

A Homecoming Soliloquy

by B. Smith Haworth, Emeritus

Professor of History and Political Science

The best compliment ever given to a college was to call it "home." The most significant tradition in college life may well be "Homecoming." For the need for a second home is great indeed. In our first homes we were nurtured in life and love; in our college home we shook off our provincialism; we extended the boundaries of our concerns; we found practical applications for our larger dreams.

If all of that sounds wordy and a bit unreal, perhaps it is this; in college we had experience, which if we come home, we can live over again and be renewed in purpose and spirit.

I joined the Ottawa family nearly fifty years ago. There were three buildings; four, if one counted the old "gym," hardly worth the title. Resources were severely limited, activities restricted. Football was almost a lost cause in 1913 for there were not only no Ottawa victories, but no score of any kind during the entire season. What athletics lacked, debate and oratory furnished in good measure. The school orator, on one occasion, went to Emporia, via special train, "under guard" and when a contest was held in Ottawa in the Rohrbaugh Theater, the mayor required the presidents of all the schools involved to pledge payment for any property which might be destroyed. As it turned out, the fighting occurred in the street, according to the *Herald*, "all the way to the Santa Fe depot."

Dormitories, except the Cottage, were non-existent; personnel not highly classified. One part-time student was secretary to the President, registrar and, to some extent, business manager. The Student Council had charge of all business connected with student activities: collections, purchases and awards. One coach struggled with all the sports, including baseball, and conducted all the physical education classes. Social life was individualistic and spontaneous. Candy making, picnics, walks to the "cut" and "Som-R-Set" parties established the social pattern and represented the social spirit. The "chapel" was a favorite spot for impromptu conversational "dates," but steady dating before the senior year encountered considerable social disapproval. Altogether the drama and the glamour of Homecoming with its coronation, its parades and its climactic game were far beyond some distant horizon.

But the spirit of yesterday is the same as the spirit of to-

day. What was home then is home now. Fifty years ago, exactly as now, young men and women traveled the roads that led to truth in so far as the signposts made the way known. Then as now, the hunger and thirst after righteousness were filled with the sense of a Presence to those who were still enough to know. On every side there were, and are those with outstretched hands and radiant smiles; willing sacrifices on the altar of friendship. And through the years young men of vigor and purpose proved on the gridiron, win or lose, that the true value of competition was devotion to a cause which was bigger than the game itself. Perhaps it was that devotion to a cause which inspired two teams of girls to play a game of football in the days of World War II when there were no boys to carry on. At any rate the girls did it, replete with all the regalia. If some hair was grabbed in the tackles, it must have been the law of survival which was on display. The game made headlines and a lush offer to repeat the show on the California coast, but that was carrying tradition a bit too far.

Now it is 1962 and once more I have come "home." To wander among the campus trees; to check the "squeaks" in the "Ad" Building stairs; to gasp over the prospects of a Student Union and to wonder about the national debt; to watch with feeling and a bit of envy the flashing starlight in youthful eyes.

Just for a day I'll push Cuba and civil defense into some recess of forgetfulness. For a few fleeting hours I'll be submerged in cheers and the odor of Homecoming "mums." In a completely ridiculous but lovely dream I'll ignore population explosions, automation and the stock market.

For I have come HOME.

The Old Grad
(Class of 1917)