

Aims of the College of Wooster

BY PRESIDENT CHARLES F. WISHART

WHAT is the aim of a college like Wooster? Primarily, perhaps, the impartation of facts. The college must open before young minds areas of knowledge hitherto unexplored by them. Simple and elementary and even humiliating as it may sound, long experience has shown that the first and essential step is a very generous dissemination of much-needed information.

But Wooster invites her students to something more than a mere "miscellany of information." Much of it they will forget. Some of it, perhaps, they should forget. What is far more important than any acquirement of facts is that the student should develop what might be called the technique of the well-informed man, that he should know how to discriminate, to balance and compare, to clarify and coordinate, to retain in the mind great structural essentials and to lose the incidental rubbish, to acquire blazing intensity of thinking, and along with it an equal ability for mental relaxation, to study the art of concentration on the problem ahead, and of detachment from the problem left behind, to maintain a sense of proportion which is the obverse of a sense of humor, to learn logic well enough that one comes to know how sometimes logic cannot be trusted, to master reason and not be mastered by it, to realize that all great in the supreme advances of human knowledge abandon the laboring oars of reason for the swift wings of intuition, to cultivate the fine instinct for feeling facts, the sixth sense which by divine affinity with a soul of truth sights and seizes it amidst the fog of balancing possibilities, above all to learn how to face grim truth with courage, humbling truth with reverence, and exacting truth with fitting obedience—this we believe to be the beginning of a liberal education.

There is another and even higher quality of an educated man which I find it hard to put into exact words. It is intangible, imponderable, incapable of concrete definition, yet quite unmistakable both in its presence and in its absence. We might approach it by the "grace" of the New Testament, the "noblesse oblige" of the French, by our word "culture," or by those meanings which we have come to wrap up in the word "gentleman," which a quaint old writer expressed by the phrase, "high thoughts seated in a soul of courtesy."

This is a thing of spirit and atmosphere and Wooster would fall below her traditional ideals if she did not furnish the environment and the incentive for the development of this quality. Her work would be a failure if she sent out brilliant cynics, intellectual snobs, or hard-minded scoffers. In this true high sense she

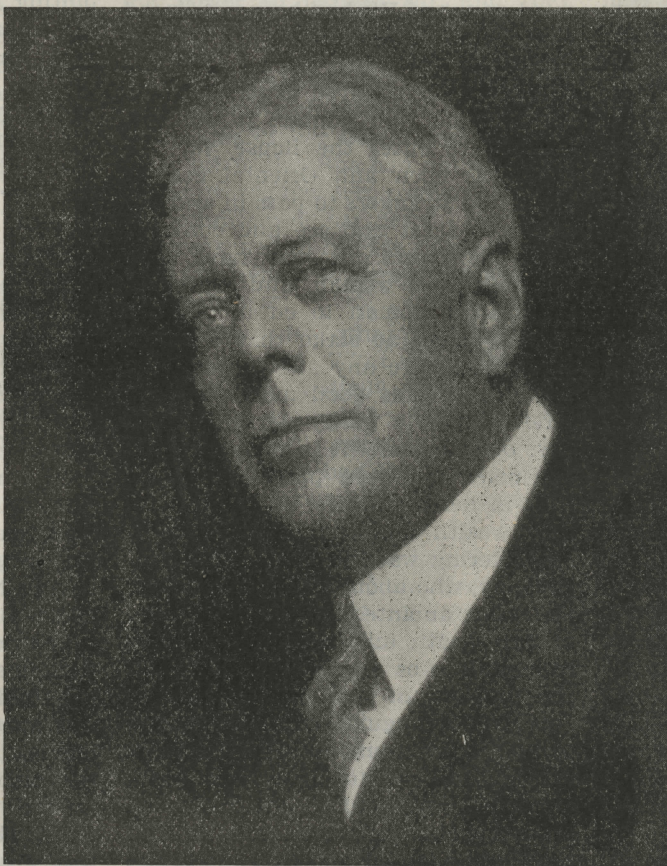
strives to maintain an atmosphere of culture, a culture whose best exemplification she tries to show her students in the great Figure who moves across the scenes of the New Testament with such majesty and sweetness, such strength and tenderness, such regal assurance of His own powers, and such delicate and tender consideration for the weaknesses of those about Him.

And this involves stern intellectual tests. Our admission standards are high. Solid work is required of those who receive a degree. Wooster's best service for democracy is the training of leadership.

When we turn to the religious field, the service which Wooster is rendering to democracy and to the whole world is almost unique. In her religious life Wooster definitely disclaims the wholly arbitrary and often misleading meanings attached to such words as "modernist" and "fundamentalist." She could not be a college at all if she failed to look the facts of modern science squarely in the face. She could not do her great work in the development of personality if she were not loyal to the great fundamentals of religion. She has a faith for her students which does not blink or dodge all the facts that the modern scientific method has revealed, but which in reasoned assurance and by a warm vision and a vital experience holds steadily to a personal God, a personal Saviour hereafter, a divine personal Saviour from sin, a great program for winning the world to Him, and a transcendent gospel which moves, never against reason, but often very far beyond it.

If Wooster did not give her students a glimpse of the scientific method, they would go out into a science-saturated age unable to speak the language of the men and women among whom they must take places of leadership.

History has never seen anything like the extent to which the American of the next generation will be trained in scientific method. How colossal would be the folly of sending out leaders into such a generation with no knowledge of the scientific method, and no ability to speak the language of the scientific man! Wooster wants her graduates to be able to do this. She does not believe that in this age the young mind could be shut away from the results of modern science, if it were desirable to do so. She would develop a faith that is strong enough to face such facts, strong enough even to hear divergent opinions, to stand upon its own feet and to keep its balance in the face of conflicting currents. In our modern science-saturated world such conflicts must be met sooner or later. Where better met than in an institution where the student has the sympathy and assistance and guidance of a noble group of Christian men?



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