

# THE FORMATIVE YEARS

By ELIZABETH T. THOMPSON

*Mrs. Thompson looks back on her university years and recalls some of the professors, the courses and surroundings which were part of her impressionable years.*



The play was the thing when this M.U. cast posed for its picture. We think the title was "Choosing a Wife." Courtesy Missouri Historical Society.

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN wrote that "A university kindles the affections of the middle-aged by its beauty." Indeed it does—especially if it is your Alma Mater!

Was there ever a more beautiful campus than what we called the "red" campus at the University of Missouri—the original Jesse Hall with footprints imbedded in the concrete steps, the Francis Quadrangle, and the Ionic Columns? There is something so warm and inviting about red brick buildings. They are conducive to learning by reason of their tradition. But the real excellence and symbolism is in the columns, reminiscent of the grandeur and wisdom of ancient Greece. They give us a proper perspective and offer repose from tumult and anxiety. But then, time throws a mantle of glamor over the past, as someone has said.

In the fall of 1928, there were only 4,000 students enrolled at M.U. At first some of us were homesick, and although we could not all call each other by name, we had a common bond of being on our own and a sense of community. A glance at each other's eyes revealed our fears and hopes of obtaining a liberal education, whatever that was. It was thrilling and challenging to be a part of the concourse—to lose ourselves in higher studies and to share them both with the professors and fellow students.

Nearly all of my instructors reminded us that the twentieth century was heralding the scientific age—in fact, it *was* the *scientific age*. This had a familiar ring. My elder brother at home had said that, with the discovery of electricity and the invention of radio, there would be illimitable possibilities in the field of science and that nothing could stop the march of science. But ironically enough, this same University, due to pressure from the irate parents, found it expedient to oust or accept the resignation of a brilliant professor of psychology who had circulated a so-called sex questionnaire among the students for the purpose of obtaining statistics to further the work in his field of science.

1928 WAS A PRESIDENTIAL YEAR, and Governor Al Smith as Democratic nominee was opposing Herbert Hoover, defender of the G.O.P. Some of the intellectual circles on this midwestern campus associated Smith with Tammany Hall, which was true, and thought he was ill-suited to become president. But being the daughter of staunch Democrats, I rather admired Al Smith. I thought he had a powerful countenance and exhibited much animation. He was no dead-beat! But since these were the formative years, I was somewhat influenced by associates whose judgment I considered to be of a superior quality. While I was not for Hoover, inwardly I felt a disdain for the associations and background attributed to the Democratic nominee. I was too young to vote.

But later, along with my fellow countrymen, I was to experience the adverse effects of the inevitable depression.

The College of the Bible in Lowry Hall was adjacent to the red campus. My father was very anxious that I take a course from this school, and I was fortunate to have Dean G. D. Edwards as my instructor in Old Testament. I remember his teaching that Genesis was a spiritual interpretation of the beginning of the world, that the Book of Jonah was an allegory, and that in order to understand any book in the Bible it was necessary to know who the author was (if possible), to whom he was writing, and under what circumstances.

In the Spring of 1929 Dean Edwards with tears in his eyes told us of the tragic death of his beloved wife. He recounted this event with poetic justice and mystery. Dean Edwards was emotional, a vital and glowing teacher of Old Testament.

I ATTENDED FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH in Columbia and I still have visions of Mrs. Hetzler (Jane Froman's mother) playing the pipe organ, and I believe it was blond Dorothy Case singing in the quartet "Here, O My Lord, I see Thee Face to Face." I considered the Rev. Mr. Carl Agee, our pastor, to be the vicar of Christ on earth.

I was fortunate, also, to receive Dean Albert K. Heckel's lectures in Citizenship, a required course of study for freshmen, conducted in the auditorium of Jesse Hall. Dean Heckel engaged our attention and interspersed his lectures with appealing anecdotes. For instance, he said that he had traveled all over the world and that, in his opinion, the most beautiful women were to be found in Sweden or the Scandinavian peninsula.

Dean Heckel first introduced us to Darwin's "The Origin of the Species," the theory of evolution, and the survival of the fittest." He defined the Mendelian Law of Heredity and dwelt upon the preeminent factors influencing life, heredity and environment. Which was the more effective? Being swayed by my father (we discussed these things while I was home on vacation), I leaned toward heredity and now that we are entering into the "genetic age," it would lead me to believe that my father's thinking was in the right direction.

Dr. Harry Gunnison Brown, who wrote his own textbook, "Economic Science and the Common Welfare," was my professor in Economics. He was brilliant with sparkling brown eyes. He seemed genuinely happy to explain the meaning and processes of monopolies and the law of supply and demand. It was obvious that he loved his subject.

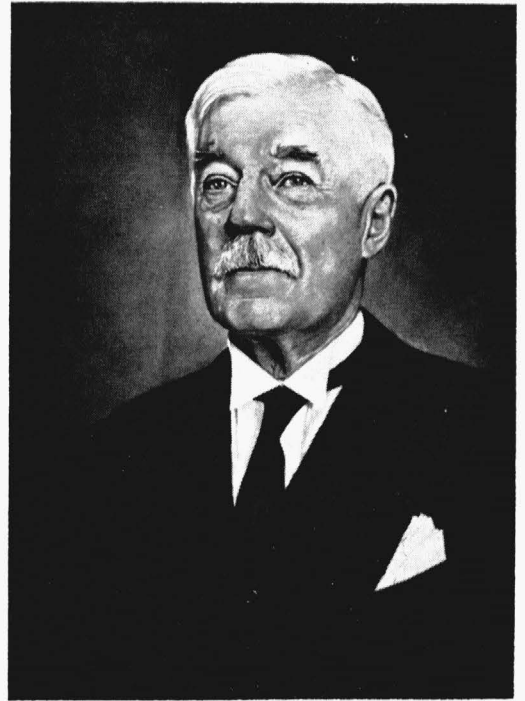
Our pleasant young French teacher was Miss Bar-



Albert K. Heckel



H. Gunnison Brown



M. P. Ravenal



A football crowd at Rollins Field in the early 20's. Courtesy Missouri Historical Society.



Carl Agee

bara Reavis. She was a decided blond and her smile was charming and flawless! "Comment faites-vous, ce matin?" She was the soul of patience and conscientiously insisted that we employ those nasal sounds. It was important to report on the little classic, "Mon Frere, Yves." Perhaps we read Balzac, in due time, but I best remember him from a good English translation. I feel greatly indebted to skilled linguists. To me they are among the most useful people on earth because they help to promote understanding among world citizens of different cultures.

Miss Brashear was our kindly-intentioned Freshman English teacher. On the first day of school, she instructed us to write a theme on "Why I Came to College." I couldn't remember writing many themes in high school. Miss Breshear paved the way to our writing in a purposeful manner. In the hallways in Jesse Hall, she walked with head down as if in meditation (the introspective type), but upon recognizing a pupil she would encourage him by saying he was going to be one of her "star" pupils. In her wisdom she knew that an ounce of encouragement was worth more than a pound of criticism.

THERE WAS THE BELOVED Miss Ruth Huey who

also taught English. She insisted that since she was from Arkansas, it was acceptable for her to say "you all." Miss Huey also thought that "ingenious" was a beautiful word, because of its connotation, and that the word "unique" should rarely be used—it was almost unspeakable!

I cannot remember the names of my Botany and Geology professors. Botany class was held on the "white" campus in Lefevre Hall. I like flowers and trees but not particularly their cross-sections. There was much talk of chlorophyll, pollen, and chromosomes. Geology seemed less intricate than Botany. Field trips gave us an everlasting appreciation for the Jefferson City, Callaway, and Cooper formations of sedimentary rock, or cliffs as we call them. The professor explained that the lowest formation corresponded to the Ordovician Age and that it would take about 25,000 years to form a three-foot layer of this kind of rock under aquarian conditions. We were filled with wonder for the Creator of the universe.

WE DID NOT HAVE guidance counselors as such in those days, but we *did* have rumor! It was rumored on campus that "Preventive Medicine" was a snap course, so I enrolled under Dr. Pete Ravenel. His name would seem to indicate that he was of French or Spanish descent, but his accent sounded German from where I sat in the large lecture class on the white campus. We had no textbooks and to this day I have no idea what constitutes Preventive Medicine!

I remember our compassionate Dean Priddy, Dean of Women. Sometimes her face was forbearance itself. If one would have an audience with her concerning housing problems or subjects of study, she would listen attentively. She also wanted us to make the most of our personal appearances, our outward beauty, be it ever so little. Dean Priddy believed that higher education involved the whole person.

A little learning has been called a dangerous thing, but here at the University of Missouri, I was initiated into an indefatigable search for the truth, a desire to appease an insatiable curiosity; to concentrate on the good, the beautiful, and the true as a way of life, while at the same time attempting to eliminate false propaganda, the ugly, and the superficial. It becomes increasingly clear to me why I have a reverence for Jesse Hall and its surroundings which were the scenes of my impressionable years. □