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THE SPIRIT
OF
ELON COLLEGE

An Excellent Spirit



BY
PRESIDENT W. A. HARPER

1925

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A GREAT ADDRESS

Editorial in "Maroon and Gold,"
By S. M. Lynam, '24, Editor

Dr. Harper's opening address before the students last Sunday morning was a great address. He has said the thing which students of the College have for so long needed to have said to them. We are carrying this address in full in this issue of Maroon and Gold, and it is our earnest hope that many students will preserve a copy of it.

Dr. Harper, in some small part at least, has given expression to the Elon Spirit. Spiritual forces are real forces, and there is such a force here. We believe that President Harper has rightly stated the chief qualities of this spirit. When we think of the Elon Spirit we need a concrete definition of this invisible force which makes itself felt so potently in the life of our College. Dr. Harper has given such a concrete definition, and too much cannot be said in praise of his address.

There is a home atmosphere in our College, a reverent scholarship permeates all the teachings of the College, through all the sport life of the College there runs a love for fair dealing and clean play, the social life of the College is a healthy and normal social life, and

all these things enter into the crowning factor of the Elon Spirit,—Christian character. These five factors, as Dr. Harper points out, make up what we are all so proud of,—the Elon Spirit. It is this Elon Spirit which has made Elon College the dearest place on earth to those who have come to love it through contact with all that the College stands for, and by contributing to the College something which has entered into the spirit of the place.

No buildings, however efficient or imposing; no curriculum, however broad or adaptable; no faculty, however consecrated or learned, can ever endear a college to the hearts of men and women. It is the spirit which dwells within and above all, which clasps in sacred bonds the whole; it is such a spirit which endears a college to those whom it trains. It is not things, but spirit, which lives on and motivates life.

*THE ELON SPIRIT

SPIRIT is eternal. We cannot see it, but we can feel it, know it, act in harmony with or opposition to it. Spiritual values are real values. All experience testifies to the verity of this statement.

Many of you have only recently come into this community. There is a spirit regnant here. Even the chance visitor cannot fail to become conscious of its presence. You have already sensed it and are rapidly becoming a part of it. This spirit has been resident here in embryo since 1889. During these 34 years it has developed and evolved until now to those choice souls who have experienced the Elon spirit it is a hallowed benediction. I came under the influence of this spirit in 1894. I have seen this spirit assailed from within by students and faculty members and from without by those incapable of appreciating it, and I have seen these same assailants converted to ardent friends and devotees when time for reflection had come. I have seen the Administration building around

* The Opening Address for 1923. The Scripture text used as a basis was Daniel 6: 3, "An excellent spirit was in him."

which this spirit had its central semi-nary and dwelling place go up in smoke and I have seen this same spirit undaunted set about the reconstruction of a more ample and befitting home for itself. You could destroy every building on this campus, and the Elon spirit will, Phoenix-like, arise from the smouldering ruins to incarnate itself more befittingly in other buildings better adapted to its needs. It is an excellent spirit and it cannot perish.

For some years now I have had in mind to undertake to interpret this spirit in an opening address. I have hesitated to do so, because the interpretation of a spirit is not only difficult, but sometimes dangerous. The beauty of the flower is in its wholeness of impression and not on its parts. So the beauty of the Elon spirit is in its unity and not in its ingredient principles. I can only hope and pray that the beauty of what you have already begun to experience may not be marred for you by the analysis to which we shall now subject it. I shall speak of only five constituent elements of it. There are others which you will yourselves add to the list, but these five all will agree stand out on the horizon of the Elon

spirit like Pike's Peak in the Rockies.

And first among these constituent elements of our College spirit I would place the atmosphere of the home which pervades our institution even as the aroma of the flowers pervades the air we breathe, borne in to us on the gentle zephyrs of the spring. Elon is a college with the home quality and it takes this quality to ripen youth into manhood and womanhood ready to grapple with and solve the complex problems of life. As go the homes, so goes the nation. Manifestly a college with the home atmosphere is a primary need in the life of any people. So many times young people from good homes lose themselves when they go off to college. They miss the cheering, saving atmosphere of home and fall almost unconsciously into habits undermining character. To move among those who know us intimately, appraise us charitably, and love us devoutly is the strongest character-making influence touching our lives in the fateful days of youth. Here we are all members of the same family. The professors stand in loco parentis to you and your fellow students are your brothers and sisters in the college household. It becomes

each of us to contribute all we can to the success and happiness of our home. "Mother Elon" the Alumni affectionately style the college of which you are now a part. Love her as you would your mother. She will be to you all a mother can be, and through the encroaching years you will ever recur to the days spent in the atmosphere of your college with pleasant memories associated with ideals that have meant your life's success.

But a college is a place for study, a place to face the questions and problems and facts of life. The Elon spirit is in this regard permeated with the attitude of reverent scholarship, of reverent search for truth. No half-truths are taught here and none are safe here. All sham and pretense are sure to be exposed. Every realm of knowledge is subjected to most painstaking analysis and only that which can stand the test stands. There is only one question we are unprepared to examine after this manner and that is the existence of God. Elon is a Christian College. Just as the chemist assumes his electron and the physicist his molecule, so we assume God as the synthesizing fact of the universe. We just cannot

get along without God here and we make that assumption and offer no excuse for it. The Bible assumes that God is and labels him a fool who denies it. That is our position. It would be presumptuous to undertake to discuss a spiritual concept here today without taking for granted that the Father of spirits actually is. We do not object to your using every means you can conceive of to prove or disprove this assumption, but we are convinced that you will if you are wise and honest necessarily arrive at our axiomatic attitude, that all in vanity without God and that all is reality with Him. Elon takes her stand here and, God helping her, can do no other. This assumption lies at the basis of all Christian colleges. It must lie there, else why maintain such colleges at all?

You can see now what we mean by saying that Elon is characterized by the reverent search for truth. We mean being firmly convinced that God is and that the spiritual life is a real life, we are willing to investigate any problem, question, theory or fact and to render verdict respecting it in terms of our fundamental conception of God as the source and author and synthe-

sizer of all truth. Elon is not afraid to teach geology. What is geology? Nothing more nor less than the effort to learn how God made the world. We are not afraid to teach biology. What is biology? Nothing more nor less than the effort to find how God made our bodies and how life goes on in them. We are not troubled about evolution nor about the higher critics. We examine their theories, but we cannot accept any mechanical origin for the world, because we know that God is our Father and we constantly find Him present as the creative and directive spirit in every science, in all philosophy, in all art and history. We are convinced that there is nothing to fear from science and that there can be no conflict between science and religion. God is the author both of scientific and of religious truth and God is not inconsistent with Himself. When science and religion seem to conflict, we hold fast to our fundamental concept and know it will come out all right. We do not know enough of any science yet to be dogmatic about its conclusions, nor has God ceased yet to speak to His children new conceptions of His spiritual truth. Jesus told His disciples He had

things to say to them that they could not bear and promised that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth; all truth, that is it, and trusting such a leader we cannot greatly err even momentarily, and ultimately we shall not err at all. With God all is well; without Him all is ill. So let me repeat that this college is permeated with the spirit of reverent scholarship, a scholarship that takes its point of departure from the settled conviction that God is our Father and that He is the author of all truth. Such scholarship has in each recurring age made the universe more and more the servant of the life of man and such scholarship shall in the fulness of time make this world the Kingdom of our God. Be earnest and faithful in the service of such scholarship during your college days. You will never regret it.

You have already seen the Elon spirit displaying itself in athletics. Wholesome sport and recreation are cardinal principles of the Elon spirit. The human body is the temple of the living God. As such it demands every consideration at our hands. We dare not desecrate it. We are to use and develop it; yes, beautify it. But we are ever

to keep in mind that it is a Christian temple. High sanction by this concept is given to sport and athletics. Every student here is required to engage in some form of physical exercise under trained direction and supervision. This is a Christian duty and no Christian college can shirk this duty and please God. But our athletic teams are not ours in spirit when they resort to un-Christian methods to win victories. We rejoice in victories, as much so as any college. We want to win, but we want no victory at the expense of Christian character. The wholesome principles of co-operation and sacrifice, other names for Christian brotherhood, are the very heart of college athletics. As such we welcome athletics to our college life and duly honor those who wear Maroon and Gold on the gridiron, the diamond, the court and the track. We make no apology for the high estimate we place on athletics here. But we do not oppose athletics to scholarship. We believe in and aim at the scholarly athlete and are never happier than when Elon produces an athletic scholar.

Elon is a co-educational college. It would not be other and be a college with the home atmosphere, for sons and

daughters with fathers and mothers make up our homes. Equal education without restriction or distinction growing out of sex is natural education, is Christian education. But since Elon is a co-educational college the social question becomes an important item in the college life and spirit. This is natural and right and Christian. Young men cannot sin in the presence of a pure Christian young woman. That is why gentility, refinement, courtesy, fraternity loom large in the Elon atmosphere. To be sure social restrictions are necessary to keep the social nature in proper relation and proportion to the other interests and concerns of the college life, but wholesome social intercourse is urgently desired and definitely planned for here. A cynic recently found fault with Elon as a courting school. Well, courting has to be done and I do not know a better place to do it than in the delightful atmosphere of the Christian college with proper supervision. There are other aims in social intercourse, however, than the directly and intimately personal one of courting. Learn to love the association of clean, pure, high-minded young people of the opposite sex as well as of your own sex,

my young friends. Place this association on the high plane of Christian brotherhood. The world stands sorely in need of this spirit today. Let not classism and the clan spirit sully your social life. Be a brother and sister to all. Such is the basis on which the entire social fabric of your College is created. It is a safe and sane basis for you to build the edifice of your character upon.

And this brings me to the final ingredient of our excellent Elon spirit about which I am to speak at this time, the ingredient of Christian character. When I say this I say all. The end and aim and purpose of education is the production of character and the only enduring, satisfying character is Christian character. Your college motto is, "Christian character first and always at Elon," and around the hope of realizing this splendid product in the lives of those who resort here for study all the activities and life of this College are organized and on it focussed. If Elon fails here lamentable will be her plight. She will have failed in her major purpose. It is the earnest, prayerful, expectant hope of this Christian faculty and of these Christian trustees that no student should leave these walls

consecrated to God and the young life of the world without having definitely and personally dedicated himself or herself to the program of Jesus. Strong and courageous and consecrated Christian manhood and womanhood is Mother Elon's aspiration for each of you. The world needs you and the service of your promising lives motivated in terms of Christian idealism.

An excellent spirit is this of our Elon in the joyous presence of which you now find yourselves with a year of hopeful endeavor challenging you. Be brave and strong as Daniel was. He purposed in his heart not to defile himself. Make this same splendid resolution here and now, young friends, on the threshold of your college year. You too, then, like Daniel, will come to a place of high and helpful service if like him you cherish an excellent spirit like the Elon spirit as the guiding hope and inspiration of your college days. I congratulate you on coming under the beneficent influence of such an excellent spirit and I congratulate Elon on the privilege which is hers to bring her spirit to bear upon your young lives radiant with hope and big with possibilities as they are for God and broth-

erhood. Happily are you and the Elon spirit met. Happily may you dwell together and unitedly may you rejoice over the good consequences of your mutual contact and association together. May God bless you and Elon in the days and months and years that lie ahead.



