

# The Neshoba Democrat

Archives & History

Patience, Tolerance and Triumph.

VOL. 41.

PHILADELPHIA, MISS. THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 1922

NO. 1

## ALUMNI ORATION

### DEMOCRAT EDITOR DELIVERS ALUMNI ADDRESS AT A. & M. COMMENCEMENT

Subject for the Occasion "Dreaming and Building for Mississippi"

Clayton Rand, of the Class of 1911, and Editor of the Neshoba Democrat, delivered the Alumni Address at the 1922 Commencement at the Agricultural and Mechanical College at Philadelphia, June 3 in the college auditorium. The subject of the address was "Dreaming and Building for Mississippi." The address was presided by a band concert by the college band, and the rest of the day was given over to exercises for the alumni.

The address which pertains to one of Mississippi's problems follows:

Public men from within and without the State, for many months past, have been asking the question: "What is the matter with Mississippi?" and their answers to this much mooted question have been given much publicity. As a result the outside world, and we within the State, have begun to believe that Mississippi suffers from some incurable malady. While it is true that destructive criticism cures many ills, we in Mississippi have had enough of chronic kicking for a while. Our State's interests can be better served, at least for a season, by cataloging our many assets than by diverting our liabilities; by reciting our many virtues than by recounting our many sins.

Mississippi will be cursed, more or less, with inertia, and the outside world will continue to look upon her with indifference, as long as her spokesmen are chronically critical, and her kickers and knockers outnumber her dreamers and builders. Recently I clipped a bit of verse from a copy of *Forbes*' Weekly. It was written by Ted Olsen, and is entitled, "The Knockers." Its sentiments are such sympathy with my message of the morning that I shall preface my remarks by giving you the benefit of it.

"The dreamer blazes out a path to lands remote and dim,  
Far heights men never trod, until the vision beckoned him.

And err the jungle closes round where first he struggled through,  
The builder comes upon his heels to make the dream come true.

Dreamer and builder, hand in hand, across the world they go;  
The trails they make, the towers they build, the wondering world may know.

And when their temples stand complete, challenging heaven's crown,  
The knockers gather round, and start to talk the structure down.

For this was builded in a way that breaks all proper rules;  
And that design is incorrect according to the schools;

And that offends most shockingly some fundamental law;  
And that—like this, and all the rest—displays some hopeless flaw.

And so the critics saunter home, confiding each to each,  
How mightier than spade or sword is man's great weapon, speech.

And each congratulating each, that by their words alone  
The dreamer's dream, the builder's work, are wholly overthrown.

And while the critic fellows sleep, the builders come again,  
And recreate from dust the dream the knockers would have slain;

Not perfect quite—proclaiming still the crudeness of the clod,  
But wrought for stalwart service in the toil of man and God.

And while the knocker folk deplore, and strive to fix the blame,  
Dreamer and worker, hand in hand, toil onward just the same;

Content to build as best they know, as every builder may—  
And caring not one single damn for what the critics say!"

In my address to you perhaps I am filling for the time the role of a dreamer; a dreamer, speaking to a group of dreamers and builders, and it takes both to build roads and erect temples. And the time is ripe for the dreamer and the builder in Mississippi. We have had enough for all time of factionalism and fault-finding. If we could capitalize the energy and talent that annually runs to waste in Mississippi in par-

tisanship and chronic knocking, and divert its force in channels promoting, building and boosting Mississippi, the agricultural, the economic and the educational status of Mississippi would undergo a rapid and happy transformation.

I, for one, have confidence in the citizenship of Mississippi, and faith in her future, and I think her history justifies me in my convictions. Few states have been subjected to as many reverses, and it is when we review her struggles that her achievements seem phenomenal.

In the War of 1812, in the war with Mexico, and in the tragedy of the 60's she contributed well her share in blood and treasure. Along with her sister Southern states she lay prostrate in '65. Her wealth, measured in slaves, was converted into a public menace, and her sons and daughters in numbers uncounted joined that army of Southerners, 5,000,000 strong, that migrated North and West, following the Civil War; either to escape the insults of black misrule, the tyranny of the carpet-bagger, or in search of larger opportunities.

Those who remained at home faced bankruptcy the Bolsheviks of the 70's, and the destructive period of so-called reconstruction. Read the tragedy of those times in the faces of those who survived it. Remember that through it all, we have raised cotton; raised cotton, pitted against the combined attack of the boll weevil and the broker, and the strategy of the manufacturer of cotton fabrics, in Old England and New England. Picture whole families in the cotton fields, when the women should have been at home and the children in school. Picture Mississippi with her perplexing race problem, with her high percentage of illiteracy, without a satisfactory road system, her sons ever drifting away, giving up her best blood to the upbuilding of the great Southwest. Consider a Mississippi with more than her share of demagogues and ambulance-chasers, cattle ticks, hook worms and boll weevils, and remember that through it all we have been purely agricultural, without cities, and except for lumbering, without other industries. Add all these things together, and if you then have anything but admiration and pride for what Mississippi has achieved through it all, you are ignoring history. Constantly exploited by her demagogues from within, and her money-changers from without, verily, Mississippi has been between the devil and the deep blue sea, and because she has well-nigh gone down three times in the swim is nothing to her discredit.

I have read it somewhere in the books, I think it was in one of Emerson's essays, that Lord McCauley was proud over a London news dispatch that there were ten thousand thieves in London. There was consolation in the fact that London was big enough and rich enough to support ten thousand thieves. I wonder what Lord McCauley would think of a State that could survive war and pestilence, the Bolsheviks and the demagogue, the cattle tick, the hook worm and the boll weevil, contribute generously to the upbuilding of a dozen or so states, support a few thieves while doing it, and still grow strong and great?

We have listened all too long, in Mississippi, to her disciples of discontent; her propagandists of pessimism. I turn my back upon them and tell you that there is no cause for alarm provided we can catch the vision and the spirit of the constructive optimist.

Of course Mississippi's politics is rotten, and this is our outstanding liability, but I believe that a statewide wave of enthusiasm over our latent resources and possible developments would enlist into such a crusade a number of those who are now fighting over the fortunes of some worthless demagogue. Perhaps a program of achievement would put factionalism on the wane. To fight it in any other way is too much like fighting Johnson grass. When I quit fighting Johnson grass in my back yard, and began cultivating other crops the grass died. Politics in Florida, Alabama, Arkansas and Louisiana has been at times about as dirty as it is in Mississippi, but when the people of those states went to work on a constructive program for the development of their lands and industries, their politics became a little cleaner. And even where the Republicans gain power things are not so clean. Republican patronage, for instance, is about as vile and fla-

grant a thing as we have to contend with, and we find it showing itself in most every little Southern city. No Mississippi has no monopoly either on demagogues or political scandal. And I cannot help but believe that woman suffrage in Mississippi is going to have a purifying, clarifying, "fumigating" effect upon our politics. I have always had a kind of heavenly conception of Southern womanhood, and sooner or later, Mississippi is in for a good political house-cleaning.

Much has been made over the fact that Mississippi's population has fallen off. For many years the trend of population has been from country to city, and Mississippi could but lose in such a shuffle. We are a rural people to a higher degree than the people of most any other state, and it is only in our agriculture that we must look for any great industrial developments.

And when we compare our agriculture with that of other Southern states we make an excellent showing. In 1920 the value of Mississippi's farm products exceeded those of Alabama by over \$30,000,000. She raised more cattle in 1920 than either of the Southern States excepting, of course, Texas, Oklahoma and Missouri. The potential possibilities of Mississippi's agriculture are exceeded by those of no other state in the Union. She has the world's greatest long staple cotton belt. Her soils vary, offering undreamed of possibilities in fruit and truck growing, cereals, dairying and cattle. Her rainfall is abundant and well distributed throughout the seasons, and her climate has never been fairly advertised to the world. The surface of our agriculture has not been scratched, and in few places can soil as rich and productive be had at such ridiculously low prices.

Why bemoan the fact that we are without great quantities of minerals? Soil, climate, rainfall; there is no greater combination of valuable and inexhaustible resources. When the oil of Oklahoma and Louisiana shall have flowed into oblivion, and the furnaces of Birmingham are forever extinguished Mississippi will still be feeding and clothing the hungry, naked world. When at Muscle Shoals, several months ago, I learned that business men in that vicinity had agents in Mississippi obtaining leases to lands having valuable deposits of bauxite, which is rich in aluminum. History tells us that Mississippi was the first of the States to mine lead; and while persistent activities in wild-cattling may bring in a gusher, we must, nevertheless, look to our future in agriculture. And while profitable, successful agriculture is our predominant problem our political leaders go about the State blowing about trusts and combines, and Mississippi has fewer of them than any state in the Union. About 85 per cent of our people farm, and yet there are people in Mississippi, and most of them farmers, who are glib enough to allow this menace-of-the-money-power stuff, while they and their soil, their marketing, and farm development are crying for information and enlightened leadership for putting agriculture on a profitable basis. About the first thing I learned under Tausig, in economics, was that though the tariff was an important issue its significance had been much exaggerated by America's two great political parties. So we in Mississippi strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. And then our BIG BUSINESS (we haven't any such thing) thinks, on the other hand, that it is legislated against, and that capital is driven away, when an honest investigation will show that the laws of a number of states, Texas for instance, are more inimical to capital than the laws of Mississippi.

Some wizard is going to step into Mississippi's political arena sometime, informed along agricultural lines, familiar with the forces that have enlisted one and one half million recruits in the America Farm Bureau, and posted on cooperative marketing, that heretofore has been confined to a few fruit and truck growers' exchanges, and that has grown 600 per cent in the last year, creating rapid changes in the marketing of cotton and cereals, and captivate the multitudes with a new vision; multitudes that today follow a leadership of either this or that faction, and does nothing either for their agriculture or their pocket books, and gives them nothing except something to get hot over.

It would be a folly for me to speak longer along these lines; you here in an agricultural College are more familiar with this interesting question than I. I must speak briefly on Mississippi's educational progress, for of all the happy omens of the times Mississippi's educational achievements fill with new hope the dreamer, the prophet and the builder. In proportion to Mississippi's assessed valuation she spent more money on her common schools in 1920 than either Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, North or South Carolina. In 1920 Mississippi spent \$430,000 on her common schools; in 1920 she spent ten times that amount. She leads all other states in the development of her agricultural high school; she has 49 of them. She is now in the consolidated high school era of her educational history; she has 700 of them. In the hills of Mississippi they multiply. I have seen fathers and mothers in my county going without many of the necessities of life voting in special bond issues for the education of their children.

When we contemplate that most of our problems in the last analysis are educational, and that our problems in agriculture, politics and elsewhere spring from ignorance and illiteracy these are hopeful signs. Wherever, the world over, people of the Anglo Saxon strain of stock have been given educational advantages the stars have begun to write for that people another story. Oliver Wendell Holmes, when a professor in Harvard, was once asked, by an anxious mother, "when the education of a child should begin." His answer was, "A hundred years before it is born." The mothers and fathers of Mississippi are a little late, but today they are determined that the educational opportunities of their children shall be equal to the educational opportunities of the children of other states.

And in speaking on education happily should we be that this great institution has been dreaming and building. She has contributed generously her share to make farming in Mississippi more pleasant and profitable. She has been that great leavening force that has kept us moving toward our destined goal. She has never been among the knockers. I turned back to Mississippi from the East several years ago, ambitious to contribute my bit for a better Mississippi, and I went about the State looking for a location and encouragement. I talked with business men and lawyers everywhere, and I heard only the voice of the knocker, repeatedly advising me to stay away. But as I went here and there about the State I met graduates of this institution engaged in teaching and extension service, and I found them everywhere full of enthusiasm for Mississippi, and I said, "Thank God for A. & M." Thank God for an institution surrounded by many obstacles that cango on talking about the latent resources in Mississippi's "unplowed spaces," preaching diversification, better hogs and cows. Thank God for an institution alive and alert to the opportunities of its people. The average legislator and farmer in Mississippi has criticized this institution because it sends so few of its graduates back to the farm. The purpose of A. & M. is to teach its students to toll and spin, to hoe and plow, of course, but this school performs a greater service than that. Her greatest service to Mississippi has been in the cultivation of community leadership among those who pass her portals. In my small town a merchant, a county agent, a creamery operator and a country editor have graduated from this institution. It is not a conceit to say that I believe these men are serving Mississippi, and the story of my small town is the story of countless communities over the State.

The cry of the time in Mississippi is for optimistic and constructive leadership, and thankful should we be that this College has taken the lead in developing it. For a generation A. & M. has served Mississippi as a sort of broad-casting station of information and enthusiasm, and every community in the State has been an unconscious receiver for this great central plant. The persistence of a few great leaders here has fought on with little praise and no profit building for us building opportunities for you and for me. I envy this vast army of students before me, more than 1,000 strong; I understand there are 40 graduates finishing this year in vocational

education. In the community interest that is being quickened here and there with the coming of the consolidated high school you are to find a place. I envy you. I have gone a little farther along the way than you, and I know some of the interesting things that you are going to experience in this great State of infinite possibilities. The atmosphere is full of aerial voices, perhaps I should say, "radio voices," whispering words of hope and opportunity to you. Sometime I wish there were fewer opportunities in Mississippi, just one or two, so I would not be kept so busy hopping from one to the other. And yet you boys have a lot to learn. Not long ago just eleven years, I sat where you now sit, and I knew that I knew more than I know that I know now.

"I used to think I knew I knew, But now I must confess, The more I know I know I know, I know I know the less." But this one thing I think I know, and I have spent a lot of time and money learning it, and I did not learn it in College, and it is this that I get out of a thing only what I have put into it; no more. You can not get something for nothing. You get out of this institution only what you have invested into it. It looks simple on the face of it, and yet had I learned that fundamental ten or twenty years ago I might to day be editor of the Commercial Appeal instead of the editor of the Neshoba Democrat. Many of these non-bookish, practical things you will have to pick up along the bitter paths of experience.

I should like to see you invest more into this institution. I have about decided that A. and M. will never have a very strong Alumni Association until the spirit of her student body steams up a little. I look about me here and I see many who have grown old, and grey, serving our Alma Mater. They need our cooperation, and the Lord knows, they deserve it. Our Alumni Association is getting the full support of our graduates. I appeal to you who are younger, and who in time may become graduates, as well as you who are older, to help us strengthen our fraternity, that our concerted effort may bring a greater School and a greater State. Let us make our Alumni Association the most potent force for good within the State. Let us give to those willing to spend their time and talent to its promotion the support they deserve. Let us substitute gratitude for indifference, and show our Alma Mater, God bless her, that devotion and fidelity she deserves. The relationship is a sacred one, like to that that exists between the mother and the babe that drinks her milk. We have a common purpose; we have a common mother; let us see that she never wants for anything. Make her proud of her offering.

And we have duties to perform that need every shoulder to the wheel. This College, along with our other state colleges and our University, must be divorced from politics, forever. A. and M. must be put upon a millage basis, in such a way that its management may know just what to expect, and that it may be relieved from its bi-annual embarrassment of going before our State Legislature like a veritable mendicant, begging for alms. It must be put upon a millage basis in such a way that its rapid growth may be taken care of, for it is now growing much faster than the assessed value of our property, and it will continue to make the same progress.

We must provide some means by which at least, occasionally, graduates of A. and M. will have representation on the State Board of Trustees for our College and University. There will never be any security for A. and M. until these things are done, and any constructive program for our Alumni Association must be prefaced by the consummation of these things; and these things done there are many other things to do. Let us foster within these walls a finer college spirit so that students may carry it away with them with redounding benefit to the school and our Association. May our professors assume less the role of kindergarteners among our men, and may students heed the advice of their elders that honor may prevail. A. and M. is less a jail than when I attended it; let's make it less so, so that our recollections and reflections of the future may have happier associations, and so that we shall ever think of our attendance here with a thrill. Let students,

faculty and alumni solve our athletic problems together. I think it a mighty poor spirit on the part of any alumnus that expresses itself in the words; "I shall never pay my dues in the Association, nor play a part in its deliberations until A. & M. has a winning team" but, after all, there is evident dissatisfaction from within and without over our athletics, and the whims of a few sensitive individuals create sentiment, and we have to contend with it.

Students, professors and Alumni, alike, let us work together for School and State, and if we would have enthusiasm for Mississippi let us drink freely of her past. Sir William Rowland.

Early in the last century Mississippi was rising to prominence and power. On his plantation, near Natchez, Sir William Dunbar anticipated the extraction of oil from cotton seed fifty years before it was done commercially. Mississippi has to her eternal credit that she established the first state college for women. General Hinds and his dragons did noble work at New Orleans. Jeff Davis and his countrymen were the heroes of Monterey and Buena Vista. Quitman placed the "stars and stripes" over the capitol of Old Mexico, and we played a leading role in the winning of the great Southwest. Sargent S. Prentiss, matchless, incomparable, on the stump and at the forum, charmed spellbound multitudes from Maine to Mississippi. Ah! Those were stirring days for us. We hear again the press of the world congratulating Robt. Walker, Secretary of the Treasury under Polk, on his tariff reports. We hear Sharkey refusing cabinet positions under Fillmore and Taylor, and recall that Jacob Thompson, Jefferson Davis, and some time later, L. Q. C. Lamar served as cabinet members to as many presidents. We recall that the Southern Convention was called at Nashville by Mississippi, and presided over by a Mississippian, and that when the States of the South seceded from the Union our heroic, but much maligned Jefferson Davis was chosen to preside over their destinies.

Before fratricidal strife tore us asunder in the 60's our sons stood high at home and abroad. Without a Civil War Mississippi would be holding her own today with her sister states, and had she never seen a slave nor a boll of cotton diversification would have made her the richest rural empire in the world. For fifty years we have been passing through a period of arrested development. "Lulled by the languor of the land of the loquat," Mississippi awaits today but the clarion call of her dreamers and builders. She awaits some George or Waltham to lead her from the mud and mire of partisanship to the golden pinnacles of civic righteousness. Factionalism, dragon-like, crushes the spirit of today and our hopes for tomorrow. Pulpit, press and politician—all who knock—help to feed it.

Thankful should we be that our people are sickening of factionalism. We have less of it, and long before the consolidated high school shall have worked its happy transformation Mississippians will cease a futile fight to dream and build. Fraternalism will then take the place of factionalism in Mississippi and her sons will prosper.

I realize, my friends, that I am playing on a new key, but enthusiasm is a catching tune, and I believe in mass psychology. Let us, therefore, dedicate this hour, our time and our talent to building and boosting Mississippi, that her disciples of discontent may be forever exterminated, and that her propagandists of pessimism may be converted to the new vision, and that we may all be baptized with the spirit of the 50's. Let this Alumni Association, and God bless her—our Alma Mater—this glorious, enterprising institution, work hand in hand with other dreamers and builders for the promotion of a greater State, "and recreate from dust the dream the knockers would have slain." And tomorrow will carry us on the wings of promise to some dizzy height from which we may see the infinite possibilities of today unfolding.

Faithful to our College, faithful to our fraternity, faithful to Mississippi, let us transform the State within a decade. You and I have faith in Mississippi, and her people, and if I have given you today but the fabric of a dream, so let it be, far from the dawn of God's first day dreams have been the mothers of great achievements.