

Bessie Ladley Totten's Retirement Address (1941)

Bessie Ladley Totten, class of 1900, spent a lifetime at Antioch College, and many more by extension. Her family, the Carrs and Ladleys of Yellow Springs and the Tottens of nearby Springfield, collectively sent more students to the College than perhaps any other. Born in 1876, her direct association with Antioch College began when she entered its Preparatory Academy in 1892. After completing her studies a forty year career as a librarian at the College ensued, though she hardly retired in 1941, the occasion for which she delivered the following address. Retirement for Miss Totten meant little more than relinquishing her well-worn title of Librarian for the working honorific Curator of Antiochiana, which she held until her death in 1963. Her remarks allude to her longtime passion for the College's history with her customary humility and (if the opening line is any indication) a wry sense of humor. Especially interesting is her quotation from a Harper's article about memory that speaks to the historian's mantra all things in transition at all times

and an example from the daily life of a curator, which brings with it handling of historic visual and written materials that elicit such frequent and vivid episodes of familiarity and recognition as to border on the feeling of d

vu.

Mr. Toastmaster, Antiochians all, and friends

When one of the committee asked me if I would be willing to stand up and be introduced to the group here this evening together with Dr. [Austin] Patterson as retiring members of the faculty, I agreed on condition there would be no speech required for which I have no talent.

However I should like to express my appreciation to the Administration of the new Antioch'especially to former President Morgan who retained me from the old Antioch as one of the new Antioch group when he was reorganizing the whole setup of the college 20 years ago.

Likewise, President Henderson and the present Administrative Council have been most kind in letting me out gently'so to speak'for I am not completely divorced from Antioch, having been designated as the Curator of Antiochiana. This job is really not new as it is one of the things that has held my special interest for years. Antiochiana had its beginnings many many years ago when the Trustees gave special directions to the librarian to carefully preserve various college records. To Miss Eleanor Lewis [class of 1873], a former librarian and professor and whom some of you know and to the late Professor [J. Peery] Miller should go the credit for getting and preserving many of the most interesting items in the collections, especially books by and about President [Horace] Mann, President [Thomas] Hill, and Dr. Edward Everett Hale, author of the

Man Without a Country.

Dr. Hale was a faithful and hardworking Antioch trustee from 1865 to 1899. He attended almost every commencement and was the man who helped raise \$100,000 for an endowment

from the Unitarians and brought the money here himself in 1865. To raise that much money just after the Civil War was no small matter but it was done and forms the nucleus of the Antioch endowment fund to this day.

At the risk of boring some of you who have read the article by Rollo Walter Brown in the June Harper's on

Memory as Enrichment,

I wish to quote some lines which express so well the thought I have about the old Antioch being related to the new through a long process of growth:

The fearful and over sentimental shrink from using the memory, from letting the memory have its own way'to them remembering means clinging to the past'something that is in truth fatal to any healthy enjoyment of the present. But when the past is treated as if it really were what it is'that is, something flowing constantly along into the present, which is the normal center of existence'instead of taking away from mature enjoyment of the present, it adds profoundly to it. All authentic memoirs of whatever sort will keep flowing down to us if we let them. They give body, color, depth, and warmth and sometimes a strange brightness of morning to what we are experiencing in the present.

Let me illustrate. Recently there came into the possession of the Library a section of what had belonged to an old scrapbook. In it were several poems on the death of Horace Mann that I had never seen before, and one written by a Miss Scott of Warren County dedicated to Judge William Mills entitled

The Lawn

in which she recalls the pleasure experienced by watching little children joyously at play on

The Lawn

as the ground around Mills House was called. What made that poem expressed in the quaint style of the 1850s so interesting to me was that just recently I was present at two entertainments given by little Antioch School children on that very same Lawn, and experiencing the same pleasure in watching these children in their dance around the Maypole and crowning the Queen of May.

I have a more deep seated appreciation for Antioch perhaps than many. My grandfather Rev. DF Ladley was one of the founders back in 1850. Since then down thru the years, some of his descendants have been associated with Antioch almost continuously'my parents, two uncles, 2 aunts, 5 first cousins and other cousins too numerous to mention.

hwLs'hV^T

:pl3