

Speech to the Freshmen

September 24, 1929

I appreciate the kind words of Dr. Meadows but I am not guilty of all he said. I may be guilty of some of it but not all. We are glad to see you. We are glad to have you enter our college. It is a pleasure for us to see so many young North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia young women who want to train themselves to be of service in the schools of our state and other states. You people who have an ambition to do something worthwhile. It is always a pleasure to us to have you want to come to our college.

I do not know how many of you young people have watches. This program was to begin this afternoon at 2 o'clock and exactly at 2 o'clock by the college time Dr. Meadows rose and started to speak to you. Our motto is "To serve". Our second motto is "On time every time". And our slogan is "To serve on time every time". 2 o'clock in a great number of places means 2:15. 2 o'clock at East Carolina Teachers College means 2 o'clock. Not 2:01 nor 1:59. I had an appointment with a certain good citizen in this community and I said what time must I come and he said about 7:30 and I said that doesn't suit me. He said oh come about 7:30 and I said you want me to come about 8:00. I said I will come when you say and he said let's make it 7:45. It is a great deal better to be able to meet your responsibilities on the minute. I know some people, one very close to me, that I am quite sure if Saint Peter does not hold the door open 15 minutes overtime she will not get in. But I am not going to lecture you this afternoon.

You come to us with a clean record. You are graduates of standard High Schools almost without an exception. You have done your work in the secondary school. You have decided to come to college here. You are here to make your record. Your record is absolutely clean. You are going to be with us some

one year, some two, some three and some four and now we are offering a post graduate course and it is possible for you to come five years if you wish. You are going to make your record. The college is not going to make the record for you. Your mother or father is not going to make the record for you. The record is going to be made by yourself. Your tablet is clean so far as your record here is concerned. It is absolutely blank except your name as an enrolled student.

It is your problem to write upon that tablet. Your teachers cannot write it for you, your mother and your father at home, they cannot write it for you. Your classmate, your college mate, your roommate cannot write it for you. You are going to make your own record. And I hope every one of you will make a record that you will be proud of.

You will find this college a little world within itself. Your success or failure will depend upon how you write your record in conduct, first. Oh, you say we have nothing to do with the conduct. Yes, we do. There is within the college a Student Government Association, an organization of the students, an organization by the students, an organization with a few faculty advisers and you write your record there as well as in the class room and that record in part is determined by the kind of character you form. Oh, you say, I have a good character. Nobody is questioning that but your conduct is a part of your life and will become a part of your record. There are certain laws and regulations of the college, not many but there are certain laws and regulations, and as one conforms or violates these regulations his conduct record is made.

You are going to make your record in your class work. I know how you feel now. I was going to set the world afire when I started to college. I found out before the year was over that my teachers had nearly set me afire. It is all right to feel that way about it because if you make the right kind of a start it is much easier to go on. You are going to make character by the

kind of spirit you put into your work. There is the spirit in the home. Every home has a different kind of spirit in it. We sometimes speak of it as the atmosphere of the home. There is a spirit in a college and it is that college spirit that enters in to the student body that has almost as much to do with shaping the worthwhileness of many students as all of the class room work put together. President Woodrow Wilson said on one occasion in my presence that he sometimes believed that students put in the time preparing for their classes for the fellowship with the other students.

You want to be loyal to your home, loyal to your state, loyal to your society, whichever one you join, loyal to every organization you become a member of. A spirit that makes you willing to do more than just the task that is assigned for this particular day or this particular occasion.

There is one thing that I would like to call to your attention this afternoon. Select your friends wisely. You are going to select friends who are going to help shape your character. You are going to select new friends. Getting acquainted with a large number of fine young women from various sections of one's state is one of the finest things about a college. Broadening one's acquaintance, coming in touch, shoulder to shoulder, with people who have been reared under different environments than we have. But you want to be careful that you select the right kind of friends. One's friends make or mar one's record. You have heard the old saying, "Birds of a feather flock together". But it means that people of the same kind group themselves together. Here is a girl who is full of laughter and fun and she walks out on the campus and a stranger comes by in an automobile. He hails her and she speaks to him. Isn't she popular? Who is that? She will get me acquainted with folks and she will get you in trouble just about the beginning of the spring quarter. I know from experience. I have seen that happen before. That person who is perfectly free with everyone;

she may be a good mixer; she may be too good. That is not North Carolina's ideal of what right minded young womanhood should be. My advice is not only to not select her but to use your influence to help her change her ways.

Your parents cannot help you any longer except as counsellors and as bankers. I know exactly how a parent feels, young friends. I know exactly how the heart of a father or mother reaches out to go with a son or daughter off to college. I know how they wish they could be there to counsel and to advise. Just last week I sent my youngest off to college but I told him, "Son, I cannot go with you. It is yours from now on." And the same is true for you, young women. As much as your parents want to be of service to you and they will write you long letters full of good advice and you will get an insight into father and mother that you have not had before but they cannot help you after all. About all they can do is to send you a check and some of them are going to find it hard to do that. You are making your way yourselves. They will rejoice with you if you make a good record. They will be heartsore and sick if you do not but they cannot help you. Quite a number of times in my life when we were forced in discipline to do things I hated to do, quite a number of times a young lady will say to me, "This will kill my mother. If I had just thought before I did it." Nothing else could be done. It did not kill mother but it hurt. You are making your own record and your father and mother cannot make it for you. The best friends you have on earth cannot make it for you. They cannot go with you. You have broken away from home now and you will write your name for the first time in a way that you have never written it before.

I hear someone saying, "Mr. Wright, you are about to make me homesick." I do not care how homesick you get. I do not care if you do cry and cry and cry. You know we have placed a laboratory in each room in this college. You can go cry there as much as you wish. But, listen, have backbone enough and love for that enought to make good. Have character enough to show those folks at home what kind

of stuff you are made of. Dont sit down and write home that you are just going to die. I never have seen anyone die of homesickness. It is as bad as the fellow who crossed the ocean and was so seasick and someone said you wont die and he said that is what is worrying me, I want to.

That person who does not love their home is not much to work with. Of course, college life is not home life. We cannot make it that way. We do the best we know how. Dr. Brewer when he went to Meredith College after leaving Wake Forest said that on one occasion he was worrying over the problems and difficulties he was having at Meredith that he did not have at Wake Forest and a girl came in to see him. She sat down and he said, "What can I do for you?" And she said, "I'm homesick". He said, "I am too so let's cry together". We cannot make college life like home life but we do the best we can. It is organized so as to give you the greatest possible opportunity to do the most possible in preparing yourself for your in life.

Your main object in coming here was an education. The educated men and women of this country are the people who will determine our advance towards civilization. They are the leaders in church, state, business and industry and in all of human relationships. If you take Who's Who in America you will see that the greater majority of men and women whose names are there are college bred men and women. If you take just the business men and women you will find that over 50% of them are college bred men and women. And it was not many years ago when people thought you should not go to college if you were going into business.

The education offered here is of a rather special type. The primary object of the courses offered here are to help the students who come here to become efficient teachers in the public schools of our state and the public schools of North Carolina include all of the schools under college. The

courses of study are planned to help you become the most efficient teachers that you can possibly make of yourselves. There is, however, in that kind of training, at least I believe there is, the finest type of college education that you can almost imagine to prepare one to live in a home and in a community. There is no education that is superior to a teachers college education when it comes to train one for life and life's responsibilities. There are courses of study in this college that prepare you to get all the certificates the state offers.

One year of training here provided you take a certain number of specified subjects in education will prepare you to receive the Elementary A Certificate. Then if you take the two year normal course this course is divided into two divisions, one is for the teachers in the primary grades and the other is for the teachers in the grammar grades. If you complete satisfactorily the two year normal course the state will issue you a Primary or Grammar Grade Certificate Class B. If you finish the four year Primary or Grammar grade course the state will issue you a 1-A Certificate with a year of experience because of your training in the Training Schools. Then there are four year courses for High School. There are courses that will train you for practically everything that is to be taught in the High Schools of North Carolina but I am not going to go into that because I think someone is going to talk to you about "What Course Should I Take?" But I want to say to you that it will be best for you to come to college for four years if you possibly can. There is a place at the top of the ladder but it is crowded at the bottom always. The last Legislature is going to leave 1500 or 2000 teachers in this state out of a job this year but the superintendents are wanting the teachers who are on top. They are asking what kind of a girl was she in college, how did she conduct herself. How was this girl? She was late 28 times during the last quarter. I do not want her and that girl was in

my office to tell me about that and she was bemoaning the fact. She said she lived a long way from school and she just slept late. Well she will continue to sleep late when she goes out to teach. The way you conduct yourself, the kind of record you make and the farther you go in your course of study the better prepared you will be.

Young ladies, I am glad you are here. I want you to know this that you are among friends. There is not a teacher or officer in this college who is not a friend of yours and do not be afraid to go and ask them a question. Someone saw me this summer and said, "I had a daughter in college last year and I told her to go to see you and I kept writing her to go to see you and she said she was afraid of you." I have never eaten a girl yet and I do not expect to and I am not hard if you behave yourself. Now, of course, if you have done something you ought not to do that is another thing.

I sent for a girl last spring, she happened to be just across the corridor from me and the girl came out and said, "What in the world, Mr. Wright, have I done." I said come with me for her brother was there to see her. Do not feel afraid to speak to any teacher or officer here about any problems you have. I cannot help it if my face is long. Listen, young friends, we cannot help you if we do not know about what your problems are. We want to work with you and for you. Let us serve you in every way we can possibly be of service to you.

Robert H. Wright, President  
East Carolina Teachers College

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