

Founders' Day Oration 1918
By William P. Woodard
Taken from the 1918 "Ka-Col" yearbook

Great, indeed, is our reverence for those who founded our Alma Mater. It was thru their lives of sacrificial devotion that we have been able to enjoy these larger opportunities of growth and development. They felt a divine sense of responsibility. They sought by their gifts to enrich and ennoble the lives of others. Their work was not in vain. "Their line has gone out through all the Earth, and their words to the end of the world." Even as they answered the call of opportunity, so we, the class of 1918, long for the time when we shall hear that call and be privileged to cast our mite on the altar of service. Only in so doing can we fitly show our gratitude for the blessings which have come into our lives. We humbly pause on this Founders Day to thank, to honor, and to bless our Alma Mater and those whose lives have been blended with her life in loving sacrifice.

The year 1914 marks the beginning of a new epoch in history. Since then, Europe has been one seething mass of fire and blood. The maelstrom has spread out and gradually engulfed the whole world. Civilization is threatened with annihilation. The forces of evil and destruction fight on relentlessly. Humanity has stood aghast as the arch-demon of Potsdam has slowly tightened his fiendish grip about the throat of the eastern hemisphere. One after another the allied nations have met, checked but not repelled the onrushing Hun. It seems that 'ere the sword of this terrible murderer shall be stayed America, too, must pass through the fearful ordeal of fire. A Pentecost of calamity is upon us.

In such stirring times it is no wonder that we find a new spirit. The vaunted individualism of the past has disappeared. The larger self is manifest. Society is again recognized as the stronghold of democracy. Personal wish is absorbed by the will of the State. Freedom and justice, not for the nation but for the whole world, is the battle-cry.

Every government must depend upon its enlightened citizens for support. This is more particularly true in a republic, where so much depends upon the movement of the masses. The American college has always been the hearth of liberty. It has given to the nation many of its most noble men, who have led the people under the banner of Truth. Visions have been kindled in the hearts of young college men and women, which have set the world ablaze with a new light. The present cataclysm is an outgrowth of the insistence that American principles, principles which have been nourished and developed in the college halls, are the proper standards for all humanity. When

this struggle has finally ceased it will be to the manifold institutions of higher learning which dot the country that the new age will look for its leaders.

In the Spring of 1917, when the United States cast its lot in the defense of civilization against the Imperial German Government, every member of Kalamazoo College became extremely restless. The positive course of the Administration was very uncertain. It was for the pathway of duty that each student and professor diligently searched. Then came the call for volunteers and the boys began to leave—our comrades. Gladly and willingly they put aside the hopes of a lifetime in order to preserve the integrity and honor of their country. When later the arm of Uncle Sam reached out and tapped others gently upon the shoulders, they too responded and took their places in the armies of the nation. Today, through our friends, our personal representative, the spirit of old Kazoo is helping to fire the heart of every soldier to put his last ounce of energy into the momentous struggle for liberty.

These are truly times that try men's souls. The world is groping in darkness and despair for a new light. Columbia holds aloft the torch of liberty and points out the way. America seeks to bring order out of chaos, peace out of confusion. Thus far every conceivable effort has been made and failed. Every approach to the enemy has been met by a rebuff. Force is the only arbiter which they will recognize; hence, in the words of Woodrow Wilson, "we will use force to the utmost, force without stint or limit." By force shall we establish the righteousness of our cause. America can depend upon her citizens to fight to the finish. She can depend upon her citizens for support in field or factory. America knows that the colleges will ever be true to her cause, that they will send forth men and women filled with inspiration and determination which only a college can give; men and women who shall be trained, capable leaders in a new age of democracy.

Alma Mater! What mean these words to us? Naught but the embodiment of those spirits whose association has so richly blessed and glorified our lives! Our Alma Mater means no more than that which has been made manifest in the short time we have sojourned in these halls. The glories of the past impress us but little if they do not find a two-fold expression in the present.

Our tribute to the founders of this college must be made to those who are now seeking to keep alive the noble spirit of the past, those who have endeavored to spur us on to greater achievement. We were thrilled, early in the war, when our honored President said that should the war continue long, America would be forced to draw the sword. His intense loyalty and patriotism will ever be a beacon light in our path of life. The untiring efforts of his associates to urge us toward the highest and the best can never be forgotten. In the eternal values of the spirit, the past four years are priceless

in the inspiration they have given for future work. It is the intense devotion to the ideal of service which has caused our Alma Mater to give so bountifully of her children in the defense of the flag.

In the years to come, if God permit, we shall fondly look back upon our college days, but in this crucial hour of the nation's life we cannot regret that the time has come for us to assume new duties. Abroad the land and on the fields of France, the sons of Kalamazoo are rendering their last full measure of devotion to the cause of liberty and righteousness. Our own classmates are among the number. While they thus fight, can we sit idle and be content? Not a thousand times no! We have been blessed with a noble heritage. From this time forth we must spend every effort to augment that heritage and transmit it to the coming generation. Only thus shall we prove ourselves worthy of the trust placed in our hands. The nation's call for service has found a response in our hearts. Not until our souls pass into the hands of their Maker shall we pause to rest from our work. The ideals of our Alma Mater, the principles of the Stars and Stripes, the life of the Man of Galilee must be made the dominating and controlling principles in the hearts of all mankind.