

# THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

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## THE GREAT TRADITION

ON THIS occasion, when you are celebrating your academic birthday, it seems proper to speak on some traditional aspect of our state and national life which needs a new emphasis in our time. Among the numerous traditions that we, as Virginians, have always cherished and about which I shall speak this morning, is one which I call "the great tradition." It is the tradition of individualism. I wish briefly to point out its significance in our history and to show the importance of it in our American education and literature today.

A human being has never seemed so small as now. The expanding universe has reduced each one of us to atoms; and the atoms themselves, being each a miniature universe, have still further dwarfed us. The discovery of a ninth planet the other day, four billions of miles away, has given a different meaning to *e pluribus unum*. The question is now, "Which *unum*? and how many *pluribuses* are there anyhow?" If science emphasizes our insignificance, so does machinery, which is the offspring of science. We become the victims of the machine. About thirty thousand of us pygmies get run over or smashed up on the highways every year, to say nothing of the slightly injured or the destruction from other forms of machinery. And yet, it is comforting to our pride, perhaps, to remember that man's mind made the machinery, discovered the planet and the atom, and that the individual is either actually or potentially greater than both. And so we arrive again at Sir William Hamilton's famous dictum: "There's nothing great in the world but man; there's nothing great in man but mind."

And now let's get back to Virginia, which I left for a moment to chase planets. One thinks of Virginia's past largely in terms of individuals. I doubt whether there is any other state, not even Massachusetts, whose history is so highly individualized and whose oldest institutions of every kind are in so true a sense the lengthened shadows of their founders. I think you will agree with me that it would be difficult to find anywhere else so impressive a group of nation-builders and interpreters who stand out with such marked individuality as the bronze aggregation in the capitol grounds at Richmond. And when I visit Gettysburg and pass through that vast area of bronze and marble effigies, one majestic figure on Traveler stirs the imagination more than all the rest by its simplicity and dignity, for it seems somehow to symbolize the individual tradition of Virginia. Both in Virginia and in the other older states of the Republic we are now entering upon our Periclean age of statue and temple building. Looking backward to simpler days we now seek to memorialize the pioneer, the inventor, the scientist, the poet, as well as the warrior and the statesman. We are moved to join heroism with beauty.

This desire to honor the individual is perhaps an unconscious form of protest in the human soul against the mass thinking and mass action so prevalent today. It is also a form of tribute to the undying love of the heroic which always expresses itself not for the multitude but for the man. The growth of democracy over the world has obscured the value of the individual by an insistence on the sacred rights of the majority. An extreme illustration is Soviet Russia.

It is true, of course, that the professed



aim of democracy is to exalt the individual by giving him a voice and certain so-called inalienable rights. And this is an admirable ideal. But after all, have mere majorities ever initiated or really decided any great political or social movement? Has not every advance or check in human progress been the laborious achievement of a few persons who grew into a respectable minority powerful enough to win over to their views more than fifty per cent of some legislative body?

A living historian asserts that "it was very common, both before and after the Revolution, for two thirds of those entitled to vote to remain away from the polls"; we are certainly keeping up that ancient habit in Virginia. He furthermore declares that even popular leaders, "when thundering in the forum and making decisions of power, often spoke for only about ten or fifteen per cent of the eligible voters." And the English historian Lecky declared that "the American Revolution, like most others, was the work of an energetic minority." The same might doubtless be said of the adoption of the American constitution. The same might also be said of our decision to enter into every succeeding war. And the same may be said about international treaties and courts. When we turn from political history to scientific achievement the strength of minorities is still more notable. The rotundity of the earth, for instance, is thought of as a universally accepted fact. One should not be too certain about that, however. If today there should be a worldwide popular referendum on whether the earth is flat or round, I fear the flats would considerably outnumber the rounds. And the Daytonian view of evolution would win over the Darwinian by a majority as large as the Republican plurality in the last Presidential election. As for a popular vote on Einstein's theory of relativity or on the movements of electrons in

the atom—well, there wouldn't be any vote at all. The thing is too impersonal.

What supremely counts in the long run intellectually and morally is not quantity, but quality. We say that, but we seldom act it out. It is hard for a big business nation like ours to realize that mere bigness is not a cardinal virtue. Multitudes don't originate anything and don't *necessarily* settle anything right. What, indeed, would our civilization come to if men and women of ideas and intelligent ideals should be compelled to win a majority over to their thinking before they dared to give public expression to their convictions? There must always be leaders far in advance of the crowd, leaders willing to be patient and to suffer, sustained by the hope that ultimately, whether they live to see it or not, there will be a glad fruition of their dreams and their endeavors. Such a consummation must be predicated upon the triumph of intelligence over ignorance and indifference in general as well as upon the education of the individual in political and social responsibility.

One of the notorious defects in American public education, for example, is found in the almost unavoidable neglect of the individual because of mass production in our schools. As an industrial nation we seem largely to measure progress by the number of factories and filling stations in the towns and cities. A ride across the continent is almost enough to convince one that the smokestack is the symbol of our greatness. I have nothing against smoke-stacks, or filling stations either, for that matter, but I do not like to have the factory system or the filling system applied either to education or to literature. Our colleges and universities are over-crowded. There is hardly standing-room, and thousands are turned away, so popular is academic life. Residence in college has become one of our most popular pastimes, and some acute, though cynical, observers assert that college life is one of



the major American indoor and outdoor sports. Getting into college is, however, more difficult than it used to be, and that very fact apparently tends to stimulate the desire to get in. One trembles to think what a thirst for learning a legislative enactment prohibiting college education might bring upon us. The rush for forbidden knowledge might be as great as that for publicly censored books. Thirty years ago there was one boy or girl in a college or university for every 1,000 of the population of the country. The ratio is now said to be one to about every 120 of the population. This means that nearly a million persons are in the 800 colleges and universities in the U. S. Whether we divide the big colleges into small units, as at Oxford and Cambridge, or reduce the size of classes, or limit the numbers to those who have demonstrated their fitness for cultural education, we must by one plan or another come to deal more individually with youth than our present factory system permits.

In general, what we in Virginia should pray to be delivered from is excessive standardization in every form of life—in education, in literature, in art, in politics, in social customs. There have been many books written about the South in the last few years. In some of them the implication, where it is not an exhortation, is that we should be like all the rest of the country. The Changing South or the Awakening South or the Up-and-doing South, or some such title, is often a plea for conformity or uniformity. For my part, I confess to a liking for regional as well as individual differences. Our vast country has developed its literature and some of its plastic art by sections, and nothing is more striking than the variety of local coloring and flavor which the national product we call American literature presents. Certain critics of the older Southern literature superciliously belittle our writers because they

created fiction or poetry in the fashion of their time and place.

Nothing is easier for a satirical era like ours than to have fun with the Victorians; but the whirligig of time has its revenges, and these superior satirists will also furnish sport for their literary grandsons. Condemnation of the past because it is not like the present or of the South because it is not like the North or the West shows a lamentable lack of perspective as well as an atrophied or perverted sense of values. Some years ago Mr. St. John Ervine, the British dramatist, asserted, after his journeyings in the United States, that all American villages look alike; and Mr. Sinclair Lewis has succeeded in giving foreigners the impression that all American Main Streets closely resemble the chief thoroughfare of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, and that Mr. Babbitt is the typical American. Well, all American villages do not look alike; there are regional differences in architecture, shrubbery, and trees. They all do seem to be alike, however, in the lack of parking space. What Mr. Ervine probably meant was that, as compared with an old-world village, an American village is not picturesquely interesting. And the American novelist was, of course, emphasizing the drabness and commonplaceness of Main Street and its people, including Mr. Babbitt. Both satirists, with the usual exaggerations of their tribe, were caustically commenting upon our national passion for standardization and our loss of individualism.

A year or so ago as I was crossing the lawn at the University of Virginia late one October afternoon, when trees and sky and gleaming columns melted into one enchanting symphony of color, I was stopped by a stranger who startled me with the abrupt and irrelevant question, "Where do you feed 'em?" "Feed who?" I countered, doing violence to my lifetime friend, the nominative case. "I mean your students," he replied. I explained as gently as I could



that they "fed" at various places from necessity and preference, since no one place could accommodate them all. "That's what I don't like; that's where you're wrong," he said. "I was at a college in Alabama last week where they lined 'em all up and marched 'em into one big hall like soldiers and made 'em eat together. That's what I call democracy." Here, indeed, was an interesting conception of democracy. To be democratic a multitude of people should eat together. They should all be having the same dishes in the same way at the same time. There's mass education for you with a vengeance. There's uniformity. A thousand minds with but a single thought, a thousand jaws that move as one. Does democracy mean general gregariousness and the disappearance of the individual? It sometimes looks so in this land of the free. But there is a brighter side to the picture.

One of the most hopeful signs of our time is the popular interest in biography. Biography is the art of portraying the individual life. It is history personalized. It may be safely said that never before has there been so much writing of biography or so much reading of it. The significant thing about all this biographical activity, whether historical or fictional, is that we are concerning ourselves more and more with those three abiding elements of the individual—personality, character, and mind. Thanks to Mr. Gamaliel Bradford, the biographical portrait has helped us to see in miniature the lives and motives of a whole picture-gallery of American immortals. It is the new art and science, in this country at least, of the study of souls, a graphic and vivid psychoanalysis of outstanding men and women whom tradition has often camouflaged either into plaster saints or terra-cotta villains. Saints and sinners, unsoiled and damaged souls, all are today being pitilessly exposed to the limelight in the interest of truth, without fear or favor, in the effort to restore to them, for this and

coming generations, their contemporary humanity. We see them, as Hamlet saw his ghostly father, in their habit as they lived. The new biography attempts to bring us vividly back to the individual and to interpret him in the light of his time. It neither magnifies him nor belittles him. And while some halos have faded out in the fierce light that now beats upon the thrones of greatness, and some romance has faded into drab reality, this humanizing of history has not made our great men less great. It has only served to reveal our actual or potential kinship with them. Lives of great men do not necessarily remind us that we should or can make ours sublime. Sublimity is not the goal we strive for. These great men did not consciously and deliberately head for sublimity or trouble themselves about impressions. They were not so calculating as that. They did not wish to encourage mere imitation, but originality and individuality. They lived diligently, effectively, many of them nobly, and all of them courageously. These are the ways of life of which we should be reminded.

Another hopeful sign of our time in the way of individualism is the freedom with which men and women now express their individual opinions in print. We may be a law-ridden nation, passing six thousand laws a week in our forty-eight legislatures, but we are not repressed or suppressed when it comes to saying what we think or, one might add, doing what we please. Whatever else posterity may praise this generation for, it is hardly probable that either reticence or law-observance will be named among our national virtues. The frankness of modern youth is of course notorious or notable according to the point of view. The intelligence of modern youth is also much greater than it was in the so-called "good old times," and that is a heartening evidence of progress. The level of intelligence is steadily rising. As a teacher of youth for many, many years, I know



that this is true. And if it is true of youth, it will be true in general.

Our hope is in a growing minority of intelligence, powerful and patriotic enough to reduce to comparative harmlessness the charlatan in politics, in education, in religion, in art; and influential enough to stir the apathetic into thought and action. Already there is a renaissance. Back of us here in Virginia there is for our encouragement and stimulus a heritage of civilization and culture as secure as it is rich. Our civic and social salvation depends upon our adding to it and transmitting it, changed in form but not in spirit, to each new age. The dross that mingles with this onward stream of culture, just as it mingles with the gold in every individual life, will be purged away and perish. Through sacrificial loyalty to the finest memories of the past and courageous devotion to the challenging problems of the present, our dreams of progress for this ancient commonwealth will find their glad fulfillment.

But that fulfillment will, as in the past, depend upon individual initiative and energy. In an age of machinery the individual cannot stand out as he once did. Will he get lost in the machinery in education? Will spiritual progress be blocked by corporate wealth, mass production, mass thinking, mass action? We extol efficiency, but it takes more than mere efficiency to satisfy the human soul. It is the spirit in man that makes him great. It is the spirit that supremely counts, man's intelligence allied to man's unconquerable will. A high medical authority has estimated what he calls the "drug-store value" of a man by describing his chemical constituents as follows:

"Consider the average 150-pound body of a man from its chemical aspect. It contains lime enough to whitewash a fair-sized chicken coop, sugar enough to fill a small shaker, iron enough to make a tenpenny nail, plus water. The total value of these ingredients is 98 cents, or about 60 cents

per hundred-weight on the hoof. Yet the insurance companies place the economic value of a man at \$5,000. How do they account for the difference of \$4,999.02? The answer is, in the value of the spirit within the man."

Well, according to this chemical rating, some of us here this morning would not be worth more than 75 cents in the drug-store.

I am told that in the Ford plant at Detroit a man can easily learn in twenty minutes the management of a small piece of machinery so that he can work it successfully the rest of his life as his daily job. He has spent twenty minutes in training, he immediately applies his training, and he proceeds for the next thirty years to do the same thing so many hours a day with mechanical and automatic precision. But nobody would say that he is educated. He is trained without being educated. He may have precision, but he has no power.

This college and every college is a human power plant. It seeks to train and also to educate. Its main function is to enrich, deepen, and vary the individual life by opening windows through which the mind gets glimpses of successive promised lands. Through these windows of knowledge, these gateways of the spirit, as well as through the more practical doorways of useful learning, youth is led to enter more fully into the meaning and power of life. And by such inner light of wisdom and beauty, youth may, in the fine expression of Wordsworth, "help to redeem from decay the visitations of divinity in man."

And this divinity in man we find incarnated in those rare souls whom we call nation-builders, prophets, and poets. We glorify the prophet, the poet, the true statesman, the genius in any field, not because he was rich or learned or socially high, but because he saw clearly what others would not see for generations, and dared to act on his inner convictions in scorn of consequences. When Jefferson said that he had sworn



eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man, he voiced the ideal of democracy everywhere. When Woodrow Wilson said, in his last days, to a group of people bearing birthday greetings to a broken old man: "I have no anxiety for the League of Nations. It will take care of itself. My only anxiety is for the people of this country"—when the great Virginian said that, he spoke like the older Virginians with the fervor and foresight of a patriot.

We cannot reproduce the past. We would not if we could. But we can still carry on in the spirit of great individuals of the older days. And after all, that is what your study here and elsewhere of the classic traditions of Virginia must have left upon your minds as an abiding memory. Each new time has its own fashions of speech and manners, but we never outgrow the heroes. The individual is still the magic standard by which we measure national and personal greatness.

J. C. METCALF

### ROMAN CANTERBURY AND ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH

IT WAS a happy coincidence that my first experience with Roman antiquity should be associated with St. Martin's Church—the cradle of English Christianity. On a beautiful day in the latter part of June I made the pilgrimage of sixty-three miles in an open bus from London to Canterbury.

No city in the British Isles has the rich historic associations of Canterbury, from which the Primate of England takes his title, and certainly no other town in England is so wealthy in unique monuments of bygone ages. Practically every street and by-way within its confines has silent witnesses to its ancience. In its earliest days Canterbury was, according to historians, a village of ancient Britons. Later it assum-

ed importance as the Roman station "Durovernum." Next, as a Saxon settlement, it was known as Cant—wara—byrig. In Norman times it was subject to etymological variations until finally it acquired its present designation.

It was at Durovernum, the subsequent site of Canterbury, that the roads from the three Kentish coast fortresses of Reculver, Richborough, and Lymne united to cross the River Stour, and thence proceeded northwards through Britain in the one great military highway known in later days as Watling street. That the Roman settlement here was of importance is evidenced by the fact that five Roman burial grounds have been found in the immediate vicinity. The abundance of Roman tiles or bricks re-used throughout the city's mediæval buildings further emphasizes that assumption. The site has been practically in continuous occupation since the Roman conquerors abandoned Britain; consequently it is not surprising that Roman antiquities have not been found nearer than seven or eight feet from the present surface.

A most valuable discovery was made in 1868, during the execution of a drainage scheme. Over two hundred Roman coins were found. In St. Margaret Street, Sun street, and High street many remains of Roman walls or buildings were revealed. Foundations were brought to light in St. Margaret street of undoubted Roman origin, and so massive and solid were they that men were at work night and day for two weeks with sledges, wedges and chisels, breaking them up.

At the junction of Watling street a heavy buttress had to be cut through and several fragments of tessellated pavement were unearthed. In Sun street remains of Roman walls were laid bare. In High street, underneath six houses, including the Fleur-de-Lis Hotel, and under the roadway in front of them, were discovered the massive foundations of an important build-