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I

CHARLES LEWIS COCKE

Fresh from the press comes a book significant in the annals of Southern education and filling a unique place in the history of the culture and intellectual advance of Virginia women. It is the life of Charles Lewis Cocke, founder of Hollins College and for half a century its wise head. From 1846 until his death in 1901 his great personality was poured without stint into that institution.

The author of this biography, Dr. W. R. L. Smith, of Norfolk, Virginia, says that it was written "in a passion of admiration and loyal love." In just this spirit it will be read by thousands of women all over the country — old Hollins students — Mr. Cocke's "g'irls." And such love is not blind. It is sometimes the only eye that can truly see. In regard to character sketching, Stevenson says, "David King of Israel could pass sounder judgment on a man than David Hume."

But apart from such readers as we for whom this book must, as the author knows, "awaken hallowed memories and unseal the fount of tears," all who are interested in how things are brought to pass in college-making will find in its pages a revelation of achievement.

The mere outline of facts in this biography will read simply enough. Born a little more than a century ago (1820) in King William County, Virginia, the boy at sixteen entered Richmond College and, two years later, Columbian College, Washington, D. C. At twenty — an eventful year he won the Master of Arts degree, married Susanna Virginia Pleasants, of Henrico County, and was called to Richmond College as instructor in mathematics and manager of the dining hall. In 1846 he moved to Botetourt Springs, near what is now Roanoke City, to take charge of the co-educational school out of which he was later to create Hollins College. The department for boys was discontinued in 1852, and from that time the institution has been devoted exclusively to young women. Until his death, twenty years ago, the history of Mr. Cocke was that of Hollins.

Into these facts the biographer has deftly and sympathetically woven the high-born intelligence, the integrity, and the religious reverence of the old Virginia home, Edgehill; the executive ability of the mere lad, who took charge of a kinsman's farm and raised on it the best crop it had ever borne; the quick, eager decision of the boy of fifteen when offered the choice of farm life or education for a profession; the leaping ambition and assiduous application of the college student; the manliness of the youth of twenty, on whom leadership had thus early thrust its burdens; the young Christian's quiet consecration and clear-cut purpose as to his own field of service, and the dignity, self sacrifice, and high achievement of his life-long adherence to that single aim.

And what was that purpose? Charles L. Cocke declared it at the age of nineteen, during his senior college year, in a letter to a kinswoman of the old home neighborhood: "To devote my life to the higher education of women in the South, which I consider one of our greatest needs. In this decision my promised wife concurs."

Such was the "majestic consecration" of the college boy in 1839. Inspired by the University of Virginia — opened fourteen years before — he resolved "to give to Virginia women the same thorough mental training as that afforded to young men." Recalling how often we heard the name of the University from Mr. Cocke's lips and how bracing was the constant touch with its standards, we are not surprised to find his biographer writing: "The educational ideals of Thomas Jefferson became the inspiration of his youth,
and with astonishing tenacity and unity of purpose he pursued them until he worked out Hollins College. . . . His work stimulated the founding of other like institutions in Virginia and the South. Thus he built up wiser than he knew.

Heads of institutions will read with keen zest and oftentimes with amazement the financial history of Hollins. For forty-five years it was in the hands of a Board of Trustees, Mr. Cocke's valued friends, who always held him in highest esteem. But all gifts of money from all sources, first to last, amounted to $35,000. Exactly half of this was donated by Mr. and Mrs. John Hollins, of Lynchburg. Of the total sum not a dollar ever touched Mr. Cocke's hand. It was all paid to the trustees and every cent of it put into new buildings and accommodations for the growing school.

"He pressed on the attention of the trustees the certainty of continuous demand for enlarged facilities. To provide for this, it was agreed that the revenue from the boarding department should go to the trustees, who should devote it to that purpose. How ridiculously small that revenue was likely to be may be gathered from the fact that [at that time] a student was boarded at the rate of $5.00 a month . . . . Mr. Cocke was to pay his teachers' salaries and maintain himself and family out of the tuition funds . . . . Neither he nor any one of his sons and daughters, who worked so loyally with him, ever received a salary from the Board . . . . What remained in the [tuition] treasury after the teachers were paid was his. Out of that residue, it soon became evident, must come much of the means for repairs and improvements. There was no other source from which to draw. Improvements were made, and self-denial paid the bills. Now, while this involved inconveniences, it did not, of course, mean the making of gifts to the trustees. In just business fashion, they recorded each outlay of this kind as a loan to Mr. Cocke . . . . They had no possible way of liquidating that debt. What could they do? What ought they to have done? They solved the question by offering to give Mr. Cocke a deed to their institution in satisfaction of their debt. The proposition was declined. He did not want to own the college. Such had never been his aim. He saw that the move would be a relief to the trustees, but a disadvantage to the school. He deprecated the idea of its going into private ownership."

But a quarter of a century later, the year before his death, Mr. Cocke saw that some settlement had to be made, and nothing else seemed possible. So in 1900 he "gave up his notes and bonds to the trustees and they in turn gave over the institution . . . . and Hollins became the property of Mr. Cocke. It was not the consummation that he wished but there was no other alternative."

Needless to say that heavy must have been the financial load, all those years, of a big institution, conducted on a basis of highest gentility, with no church or state or millionaire to help. But even during the Civil War Hollins did not close her doors, though in the midst of many sacrifices and perils, and depressed by the ghastly sight of the unfinished Main building, with boards nailed over its windows. By 1870 a new era dawned, and from that time to the present, Hollins has known great expansion and progress. Is the key to Mr. Cocke's success to be found in these words wrung from his reticent soul in a dark moment long ago? "I will go on; I will trust in God and the people . . . . We must not descend to the character of a neighborhood school."

"Into the holy enterprise," writes Dr. Smith, "he grandly flung himself, his property, and his family." How real was his achievement Virginia knows, and the South, and our broad country.

With the institution thus entirely dependent on the income from its students, how easy would it have been for a man less truly great to lower the standards and make graduation not quite so difficult. Mr. Cocke's record from 1855 to 1900 shows that among approximately six thousand students, only one hundred and twenty-five were awarded the full diploma. From this it is easily seen that the word "fail" was not left out of "the bright lexicon of youth" at Hollins, but was in frequent requisition among us, to express a very possible event. However, we well knew that the verb was always intransitive—that we were to be the subjects not the objects. Nobody was going to "fail us" or to "pass us." Facing the rigid examinations, we could quote with much feeling, though with a free punctuation,

"If we should fail—We fail."

Soft pedagogy, vaunting itself as progressive, might call our revered president strict.
But all must call him just. Dr. Smith cleaves his way straight to the truth:

"Mr. Cocke was a worker, and he hated idleness as sin. Unrelentingly he demanded work. Never a student was allowed to escape that Imperious law. For this this girls gave him honor. Well did they understand that Hollins was not for fashionable finish, or for money squandering, but for downright honest study."

Here is a hint of the best thing, after all, that Mr. Cocke did for us. He gave us something to respect. We knew that he was sincere and consecrated to high service. And we could see that the bedrock foundation of his life was the religion of the New Testament—not some mere borrowed, diluted form of its ethical teaching, but the pure doctrines of the Book itself. And so, when a dozen years ago a new school for the young women of Virginia was begun at Harrisonburg, request was made of Hollins that a Bible from Mr. Cocke's office might be Volume One of the new library here and thus pass the torch from the eldest Virginia school for girls to the youngest.

There are in the biography a hundred little touches, too, that bring back to us the man in the old likeness that we knew; how horses and boys obeyed him "without whipping" because each knew what he wanted him to do; how he found a way to feed the Richmond College students on what they liked—oysters and raisins; how with his faculty he "issued no commands, but trusted his teachers, inviting them to freedom of initiative and complimenting them with the expectation of efficient service."

No account of Mr. Cocke's life could omit his wise, kind, and helpful relations with the colored people. After settling in the Valley he would ride seven miles and back on Sunday afternoons to hold Sunday school for the slaves at Big Lick, now Roanoke. Negro preachers caught his message and passed it on to every plantation around. All his life they consulted him as a brother, wise and good. At his death a negro teacher wrote: "Thousands of our people with bowed heads mourn his loss and revere his memory." In the celebration of Mr. Cocke's hundredth birthday last year I saw honored place given to four aged negroes who have rounded out half a century of service at Hollins.

In passages like the following, one almost forgets the transparent medium of this delightful book, being lost in reminiscence and in the restored presence of Mr. Cocke himself:

"To thousands of us still, no figure on the Hollins quadrangle ever stands out so statuesque as his large form, becomingly clad in a Prince Albert suit, and surmounted with a favorite tall beaver hat. As he walked in unconscious majesty, one could hear that resonant voice, issuing orders or bestowing courtly greetings. The grace and evenness of the old Virginia gentleman sat on him like a crown."

ELIZABETH P. CLEVELAND

II

WHAT SOME OF VIRGINIA'S WOMEN ARE DOING

Virginia women have taken an important part in social service of all kinds in recent years: they have participated in a successful struggle for equal suffrage; through health and charitable organizations they are responsible for decreased suffering and higher standards of moral and physical life; they have aided in making a more efficient educational system; the organization of club work among our boys and girls has accomplished great good; and their moral influence was largely responsible for the enactment of our present prohibition laws. These are only a few of the phases of work in which the women of Virginia are accomplishing things. To show exactly what is being accomplished in these varieties of service, I shall try to state in brief form some of the things that specific women have actually done and what they are doing now. There are others who are doing work of much importance, but because of the limits of space, I am able to mention only a small number.

SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

Formerly women were actually trained away from a sense of responsibility in civic, state, and national affairs. They were trained to think it unwomanly to be participants