

## WILLIAM PRESTON FEW

### Dr. Few Served Duke Nearly Half a Century As Dean and President

William Preston Few was born in Greenville county, S. C., December 29, 1867. He was one of three sons and five children of Dr. Benjamin F. Few and Rachel Kendrick. His father, a physician, served as a surgeon in the Confederate army.

His preparation for college was in the Greer high school under J. W. Kennedy, afterwards president of the Presbyterian college at Clinton, and J. M. Manley, later professor of English in the University of Chicago, who gave him his first impulse to scholarship.

Young Few entered Wofford college in 1885. There he showed a special interest in literary studies and distinguished himself in speaking, debating, and writing. He was one of the sophomore declaimers, a junior debater, and one of the originators and first editors of the Wofford College Journal. Among the teachers, who were most helpful to him were Prof. J. B. Henneman, then teacher of Greek and afterwards of English at the University of the South, and F. C. Woodward, professor of English. His closest friends were in Chi Phi fraternity of which he was a member. He received the A.B. degree in 1889, and his graduating speech was on "The Benefits of Reading."

After his graduation, Few taught for the year 1889-90 in St. John's academy, Darlington, S. C. He was an instructor in the Wofford College Fitting school, teaching Latin and English, in 1890-91, and instructor in English in Wofford college in 1891-92.

In September 1892, the desire for training under the ablest scholars in the English and other language studies in which he had become deeply interested led the young Wofford instructor to enter the graduate school of Harvard university. There he remained four years under the inspiring influence of such men as Prof. F. J. Child and G. L. Kittredge. Though he lost more than a year's time by reason of trouble with his eyes, he received the A.M. degree in 1893 and the Ph.D. degree in 1896.

After leaving Harvard with his degree, Dr. Few was not long in finding his life work. On August 1, 1894, Rev. Dr. John C. Kilgo, a South Carolinian, had been elected president of Trinity college. Part of his vigorous constructive work in the upbuilding of Trinity college, which had moved to Durham in 1892, consisted in surrounding himself with a group of thoroughly trained and enthusiastic young faculty members. In 1896 he called the Wofford and Harvard graduate to be professor of English.

Not only did Dr. Few display marked ability as a teacher but he also interested himself in the administrative work of the college with such success that President Kilgo depended upon him for constant and efficient assistance in carrying out his policies.

In 1902 Dr. Few was elected dean of Trinity. He added the duties of this position to the work of his professorship until 1910 when President Kilgo resigned following his election as Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. When the trustees of Trinity were confronted with the problem of choosing a new president, it was natural that they should call upon the able dean who had become such a sturdy figure in President Kilgo's constructive administration.

With the hearty endorsement of Bishop Kilgo, the trustees selected Dr. Few as his successor. He was formally inaugurated on November 9, 1910, in the presence of one of the most representative and brilliant educational gatherings ever held in the South.

Although Trinity and Duke under President Few developed as have few educational institutions in American history, he steadily urged colleges to turn from the temptation to seek mere bigness. He urged that the greatness of a college or university depends upon its ideals and its influence rather than upon its numbers.

Though a busy university president, Dr. Few gave time and thought unstintingly to the religious and educational work of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, now the Methodist Church. He was a delegate to the General Conference since 1914, a member of the Education Commission since 1898, a member of the General Sunday School Board since 1914, and one of the most active officers of Duke Memorial Methodist Church and Sunday school in Durham. He was a member of the committee that prepared the legislation for the United Conference of the three branches of Methodism.

Dr. Few was always in much demand as a speaker and writer whose ideas were always expressed in language of power and distinction. He profited greatly by an intimate acquaintance with Shakespeare and other English masters of style. He was altogether exceptional in his ability to find exactly the right word or phrase to express an idea. Some of his more important addresses on educational, civic, and literary topics appeared in publications of the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Southern States, the volume on "The American College" published on the occasion of the Allegheny College Centennial, the publications of the North Carolina Literary and Historical association, the South Atlantic Quarterly, and others.

As a writer and later as one of the editors, Dr. Few was closely identified with the South Atlantic Quarterly from the first issue. Many of his thoughtful and strikingly expressed articles provoked discussion in the public press of the country and stimulated other writers.

President Few's educational leadership received recognition in many quarters. Soon after his inauguration as President of Trinity college, he received the LL.D. degree from Wofford college, his alma mater. Later he was invited to make addresses at Southwestern university and Allegheny college, and both of these institutions conferred the LL.D. degree upon him.

He also received the LL.D. degree from Syracuse university, Ohio Wesleyan university, the University of North Carolina, and Davidson college; the Litt.D. degree from Birmingham-Southern; the Ed.D. degree from Southern college; and the LL.D. degree from Boston university in June 1940, at which time he spoke at that institution's centennial.

Harvard university made him a member of the committee appointed by the Board of Overseers to study the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. He served as president of the North Carolina State Literary and Historical association in 1913. His great interest in the educational progress of the Negro race led to his election, in 1918, as a trustee of the Negro Rural School Fund supported by the Anna T. Jeanes Foundation. He was a member of the General Board of Christian Education; he served as president of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Southern States. Dr. Few was a life member of the North Carolina Education association, an honorary member of the Durham Rotary club, and director of the State University Library.

(Continued in Column Three)



### We Mourn His Passing . . .

A great man died early this morning, and the awful tyranny of words forbids adequate written or spoken tribute to his greatness. William Preston Few is dead.

President of Duke university for thirty years, Dr. Few, despite the full and pressing business of his position, was ever accessible and sympathetic and patient and wise. No person was too small, no person was too unimportant for his interested attention and, if his cause was a just one, for his undying loyalty.

An able administrator, an educator of infinite wisdom and industry, President Few built a great university where a small one had stood. The Duke university of today, growing swiftly and healthily and alertly, is the product of his almost single-handed industry and intelligence over a period of more than thirty years. This man has laid the foundation upon which Duke university has grown, is growing, and will continue to grow from now until the end.

He was a remarkable man. President of a small, practically unheard-of college, he worked ceaselessly towards its growth, physical and educational. In 1924, a long-time dream came true in the endowment of the university by James B. Duke, a friend and a far-sighted philanthropist. This was no idle, wishing dream but an active, vital dream towards the crystallization of which Dr. Few had been industriously working over a period of years.

The Duke endowment, making a dream a reality, was in itself one of the greatest tributes ever paid a man. James B. Duke had caught the enthusiasm of the president of the little North Carolina college; he had seen the vision of a great national university; he had supreme faith in the wisdom of this man and in his ability to produce an institution of sound principle, brilliant education, and national service.

Out of dollars and cents arose a university. Foremost in the mind of the president and manifest in his actions was a strong determination that mere bigness was not to be the aim of the institution he was building. He stressed ideals and influence, not numbers. To the new physical plant he attracted a teaching and administrative staff that was able and determined to educate soundly the young men who came here to learn.

Since Dr. Few's inauguration in 1910, Duke university has grown from a small school with less than four hundred students and a faculty of forty to a large, cosmopolitan university comprised of ten school and colleges and with a teaching and administrative staff of approximately 1,600.

President Few was, although the word has been overused, a beloved man, possessing a rare serenity and a limitless patience. All who knew him were fiercely loyal; all who met him came away with admiring respect. In his informal strolls about the campus, he loved to stop for a brief chat with anyone who had the time. He was never too busy for a kind word, and, above all, he was courteous. His utter lack of affectation was, as another has put it, "Lincolnesque." He was a great man.

We mourn his passing.

—R. M. L.

### Community Mourns As Plans Are Made For Funeral Friday

Dr. William Preston Few died this morning in Duke hospital at 6:55 a. m.

The president's last illness lasted exactly one week. He was stricken with coronary thrombosis at his home last Wednesday morning, October 9. Hospital specialists who attended him unceasingly admitted from the first that his condition was very grave, but at intervals gave hopeful reports that the president seemed stronger.

This morning, however, the university community arose to find the flags at half-mast. The sure hand which for thirty years had guided the destiny of Trinity college and Duke university had slipped quietly from the helm.

Funeral services will be held at 3 o'clock Friday afternoon in the chapel. Funeral arrangements provide that the body of the president will lie in state in the chapel Friday morning, surrounded by an honor guard of students.

The university will cease all official functions on the funeral day. No classes will be held on Friday.

Interment will be in a chapel vault. Pallbearers will be members of the university faculty.

Dr. Few would have been 73 years old on December 29.

He is survived by his wife, the former Miss Mary Reamy Thomas of Martinsville, Virginia; four sons: William Few, electrical engineer of the Clark Comptroller company in Cleveland, Ohio; Lyne S. Few and Kendrick S. Few, graduate students at Harvard university; and Randolph R. Few, a sophomore at Duke.

A brother and sister, I. P. Few and Miss Ellie Few of Greer, S. C., are the only other members of the president's immediate family who survive him.

Among the number of nieces and nephews surviving Dr. Few are Dr. Eugene C. Few, pastor of the Druid Hills Methodist Church in Atlanta, Ga., and Ben F. Few, an executive of Liggett and Myers Tobacco company in New York.

Absent members of his family were notified, and were present at the time of his passing. With typical thoughtfulness, the stricken president asked at first that Lyne and Ken not be called home from Harvard. "I don't want to interrupt their work," he explained.

Cheerful and serene till the end, Dr. Few was allowed to see only his family and closest friends during his last week. Even the many beautiful flowers which were sent to him, including a large basket from the student body he loved so dearly, could not be placed in his room.

Few university presidents have been so universally loved by their students. Genuine sorrow was manifest this morning as the students learned they would never again be greeted by his friendly smile and cheerful good-morning on their way to class.

Faculty and administration members, who revered him and respected his every word, felt the loss deeply.

The distinguished educator held an A.B. degree from Wofford college, an M.A. and a Ph.D. from Harvard university, and 10 honorary degrees from universities throughout the nation.

He was connected with Trinity college and Duke university for 44 years, coming to the institution as professor of English literature in 1886. Six years after he came to Trinity college, he became dean of the college. After eight years in that capacity, he was elected in 1910 to succeed John C. Kilgo as president.

An intimate friend of James B. Duke, President Few aided and encouraged that benefactor in the founding of the Duke Endowment, which made Duke university possible. To his capable hands fell the task of changing a small Methodist college into a great national university—a task to which he applied himself with tireless energy, patience and wisdom.

Having guided his fledgling university through its most trying years, and having lived to see it feel the strength of its wings, President Few might well have looked back, in his last hours, on a job well done.

### President Few Served—

(Continued from Column One)

In politics, Dr. Few was an Independent Democrat with considerable emphasis on the "Independent." He always stood firmly for what he considered sound principles in the conduct of public affairs, but took no active part in politics of the partisan variety. In recent years, in common with other leaders, he held deep concern for the state of democracy in the world and in his public addresses he emphasized the responsibility that rests on education in the task of preserving it. He was greatly concerned to bring the faculty, students, and resources of Duke university into thorough cooperation with the government in its defense program.

Having traveled throughout Europe and the United States and being a discriminating student of current economic, social, and international affairs, his more recent addresses and writings reflected his grasp of the essential meanings of affairs at home and abroad. Tall, slender, and quick in his movements, Dr. Few gave little indication of having passed his three score and ten years. His angular frame, short beard (which only in the last several years became gray), and deep set eyes gave him a kindly Lincolnesque appearance, and saw in him much of the manner and character of another great American, Robert E. Lee.

Possessing a rare serenity, a patient disposition, the power of concentration, and the ability to grasp facts and situations, Dr. Few combined the traits desired in the successful executive. With all his many responsibilities and duties, he was considerate of his fellow man, democratic, and accessible. He was particularly devoted to his family. Mrs. Few was Miss Mary Reamy Thomas, a Trinity alumna of notable Virginia ancestry, before their marriage in 1911. There are four sons, William, Lyne, Kendrick, and Randolph. A fifth son, Yancey Preston, died in 1939 at the age of 16.

President Few's administration was one of marked expansion for Trinity and Duke. Since 1910 the student enrollment increased from 400 to more than 3500 annually; the university faculty expanded from 40 to more than 400, and the physical plant was greatly enlarged. One of the largest structures on the university campus, the dormitory for graduate and professional students, erected in 1938, was named Few Quadrangle in his honor. The university organization now comprises ten schools and colleges with an aggregate teaching and administrative staff of over 1,600 persons.