnell Hart to Dodd, June 2, 1906, Dodd MSS.

³³Dallek, Democrat and Diplomat, p. 44.

³⁴F. H. Hitchcock to Dodd, July 4, 1906, Dodd MSS.

³⁵Dodd to T. Roosevelt, March 12, 1906, Dodd MSS.

but was unable to gain an audience because of the President's busy schedule.³⁶

Dodd finally received word from the President's secretary on May 6, 1907 that Roosevelt would be glad to meet with him on May 9 at 11:00 a.m.³⁷ We know nothing of the content of Dodd's meeting with Roosevelt on that day in Washington. We do know that Dodd was very secretive about the meeting and even told his wife not to tell anyone about the nature of his interview at the White House. Even Fleet was not to know.³⁸

We can conjecture as to what went on in the Dodd-Roosevelt meeting of May 9, 1907. One important point to bring out is the fact that Dodd, who had come close to making himself a pest over the Fleet issue, hardly ever again mentioned it after his second meeting with Roosevelt. Secondly, the post office records show that a man named Harry H. Cramer was Acting Postmaster of the Ashland Post Office by July 1, 1907, although he was never officially appointed as full-time Postmaster.³⁹ It was not until February of 1910 that a permanent Postmaster, John C. Vial, was appointed to replace the deceased Taylor.⁴⁰

³⁶William Loeb to Dodd, March 23, 1907, Dodd MSS.

³⁷William Loeb to Dodd, May 6, 1907, Dodd MSS.

³⁸Dodd to his wife, May 8, 1907, Dodd MSS.

³⁹Letter from Richard S. Maxwell, Assistant Director, Social and Economics Records Division, General Services Administration, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C., to the author, January 21, 1969, in the author's possession.

⁴⁰Executive recommendation of John C. Vial to be Postmaster of Ashland, Virginia in place of James M. Taylor, received by the Senate February 15, 1910, confirmed February 21, 1910, Congressional Record (61st Congress), Vol. 45, Part 2, pp. 1920, 2168.

From the evidence thus far presented, it seems reasonable to assume that Dodd went to the White House to demand that Roosevelt reinstate Fleet and was told by the President that neither Fleet nor Fox would be the Acting Postmaster of Ashland, but Cramer, who had probably had little or no part in the fight between Dodd and his friends and the local political machines. This helps to explain why Dodd, more or less, "went in like a lion and came out like a lamb."

Whatever the outcome of the Fleet-Fox Affair was, it obviously served to intensify Dodd's hatred for corrupt politics and the power of the "vested interests" of the South.

In 1907, Dodd was given a great chance to carry on his fight against the so-called Martin-Ryan Machine of Virginia. August of 1907 was the date set for Senator Henry T. Wickham's fight for renomination by the Democratic Party for the Thirty-Second District seat in the state senate. Dodd immediately recognized Wickham as the embodiment of everything he hated about the Machine of Virginia. Wickham, while a state senator, had been the chief counsel for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway for nineteen years and receiver for the Gould Traction properties of Richmond. It was reported that he annually received \$20,000.00 from the former and \$5,000.00 from the latter for his services. Therefore, it was obvious to almost all that he used his position in the Senate as a means of serving his employers. In 1900, Henry D. Flood wrote Martin describing the former's successful bid for renomination to Congress from the Tenth District:

The railroad employees stood by me almost to a man. Of course you, Wickham and others will understand this.⁴¹

⁴¹Henry D. Flood to Thomas S. Martin, June 22, 1900, Flood Papers in William Larsen, Montague of Virginia, p. 102.

There is a distinct possibility that Wickham and his railroad friends were using railroad money to buy votes. Wickham had also consistently fought all attempts in the state Senate to place any kind of increased taxes or restrictions on the state's railroads.

Smarting from the machine's treatment of his friend, Fleet, and realizing a golden opportunity to strike a decisive blow, Dodd entered the campaign against Wickham's renomination on March 15, 1907 with a stinging letter to the editor of the Hanover Herald. In the letter, entitled "A Rejoinder by William E. Dodd," he told the people of the Thirty-Second District that their Senator, Mr. Wickham, reportedly received \$25,000.00 from the railroad interests and only \$300.00 from the state of Virginia. Dodd left it to the readers to decide for themselves whom Wickham really represented.⁴² And the point was well made. As one of Dodd's supporters put it: "Twenty-five Thousand Dollars from one master and Three Hundred from the other and no man of any sense will doubt which master will be served best."⁴³ Dodd went on in his "Rejoinder" to announce that he and his friends would pursue Wickham and his cronies with the same might the letter used to make Virginia the power of the great railroads. It was Dodd's hope that some interested citizen would come forward and oppose Wickham and his policies in the August election. To quote Jefferson, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."⁴⁴

⁴²The Hanover Herald, March 15, 1907.

⁴³A. M. Aiken to Dodd, April 20, 1907, Dodd MSS.

⁴⁴The Hanover Herald, March 15, 1907.

Of the many letters of praise that Dodd received concerning his letter in the Hanover Herald, one came from Dr. C. W. Gravatt of Fort Royal, a retired naval doctor, who fully agreed that it was highly undesirable to have representatives who were under corporate influence in the state Senate. He further felt that this view was held by the majority of the people of the district.⁴⁵ Dodd immediately wrote back and suggested if the doctor felt the way he did, why did he not, himself, oppose Senator Wickham in August. After a short period of self-study and consultation, Gravatt finally agreed to throw his hat into the ring.

Dodd naturally became Gravatt's unofficial campaign manager in the doctor's race against Wickham. Though Dodd and Gravatt never really enunciated a concrete political platform or plan, as the campaign progressed, it obviously became one of progressive reform against railroad dominance, machine rule and corrupt politics. In Dodd's letter to The Nation of April 25, 1907, he clearly enunciated the main issue of the campaign. He stated that the Southern states had unwittingly become the slaves of monopoly. These monopolies, the most dangerous being the railroads, controlled the state legislatures and were stifling free discussion and democratic ideals. And in Virginia, without mentioning Mr. Wickham by name, "four railway counsellors of high rank appear on the roll of the executive committee of the Democratic Party."⁴⁶

The Wickham forces were frightened. By May, Gravatt reported to Dodd that Wickham's supporters were so frightened that a good deal of

⁴⁵C. W. Gravatt to Dodd, March 22, 1907, Dodd MSS.

⁴⁶William E. Dodd, "Freedom of Speech in the South," The Nation, 84 (April 25, 1907), 383.

money was being spent on his behalf, a new development for the Thirty-Second District.⁴⁷ In the middle of May, the Gravatt forces issued a circular letter showing how Wickham was opposing a two-cent railroad tax increase in the state senate.⁴⁸

By June the Wickham forces were so alarmed that they tried to get Gravatt declared ineligible to run for public office because he received a retirement pension from the United States Navy. They cited section 44 of the state constitution which forbids an employee of the Federal government from running for public office in the state of Virginia. Their desperate attempt to stifle the opposition backfired. Gravatt announced that he had already checked on his eligibility. He had been a medical doctor in the Navy. When he had retired from that post another had taken his place. Therefore, as he pointed out, the charge that he was ineligible involved the absurd assumption that one could hold an office and be retired from it at the same time. He asserted that his retirement pay was not a salary but an "honorarium" for past service. He concluded by saying that he felt that to be barred from serving his state because he had given more than thirty years of service to his country seemed unreasonable. Confidentially he felt the Wickham forces had overplayed their hand.⁴⁹

Many other people in Hanover, Caroline and King William counties, also must have felt that the Wickham forces had overplayed their hand. Popularity steadily grew for Gravatt while Wickham's position consistently

⁴⁷Gravatt to Dodd, May 3, 1907, Dodd MSS.

⁴⁸A. J. Montague to Dodd, May 16, 1907, Dodd MSS.

⁴⁹C. W. Gravatt to Dodd, June 3, 1907, Dodd MSS.

showed erosion. By July 24, Montague reported from Richmond that Mr. Wickham and his friends were very much alarmed. Therefore they seemed to look forward to "carrying the election by hook or crook." Montague warned Dodd and Gravatt to step up the campaign and guard against election day corruption.⁵⁰

Finally election day came. On election eve Dodd addressed an interested group of Ashlanders and summed up the now well-known issues of the election. Gravatt waited at Port Royal for the final outcome of months of hard work. He wrote Dodd expressing his thanks for the great work the professor had performed for him:

In the event of my success I feel that certainly a large part of the credit will be due to your clear deductions and active participation.⁵¹

On August 29, the election came and went and in the end Gravatt and Dodd found that they had pulled off the biggest upset in quite a few years and defeated the Machine's candidate. A smashing blow had been dealt the railroad interests by a retired navy doctor and a college professor. Congratulations poured in. A. F. Thomas of Lynchburg who had lost his own election bid in August wrote that the "result in your district has shaken the very foundation of political mis-rule, and we must see to it that the good work is kept alive."⁵² S. S. P. Patterson, a Richmond lawyer, felt Dodd and Gravatt had "hit the Martin gang a blow from which they will never recover."⁵³ George McDonald Blake, a merchant

⁵⁰A. J. Montague to Dodd, July 24, 1907, Dodd MSS.

⁵¹C. W. Gravatt to Dodd, August 28, 1907, Dodd MSS.

⁵²A. F. Thomas to Dodd, September 4, 1907, Dodd MSS.

⁵³S. S. P. Patterson to Dodd, September 6, 1907, Dodd MSS.

from Richmond, hoped that Dodd would not stop then but "start the fight against Ryan and keep it up until he is kicked out of the party."⁵⁴ And as if to add to Dodd's satisfaction, in the fall of 1907, Wickham, embittered by his defeat, attempted to get Dodd fired from his position at Randolph-Macon, but of course to no avail.⁵⁵

From Gravatt's victory in August of 1907 until Dodd's departure to Chicago a year later he had little time for any more spectacular political activities, but before he left the Commonwealth of Virginia he had a few more comments to make about the condition of democracy there. After all he endured in Virginia at Randolph-Macon College, he still must have held little hope for the realization of equality and democratic ideals in the South. This feeling is seen in a letter written by Dodd to Ray Stanard Baker in the summer of 1908: "I sometimes begin an article on 'Is Democracy Possible in America?' but then lay down my pen. What good can one do?"⁵⁶

⁵⁴George McDonald Blake to Dodd, October 29, 1907, Dodd MSS.

⁵⁵A. F. Thomas to Dodd, November 7, 1907, Dodd MSS.

⁵⁶Dodd to Ray Stannard Baker, June 29, 1908, Dodd MSS.

CHAPTER V

WRITING FOR A CAUSE

While William Edward Dodd was campaigning for more historical study in the South, working to further the principle of academic freedom and assiduously fighting the "machines," he was also doing what most good historians do--writing formal history. We have already mentioned some of his more important periodical articles, but much more important are the two monographs he produced during his tenure at Randolph-Macon. And the most interesting thing about Dodd's historical works was that he made little effort to keep contemporary events and influence out of them. A close look at this bad habit of Dodd's shows that he had a serious case of what Thomas A. Bailey calls "Presentitis."¹ Though this habit is severely criticized in historical circles, it opens up new vistas for the student of Dodd and his progressive leanings.

It would be a mistake to classify William E. Dodd as a great historian. It is true that his works were popular in historical circles during his lifetime, but like the works of most, their value has faded with the passing of years. But he was important to his generation. As Charles A. Beard wrote of him:

¹Thomas A. Bailey, "The Mythmakers of American History," The Journal of American History, LV (June, 1968), 5-21.

He had the inimitable gift, in describing historical events, of making them seem like happenings of the day, full of life, vividness, and immediacy.²

Even so, only one of his books has stood the test of time--his Life of Nathaniel Macon--and that only because no one has written a sufficient biography since to supersede it.³

Dodd first became interested in the career of Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina while writing his dissertation at Leipzig, Thomas Jefferson's Ruckkehr zur Politik, 1796. Accordingly, when he returned to America at the turn of the century, he did extensive research in North Carolina and was able to complete the manuscript in his first few years at Randolph-Macon. In the July, 1902 issue of the American Historical Review, he presented a forerunner article entitled "The Place of Nathaniel Macon in Southern History."⁴

Dodd's North Carolina friends were naturally quite interested in his forthcoming biography of their eminent native son. Josephus Daniels felt that the spirit of Macon embodied in Dodd's biography could do a great service in combating what he saw as the growing tendency of the Democratic Party becoming a whig party "controlled by classicism and the like."⁵ Robert Dallek tells us that Daniels wanted to use Dodd's work on Macon against his enemy, John C. Kilgo, President of Trinity College, the same man who later defended Dodd's friend Bassett, but, who, nevertheless, was a Republican, a defender of the North Carolina tobacco

²Charles A. Beard in Ambassador Dodd's Diary, 1933-1938, p. xii.

³Wendell Holmes Stephenson, The South Lives in History, p. 38.

⁴William E. Dodd, "The Place of Nathaniel Macon in Southern History," American Historical Review, VII (July, 1902), 663-675.

⁵Josephus Daniels to Dodd, April 4, 1901, Dodd MSS.

trust and, therefore, highly critical of the career of Thomas Jefferson.⁶ Therefore, Daniels even offered to write an introduction for the volume and promote it as much as possible in the Raleigh News and Observer.⁷

Like most budding historians, Dodd had quite a difficult time finding a suitable publisher for his first book. Though many publishing firms agreed to read the manuscript and reacted favorably, all replied similarly to Houghton, Mifflin and Company. Although they were impressed with Dodd's Macon, they were afraid it would not sell well on the general market.

. . . this book falls naturally into the growing class of memoirs of prominent men whose place in history is not such as to make them objects of much interest to bookbuyers in general . . .⁸

Finally, the Edwards and Broughton, Printers of Raleigh, North Carolina agreed to publish it. The young professor saw his first book come off the press in late 1903.

Although Dodd's Macon had certain serious drawbacks, it was a fairly good biography of a previously little studied national figure. Dodd treated Macon sympathetically and described him as a man who "actually believed in democracy," a description which offers an astounding insight into the political beliefs of Dodd himself.⁹ Dodd saw Macon as

⁶Dallek, Democrat and Diplomat, p. 25.

⁷Josephus Daniels to Dodd, October 18, 1901, Dodd MSS.

⁸Houghton, Mifflin and Company to Dodd, October 21, 1902; Houghton, Mifflin and Company to Dodd, September 13, 1902; The Macmillan Company to Dodd, November 3, 1902; B. F. Johnson Publishing Company, Richmond, Virginia, to Dodd, October 5, 1901, Dodd MSS.

⁹Jack K. Williams, "William Edward Dodd: Historian of the Old South," p. 21. William E. Dodd, The Life of Nathaniel Macon (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, Printers, 1903), p. 401.

the embodiment of the great "simple, honest, straightforward" American, the idol of the progressive mind.¹⁰

Probably more important than Dodd's treatment of Macon himself, was his analysis of ante-bellum America and the conflict which was to lead up to the Civil War. He stated emphatically that both sections argued and eventually fought for purely economic motives.¹¹ Harping back to the American Revolution, he earnestly believed that "no state acted other than a selfish role in that, our first war."¹² Between the Revolution and the Civil War, the fight for the control of government was seen as a fight for "victory of an economic principle and not of idealism and agitation."¹³ And Dodd felt that the outcome, the Civil War, "was an economic struggle, a war for dollars, and both parties recognized this without admitting it."¹⁴

Robert Dallek writes that Dodd's Macon was too scientific. Dodd attempted to be so scientific, putting information before the reader and letting him draw his own conclusions, that what came out in the end was a book so "impartial" that Dodd never really adequately explained Macon to his readers.¹⁵ And, even though Dodd attempted to be "impartial," he was guilty continuously of "presentitis," for example in the following statement about Congress' failure to pass an anti-nepotism bill in 1811:

¹⁰Dodd, The Life of Nathaniel Macon, p. 209.

¹¹Williams, "William E. Dodd: Historian of the Old South," p. 21.

¹²Dodd, The Life of Nathaniel Macon, p. 13.

¹³Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁵Dallek, Democrat and Diplomat, p. 33.

It might find no easy road through Congress today, if we may judge by the appointments of a recent administration.¹⁶

Whatever its faults may have been, Macon was an unusual success. It precipitated a burst of national and local interest in Macon which resulted in the publishing of several articles in local southern journals.¹⁷ Reaction to the book ranged from praise by historians to violent criticism by Southerners who felt Dodd had betrayed his section in describing Confederate motives as economic and not patriotic.¹⁸

William A. Dunning felt Dodd had done a "first rate thing" in his first publication. He promised to make sure that all of his friends purchased it.¹⁹ Governor C. B. Aycock of North Carolina wrote Dodd praising him for what he termed a "very valuable contribution to the history of North Carolina."²⁰ But Dodd was not to escape his unfavorable critics.

Though some of the Southern press took Dodd to task because of his statement about the economic cause of the Civil War, some criticism also came from his historical colleagues. Lyon G. Tyler of the College of William and Mary, never a very warm friend of Dodd's, felt the young historian had erred in his interpretation of the Whig Party in North Carolina.²¹

¹⁶Dodd, The Life of Nathaniel Macon, pp. 369-370.

¹⁷Zane L. Miller, "Senator Nathaniel Macon and the Public Domain, 1815-1828," North Carolina Historical Review, XXXVIII (October, 1961), 482.

¹⁸Merritt Lear to Dodd, July 1, 1904, Dodd MSS.

¹⁹William A. Dunning to Dodd, February 23, 1905, Dodd MSS.

²⁰C. B. Aycock to Dodd, February 1, 1904, Dodd MSS.

²¹Lyon G. Tyler to Dodd, April 1, 1904, Dodd MSS.

The severest critic of all was Charles Francis Adams of Massachusetts who was appalled at the number of errors in Dodd's text. He also criticized Dodd for his failure to do adequate research and his over-dependence on Schouler, a charge, interestingly enough, to which Dodd confessed some guilt.²²

Although Dodd's Life of Macon, in the final analysis, was no great historical work, it did catapult him into the national arena. This is proven by the relative ease by which his second book, Jefferson Davis, was published. In fact, this time, instead of looking for publishers as he had with Macon, Dodd was invited to write his Davis for the American Crisis Series edited by Dr. Ellis Paxton Oberholtzer and published by George W. Jacobs and Company of Philadelphia.

On February 15, 1904, an agreement was made and executed between Dodd and George W. Jacobs and Company for the writing of his Jefferson Davis "to consist of not less than 75,000 words, nor more than 90,000." The book was to be completed within two years.²³ Oberholtzer felt the time had come when the people of both the North and the South could read a good, dispassionate biography of the Confederate President with some degree of objectivity. Dodd, he believed, was the man to write such a book.²⁴

It is interesting to note that the four-year relationship between writer Dodd and publisher Oberholtzer was anything but amiable. One of

²²C. F. Adams to Dodd, September 13, 1904, Dodd MSS.

²³Signed contract between William E. Dodd and George W. Jacobs and Company dated February 15, 1904, Dodd MSS.

²⁴Ellis Paxton Oberholtzer to Dodd, February 1, 1904, Dodd MSS.

the reasons for this was the fact that while Dodd had agreed to present the manuscript for printing within two years of the date of his contract with the Jacobs Company, because of press of business at Randolph-Macon, he took about four years to write the biography, and it was not published until January of 1908. Throughout this period Oberholtzer continuously prodded Dodd for the manuscript and at times Dodd reacted sharply.

When Dodd's "Some Difficulties of the History Teacher in the South" appeared in The South Atlantic Quarterly in April of 1904, Oberholtzer became concerned and wrote Dodd a rather obnoxious letter asking him about his attitudes concerning the South. Oberholtzer, a Northerner, was fearful that Dodd's criticism of the South would not rest well with Southern readers and therefore might hurt the sales of Dodd's Jefferson Davis in the South. He, therefore, urged Dodd to be more dispassionate.²⁵ Dodd took Oberholtzer's prodding as an immediate violation of his academic freedom and offered to drop the Davis project in protest. The result of all of this was that Oberholtzer quickly apologized for his criticism and encouraged Dodd to continue.

Your previous work is assurance to me that your life of Jefferson Davis will be as you say, not a book of your views but of biography and history.²⁶

When Jefferson Davis was finally published on January 18, 1908, though it was a good treatment of Davis' life, it did unfortunately contain a good bit of Dodd's own opinions. This seems to have been his greatest shortcoming as a writer of history. In his preface to the book Dodd stated that his purpose was:

²⁵Ellis Paxton Oberholtzer to Dodd, July 5, 1904, Dodd MSS.

²⁶Ellis Paxton Oberholtzer to Dodd, July 8, 1904, Dodd MSS.

. . . not to justify or even defend the course of the foremost leader of the Confederate cause; but simply to relate the story of that remarkably tragic life and, in so far as the limitations of time and space permit, correlate his career to the main current of American history.²⁷

As far as Davis was concerned Dodd depicted him as a protagonist of the Jefferson dogma of the least government possible: "at a time when politicians were striving to make the republic a mutual benefit society."²⁸ Latching on to this same economic theme that he had enunciated in his Macon he seems to have lost Jefferson Davis in the discussion. Again Dodd felt that the economic motives of both sections moved America toward the "one vital 'irrepressible conflict!'"²⁹

It seems that Dodd allowed himself to become so wrapped up in economic causation, both past and present, in his study of Davis that again he committed the sin of blatant presentism. At one point in his discussion of selfish economic motive as a cause of the Civil War he makes the following statement which reveals his progressive bias and at the same time displays a moment of amateurish history writing:

The lords of industry and transportation of the year 1906 are as loth to surrender any of their monopoly rights as were those of 1861; and, according to the view of many acute students, there is as much slavery connected with the later as with the earlier system, and far more hardship and suffering.³⁰

²⁷William E. Dodd, Jefferson Davis (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1907), p. 7.

²⁸Ibid., p. 76.

²⁹Ibid., p. 169.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 210-211.

Though Dodd's Jefferson Davis was probably inferior to his Macon because he allowed himself to get wrapped up in the economic motivation, again he did receive some praise and criticism from his fellow historians. James Ford Rhodes felt Davis to be a "calm and candid account."³¹

It should be obvious to the reader that William E. Dodd's first two historical monographs were not to be of lasting value, but they do shed a good deal of light on the man and his society. In both his Macon and Davis, Dodd repeatedly worshipped the political philosophy of Thomas Jefferson, the idea of an America mainly comprised of democratic, middle-class farmers. In his studies of the nineteenth-century South, Dodd saw the plantation owner as a distinct, evil, monopolistic force which helped bring about the great Civil War. He saw the same development in the North. According to Dodd, if the yeoman farmers of the South and North had gotten together and stood up for their rights, there would have been no Civil War and the great planters of the South and the Northeastern businessmen would have lost much of their influence and power.

Dodd tended to equate the nineteenth-century ante-bellum situation as he saw it with the situation in America in the early twentieth century. Now railroads, great corporations, trusts and monopolies were the great villains, both in the North and South. It would be the duty of the great middle class of America to fight the evils of industrialization, just as Dodd had tried to do in the Bassett case, the Montague election, the Fox-Fleet affair and the Gravatt-Wickham election. Everyone would have to do his share so that history would record that in the early twentieth century, democracy really existed.

³¹James Ford Rhodes to Dodd, February 16, 1908, Dodd MSS.

CHAPTER VI

LUNCH AT THE WHITE HOUSE

Upon the publication of Jefferson Davis Dodd had sent a complimentary copy to Theodore Roosevelt because he knew that the President was interested in history and might enjoy it.¹ Roosevelt read the biography and was most interested in Dodd's comparison of Jefferson Davis to early twentieth-century industrialists and their backing of the "interests."² Accordingly the President responded by asking Dodd to come to the White House to lunch on February 14 and talk over some of the points raised by Dodd in his book.³ This invitation not only showed a growing national interest in the young historian's academic endeavors, it also is good evidence of Dodd's increasing acceptance in influential progressive political circles.⁴

Dodd seems to have been quite apprehensive about his visit to talk with the President. He confided to his wife that he wondered what "he wants to say or ask, whether he really k thinks well of my efforts or only wonders whether they are well-grounded."⁵

¹William Loeb, Secretary to Theodore Roosevelt, to Dodd, Jan. 18, 1908, Dodd MSS.

²Dallek, Democrat and Diplomat, p. 99.

³Theodore Roosevelt to Dodd, Jan. 25, 1908; Dodd MSS; William Loeb to Dodd, Jan. 29, 1908, Dodd MSS.

⁴Dallek, Democrat and Diplomat, p. 49.

⁵Dodd to his wife, Jan. 26, 1908, Dodd MSS.

On the appointed day Dodd arrived at the White House for an hour and a half lunch and conversation with the President, the British Ambassador to the United States, Lord and Lady Bryce, Lyman Abbott, editor of The Outlook, two Congressmen and the governor of New Mexico. Dodd and the President had a lengthy discussion about his biography of Davis with Roosevelt acclaiming the book, but also bringing up some criticism. The conversation turned to present-day events. Roosevelt, who was not standing for re-election, made the statement that he had "many things to take back when" he got out of the Presidency. Dodd replied that that was why Mr. Roosevelt had been great enough to be President.⁶

Dodd seems to have been quite impressed with his visit with the President. He wrote his friend, historian James Ford Rhodes, expressing his reaction:

It is a sign that our country, which even historical students may be permitted to love, is really getting past the time when the differences of 1861-65 serve as bed-rags.⁷

But to Ray Stannard Baker he wrote that Roosevelt's "character and his talk made me wonder how he can give the approval of his great name to the utterances" of the Republican Party.⁸

The Dodd-Roosevelt meeting of February, 1908, provides a fitting end to a discussion of William E. Dodd's brief apprenticeship at Randolph-Macon College from 1900 to 1908. As mentioned before, that meeting was

⁶Dodd to J. Franklin Jameson, Feb. 26, 1908, Dodd MSS.

⁷Dodd to James Ford Rhodes, Feb. 22, 1907, in M. A. DeWolfe Howe, James Ford Rhodes: American Historian, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1929), p. 114.

⁸Dodd to Ray Stannard Baker, June 29, 1908, Dodd MSS.

indicative of the interest which the young historian was beginning to inspire nationally. In December of 1908 the point was well made when Dodd took a leave of absence from Randolph-Macon to teach at the University of Chicago. That leave became permanent and he went on to a remarkable career eventually serving as head of the history department at Chicago, Ambassador to Germany when Hitler was coming to power and finally, President of the American Historical Association.

Dodd's eight years at Randolph-Macon were indeed rewardable and interesting years. During the same period in which Theodore Roosevelt became the symbol of the new American progressive movement, Dodd worked quietly, attempting in his own small way, to do locally and regionally what Roosevelt was trying to do nationally. As a man caught between the provincialism and tranquility of an agrarian, Jeffersonian nineteenth-century South and emerging new monolithic, industrial-urban twentieth-century South, William E. Dodd attempted to understand the changes taking place in American society and seek remedies for the many social ills he discovered. Often because of his ignorance of the new America and his idealistic tendencies he sought the wrong solutions, but he was involved and concerned.

In a South where academic freedom was almost non-existent and historical study consisted of praising the virtue of the Confederacy and pointing out the evils of the Northeast, Dodd demanded that his fellow-Southerners objectively seek the truth. In a state where many believed the electorate was being controlled by a few individuals, railroads and corporations, Dodd demanded and actively campaigned for a new experiment in people's democracy.

Like most historians, William Edward Dodd has largely been forgotten by the generations who have replaced him. His publications

have long since been superseded. His campaigns against the evils he saw in his own society lay somewhere deep beneath the garbage pile of history. Time has marched on and left him obscure and antiqued. But as Wendell Holmes Stephenson so aptly put it, "the man himself was greater than his works."⁹ What Dodd attempted to do in so many different fields in itself was great. What the man stood for in one of the most revolutionary and trying periods in American history made him great.

⁹Stephenson, The South Lives in History, p. 57.

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