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William Campbell Preston, Student, Statesman, President, Professor

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WILLIAM CAMPBELL PRESTON,

Student, Statesman, President
& Professor

being the
First Annual Preston Lecture
delivered on April 10th, 1996

by

PATRICK SCOTT

COLUMBIA, S.C.:
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Dr. and Mrs. Lewis, ladies and gentlemen:

I have been invited this evening to talk about the life and significance of William Campbell Preston, for whom this college is named. Such an occasion, the quasi-alumnal invocation of an institutional hero, is essentially for insiders, and I am not an insider. I am all too aware that within the University there are South Carolina historians and Carolina alumni who are far more qualified than I, merely an adoptive Carolinian, to speak about William Campbell Preston.

Moreover, for that distinctively American, indeed characteristically Southern, genre, the eulogy, the genre of which Preston himself was so notable a practitioner, few cultures can seem more alien than my own heritage, whether ironically English or sceptically Scots. How can a late-20th century expatriate Brit ever adequately eulogize a silver-tongued antebellum orator? Thus ethnically disadvantaged and generically challenged, I am therefore the more honored by, because the less fitted for, your invitation to give the first annual Preston Lecture.
"To celebrate the memory of departed worth has, from time immemorial, been considered as a duty, not less salutary to the living, than respectful to the dead." So pronounced, in 1819, Professor Robert Henry, one of my personal culture-heroes, professor here almost continuously from 1818 till his death in 1856, and one of my only two South Carolina predecessors in the teaching of literature to have studied where modern literature teaching began, at my own university of Edinburgh.

My other Edinburgh-educated predecessor was, of course, William Campbell Preston, not himself Carolinian by birth, but a Carolina graduate of the Class of 1812, four times elected Trustee of this institution, who served Carolina as President and Professor of Belles-Lettres from 1845 to 1851, in its period of greatest antebellum fame and prosperity.

Salutary to the living, respectful to the dead. What are the facts, what the achievements of Preston, that now merit our respect? His prominence was after all partly a matter of parentage. Preston was born in Philadelphia in 1794, eldest son of a Scots-Irish congressman from Saltville, Virginia. One grandfather commanded a regiment at Guilford Courthouse, and another the revolutionary forces at King's Mountain; his grandmother was a sister of Patrick Henry, the family related by marriage to the Madisons. As Preston dryly observed, "I was well born and my mother in childhood did not fail to let me understand it." Indeed, George Washington himself called by to kiss the baby, and "so vividly" and so often did Preston's mother retell the tale, that, in later life, he wrote, "I can hardly persuade myself that I do not remember the scene."

Yet to the undoubted advantages of birth were added the still greater advantage of a wide and varied

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2 There appears to be no modern biography of Preston. Published sources on which I draw include: James H. Rion, A.M., William C. Preston, Ll.D., as President, and Belles-Lettres Professor, of the South Carolina College, An address delivered before the Class of 1850, at their Second Quinquennial Meeting, December 1860 (Columbia, S.C.: R. W. Gibbes, 1861); Maximilian La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, from its Incorporation, 2nd ed. (Charleston, S.C.: Walker, Evans and Cogswell, 1874), esp. pp. 292-315; Walter L. Miller, "William Campbell Preston," 5 parts, in The Green Bag (Boston), 9.9-10.1 (September 1899-January 1900); The Reminiscences of William C. Preston, ed. Minnie Clare Yarborough (Chapel Hill, N.C.:

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education. It was almost by chance that Preston became a Carolinian. Indeed, his appreciation for Carolina itself was based on less satisfactory experience at another college. After tutoring at home, he had been bundled off at the age of only fourteen to what would later become Washington & Lee, a college at that time, he wrote, "superintended by lazy and ignorant Presbyterian preachers, and filled with dirty boys of low manners and morals."5 Luckily for his future, Preston's health broke down under the strain, and in 1809 his parents dispatched him south on horseback, with one servant, in search of warmer climes. In Greenville, he met a judge who was going to Columbia, in a Columbia hotel he met some young Charlestonians who were about to matriculate at the recently-opened South Carolina College, and on an impulse he himself enrolled. Prophetically, it was his knowledge of English, not of classics, that got him in, for he passed the entrance examination for the sophomore class, not by translating the assigned passage of Vergil, but by declaiming from memory the equivalent "fifteen or twenty lines" from Dryden's English version.6 In 1812, still only sixteen, he graduated third in his class, with a commencement speech on his Virginia hero, Thomas Jefferson.

He had been destined by his family for a career in politics and the law. After periods of residence in Richmond to observe the Virginia legislature, and in Washington, where he lived with the Madisons while he got to know the members of Congress, he sowed some wild oats as a law student in the Richmond office of William Wirt, soon to become Attorney-General. Next he set out to see for himself the world outside the South, riding some four thousand miles in five months through the then-western states of Tennessee and Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois, Missouri and Ohio. In Missouri, he lived with the Governor and participated in ceremonial treaty-councils with Indian chiefs.

Then, in May 1817, he sailed for Europe, by way of New York, with letters of introduction from Jefferson, Madison, and the newly-inaugurated President Monroe. He began in Ireland, traveling to Dublin through "a fine country . . . rich and highly cultivated," but where "beggary, starvation, crime and punishment were on every side," nonetheless running across an American acquaintance rather mysteriously en route to Russia.7 Arriving in Liverpool almost penniless and in a high fever, he awoke from his delirium to find he was being cared for by the U.S. Consul himself and "a small gentleman dressed in black," who turned out to be Washington Irving, with whom Preston went on to tour not only rural Wales (where they visited the hermit Ladies of Llangollen), and the new industrial cities of Birmingham and Manchester, but central and Highland Scotland, where "every stream and every rock was vocal with poetry." Together, the pair visited Bannockburn and Stirling, Smollett's birthplace and Rob Roy's cave.

5 Reminiscences, p. 4.

6 La Borde, History, p. 294; the passage was Aeneid, Lib. XI, from v. 268.

7 Reminiscences, p. 28.
following canto by canto the route of Sir Walter Scott's 
Lady of the Lake (in the treatment of landscape, Scott, Preston thought, was "beyond any writer since Homer"), and passing by way of Glasgow, to Ayrshire and the land of Burns, where "with reverence and awe," they gazed on "the humble mansion where was born the greatest British poet since Shakespeare." Irving's greatest problem was to get Preston up in the morning: he was, Irving reported, "as slow getting under way as a Dutch lugger," but, it later emerges, Irving wanted them to set out on each day's hike at 6 a.m. Still to come were Paris (where Preston was briefly arrested and got to known Lafayette), and travels through France, Switzerland, and Italy.

But in the fall of 1818, Preston joined a fellow South Carolinian, his college friend Hugh Swinton Legare, as a student in Edinburgh, the Athens of the North and home to that Scottish Enlightenment so influential in early nineteenth-century American intellectual life. Here they studied natural sciences with John Playfair, and Preston at least attended also the lecture-course in Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres that Edinburgh had pioneered.

Here in Edinburgh, too, the South Carolinians took the course in civil law, still taught entirely in Latin--texts, lectures, and class-discussion included. Scottish jurisprudence, jealously independent of its more pragmatic common-law English counterpart, stressed the constant recourse to legal first principle. It was a turning-point in their intellectual development. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that the Scottish debates over vires, the jurisdictional disputes between Edinburgh and Westminster over the 1707 Act of Union governing the compact between the two independent nations, influenced Legare and Preston in their attitude to the crucial issue of federal-state relations that would later be called Nullification.

Preston returned to the United States in 1820, married a Columbia girl whom he had met while in


On the importance of civil law for Legare's later career, see William C. Preston, Eulogy on Hugh Swinton Legare, delivered at the request of the City of Charleston (n.p. [Charleston, S.C.]: published by order of the Mayor and Alderman of Charleston, n.d. [1843]); Patrick Scott, "Two Antebellum South Carolinians at Edinburgh," University of Edinburgh Journal, 30:1 (June 1981), 48-51; Rion, p. 10, describes Preston himself as a reasoning lawyer, not a case-lawyer in the common-law tradition.


10 For Scottish influence in the early South Carolina College
college, was admitted to the Virginia bar, and soon thereafter moved back to South Carolina to practice law and enter politics.

His long years of classical and legal education coloured his first political intervention, an extraordinary essay of 1823 on free trade and the Tariff question, shaped as an address to a Louisiana congressman. Like his fellow-Southerners, Preston opposed the tariff on philosophical grounds, as subordinating the nation to a small faction of manufacturing interests, "a narrow selfish, and sordid monopoly." "Every owner of a manufacturing establishment," he predicted, "will have as many cities for his tributaries as the barbarian king gave to Themistocles." 

But equally Preston's perspective was influenced by his American and European travels. Where others already saw the issue in sectional North-South terms, Preston introduced the western states also, to pose instead broader questions of social harmony and national coherence, as a predominantly agricultural nation sought to integrate the heavily-localized stirrings of industrial growth:

With a thin population [Preston wrote], a country abounding in extensive forests, a fertile soil, high wages, and an easy commerce, how can the inhabitants of this country be converted into Manufacturers? What political legerdemain can assimilate them to the population of Birmingham or Manchester? What power of legislation can call the ploughman from his fields, or the rifleman from the woods, or the boatman from the river, to crowd them in narrow apartments, where they will waste their free spirits in unwholesome confinement and spend the strength of their sinewy arms on shuttle and spindles?

Were the disruptions of the New South ever foreseen so eloquently? Would Preston, Fugitive before his time, have recognized in the ephemeral political debates of the 1820s such historic issues, had his long years of education and travel been chronologically shortened or geographically circumscribed?

Certain it is that his ability was soon recognized in his adopted state, and that his political influence rested on his character, not simply on the repetition of sectional shibboleths. Thrice elected, from 1828, to the South Carolina House, Preston was a nullifier who resisted imposing nullification tests on others. Twice elected, in 1833 and in 1837, as one of South Carolina's United States Senators, Preston nonetheless broke with the all-powerful Calhoun and the Democrats over Van Buren's bank reforms and resisted the Calhoun faction's attempt to control his independence as a federal

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14 Preston, Letter, p. 9.

15 Preston, Letter, pp. 7-8.
legislator. Rather than compromise, in 1842 Preston resigned from the Senate, left Washington for good, and returned home, like Cincinnatus to the plough, to practice law in the courts of Richland county.

It was at this low point in his fortunes that he rose to the greatest heights as a political orator, in his eulogy for his Charlestonian classmate at both Carolina and Edinburgh, Hugh Swinton Legare, Attorney-General and Secretary of State, founder of the pioneer Carolinian intellectual journal, the Southern Review. All of Preston's own values were summoned up to the praise of his dead - friend. All his own sense of the significance for political discourse and for the common good of culture and learning and law were brought together in his deep frustration at the premature end to Legare's, and his own, political influence, mourning "the sudden overthrow of all those sanguine expectations and fond hopes that hovered over the future brilliancy" of Legare's projected career. Even his bemused awareness that his own brilliance as an orator had given handle for his political opponents to dismiss his beliefs as mere elocutionary trickery colours his loyal defense of Legare's rhetorical skill, with its ringing assertion that "Liberty and eloquence are united in all ages." Not for nothing would Preston's Eulogy on Hugh Swinton Legare be printed and reprinted and excerpted and anthologized for decades to come. As a political orator, Preston had, in the words of Magoon's Southern Eloquence, "poured molten gold into the crucible of politics, with gems gathered from every glittering grotto, and fragrance distilled from every blooming field." But now, moving beyond politics, he spoke what he most believed, and showed himself, in the words of the Charleston Courier, "the last and greatest of the orators of Carolina's glorious constellation."

And soon thereafter, mourning not Legare alone, but also the early death of his only daughter, Preston found a new calling, in a sudden hugger-mugger, back-door, hole-and-corner deal that in 1845 appointed him President and Professor of Belles-Lettres of his old alma mater, South Carolina College, the first alumnus to hold that office. He saw it, others saw it, as a strange appointment. As he told the students, he had spent two decades in state and national politics, "where the . . . tumult of strenuous and stormy passions left but little leisure for those calm and meditative employments

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17 Preston, Eulogy, p. 4.


20 Quoted in Miller, as in n. 2, p. 37.

21 Miller, p. 39.
which are the occupation within these walls." He had never before taught in a college, and expressed "a deep and fearful anxiety that I may, indeed must, be unqualified to discharge the trust as it ought to be." He quoted them Cicero on his long-held desire that, having finished his active career, he might now "enjoy a lettered repose, freed from the toils of the bar and the painful pursuits of politics." 

He even translated the Cicero for them. In short, he buttered them all up, and then he got to work.

He was a roaring success, probably the most effective president in the College's first century. Student enrollment, previously languishing, immediately began to climb. His political prominence drew students from other states. His experience in the legislature and on the board of trustees brought in the needed appropriations. His earlier stature in national politics lent him authority on campus in dealing both with faculty and with students. He took charge of the College [reported one of his students years later] at a time when its friends were almost despairing of its low condition; he at once raised it to a point of the highest prosperity. Mr. Preston's may well be styled the

Periclean era of the South Carolina College...

his regime will long remain without a parallel.

He was president for a mere six years, before, late in 1851, ill-health forced his resignation. It was but recently I realized that for much of his later life he was seriously crippled, able to move about even at home only with difficulty, only on crutches. He died on the brink of the War he had sought to avoid, in May 1860. But he "died full of years and full of honours; he lived a long life of usefulness, and died universally esteemed and lamented."

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"To celebrate the memory of departed worth has, from time immemorial, been considered as a duty, not less salutary to the living, than respectful to the dead."

Respectful to the dead, true, but salutary to the living? What from Preston's life, character and achievement still remains, in the altered circumstances of the late twentieth century, salutary to us as model, admonition or inspiration? What in particular does his example suggest for the development of this revived residential college, named in his honor?

First, Preston was a man of principle, who, while seeking consensus, hewed firmly to his own values. He was born and bred to political power, yet with his 1842

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23 ibid.

24 ibid., pp. 6-7.

25 Rion, as in n. 2 above, p. 13.

26 Rion, p. 3.
resignation he gave up political prospects rather become the mere puppet of political pressure. Throughout his early career one of the strongest voices for states' rights, by the 1850s he voiced instead even in South Carolina the importance of preserving the Union. As in 1859 he returned to Columbia from Richmond for the last time, by the railway, he expressed the quixotic wish that his one-time ally and later nemesis, John C. Calhoun, were still alive, as only Calhoun could dissuade South Carolina from secession. Though Preston cherished his heritage, and sought ways to serve his adopted state, he was no time-server, no mere creature of his upbringing. He brought to Carolina a sense of political principle.

Second, Preston brought to College teaching both a respect for specialized learning and a wider experience of the extramural world. He himself tended to underplay his learning, and admitted "a conscious deficiency" in taking up his chair. He took the initiative in reallocating some of his more technical responsibilities to his colleague La Borde, leaving for himself the poetry and elocution he preferred. But this proclaimed deficiency was something of an act. In O'Brien's telling phrase, "Preston was a man of no little learning, who liked to appear the casual Hotspur." His students testify to Preston's "remarkably extensive" knowledge of "polite literature, ancient and modern," and he drew easily in his literature lectures from the classics and German aesthetics as well as from the traditional set texts of the Scottish rhetorical tradition. Of his predecessors in the rhetoric chair, probably only Nott and Thornwell read the German critics, and Thornwell only to denounce them. Yet Preston's students and colleagues recognized that what he brought to the lecture-room was enriched and deepened by his years of European travel and his legal and political achievement. The new Preston College is fortunate if it can attract such breadth of learning and experience in its faculty associates, and foster such travel opportunities for its students and graduates.

Third, Preston cared about college teaching, and cared what students thought of it. He himself taught well. He was helped by his subject perhaps, for his students long remembered his dramatic readings from Shakespeare and Campbell and Collins and Scott; they

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28 Preston, Address, p. 6.

29 Michael O'Brien, All Clever Men, Who Make Their Way:

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Critical Discourse in the Old South (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1982), p. 22.

30 Rion, p. 8. Preston was able, for instance, to converse with Prof. Lieber's German visitors. Only recently have scholars recognized the extent of Southern antebellum interaction with European, specifically German, intellectual life; see, e.g., Ward W. Briggs, III, ed., Letters of Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), esp. pp. 4-7, or John T. Krumpelmann, Southern Scholars in Goethe's Germany (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, n.d.).
reported that "he delighted, while he instructed, and made intense study and extended research, on our part, but pleasant recreation, amid the less attractive branches of the College curriculum." In addition, he took steps as president to improve the teaching program as a whole. Student numbers were growing, and class-size was expanding, sometimes as high as seventy, so Preston persuaded the trustees to reintroduce tutors to assist with the recitation-sections. He urged the expansion of the curriculum, and the introduction of modern European languages alongside the classics. He set up an effective system of annual external academic review, with a Board of Visitors examining and reporting on the college's students and academic standards. There "cannot be a more important or honourable occupation," Preston told his students, "than to instruct the rising generation," and it is fitting that the renewed Preston College should not be merely a residence or social center, but recognize, again in Preston's own words, that the "object of our association" here is "the pursuit of learning."

Fourth, Preston bothered himself with the practical institutional conditions of the undergraduate experience, in such mundane matters as housing and catering. Room and board alone do not constitute a college, but, as the revived Preston College attests, residence and commensality have long been regarded as of the bonum esse or the plenum esse, if not the esse, of the collegiate experience. Under Preston, student numbers grew rapidly, climbing from a mere 122 in 1845 to 171 in 1847, and to 237, the highest of the century, in 1848-49. The buildings, however, had rooms for a mere 142 students, and at first the increasing numbers had to be found lodgings off campus. Preston pushed through state appropriations for building two handsome new residences, opened in 1848, now called Harper and Legare, providing room for sixty additional students. He improved physical facilities too for student recreation, with halls in the new residences for the two student debating societies, his own Euphradian and its rival the Clarlosophic. By contrast, his successor chose to build, partly from projected tuition income, an elaborate auditorium for public events, whose roof

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31 Rion, pp. 7-9; cf. on Preston's reading aloud, this time of Thomas Moore, the Hon. John E. Bacon, Address . . . before the Clarlosophic and Euphradian Societies (Columbia, SC: Daily Phoenix, 1872), p. 6.

32 La Borde, p. 280, 281, 267-268.

33 Preston, Address, pp. 6, 7.

34 Hollis, I, 150.


"leaked like a sieve," and whose cost escalated, till the College was in hock for half its yearly income. 37 Preston found student food a more stubborn problem. Antebellum students were fed in the Commons, or Stewart's Hall, for a fixed weekly charge; indeed, in the 1840s, the compulsory commons charge made up more than half of a student's college cost, double the charge for tuition and room rent combined. 38 One of Preston's students described the dining hall as "that Pandora's box . . . that destroyer of health—that that nursery of ill-manners—that hot-bed of rebellion." 39 For many years, successive Stewards had squeezed their income from whatever profit the menu allowed, but in 1842 President Henry had eliminated the profit-motive and switched the Steward (now renamed the Bursar) to a set salary, with consequent though short-lived improvement in the amount allocated to actual food. There was still continual complaint. One Bursar was a peculator, one a drunkard, while Preston's final choice was, like so many ex-military appointments in academe, unpopular with everyone except the president himself. Preston's faculty colleagues were characteristically unsympathetic. Professor La Borde asserted that "the table was good; that all the arrangements were as perfect as the nature of the case would allow; and ninetenths of the young men fared better than they did at home," while Professor Thornwell ingeniously argued that the students disliked the compulsions of college life, and simply transferred their general dissatisfaction to complaints about the food. 40 Only because of Preston's constant interest and concern was the students' endemic dissatisfaction kept to the level of intermittent grumbling. 41

Fifth, Preston strove to maintain by example and persuasion an academic environment within the college. Antebellum colleges were notoriously volatile, and South Carolina College was by no means untypically riotous. 42 But the maintenance of academic tranquility was a difficult task, for student discipline lay in the hands of the faculty meeting, and the faculty held jealously to its prerogative for strong punishment, while the students sought with equal vigor to dispute any

40 La Borde, p. 285.

41 By contrast, within a year his successor Thornwell faced the "Great Biscuit Rebellion" of 1852. The students struck against compulsory commons, the trustees and governor refused to give way, and 108 students withdrew from the college, cutting enrollment by over a third, leaving only eleven to graduate in the class of 1853, and forcing the trustees to capitulate for the following session (Hollis, I, 168-169).

regulations the faculty invoked. How must Preston have felt for instance, in 1850, having just built sixty new rooms, when the chemistry professor, who had got behind with his syllabus, provoked outright rebellion by requiring the junior class to come to him for extra classes during the absence of the professor of Greek, and, despite Preston's best cajoling, faculty firebreathing generated student intransigence, until the faculty suspended sixty juniors from the college, the exact number needed to fill the new rooms? Preston's own preferred approach to student discipline was wisely less confrontational, more a matter of example than authority. *Fortiter in re,* but also *suaviter in modo.* As Preston himself told the students in his first 1845 address, "You have passed the period of coercion, and are already moral agents . . . Quid valeant leges sine moribus." In the words of one student, "himself a polished gentleman, he treated the students as such . . . he did not hesitate to consult students . . . To graduate gentlemen was his declared aim." Preston brought back to Carolina from the outside world a sense of proportion. Many faculty confuse the enforcement of their own will with the maintenance of academic standards; Preston, in the words of that same student, "seemed to know the exact point at which to slacken the reins of authority." By and large Preston was successful at Carolina, because he treated his students as adults. We can all learn from that.

Sixth, Preston was a friend of libraries and of the arts. The Legislature and the College Trustees had made library acquisitions a priority from the beginning, and President Barnwell had overseen the erection of the splendid new Robert Mills library, now South Caroliniana, opened only a few years before Preston's election. The student debating societies had their own

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43 Hollis, I, 155-156.

44 La Borde, pp. 287-288.
libraries, subscribing to a wide range of newspapers and periodicals. Where Preston took the lead was in the establishment of off-campus library and cultural provision, as one of the founders of the Columbia Athenaeum, on the corner of Main and Washington. The Athenaeum provided not only regular lecture-series, but also "the first reading-room of real worth" in the city, for which Preston donated his own library of over 3000 volumes as a core collection. "Day after day," reported a contemporary, "is he to be seen in that library room, which now seems to have an attraction for him not presented by any other spot." The Preston family's patronage of the arts is evident, not only in the portrait now housed in this College, but in the striking busts of Preston and his wife, by the Italian-trained sculptor Hiram Powers, still to be seen in the Upper Hall of the South Caroliniana Library. It is fitting that the revived Preston College should be forming on however small a scale its own reading room, collecting its own pictures, and arranging its own lecture-series.

Seventh, Preston recognized the benefits to a college of continuities, of institutional memory and of faculty experience. When Preston became President, South Carolina College had been open barely forty years. The buildings on the Horseshoe were still called merely Old North, or New South, with their residential wings as Old North West and so forth. It was Preston who first gave them the names of the College's founders and alumni. And Preston chose intellectual heroes, not merely the political influential, for the naming, heroes such as the subject of his Charleston eulogy, Hugh Legare, after whom the new south residence was christened in 1848. American colleges, like American business, have generally handled intergenerational transition rather shabbily; it is always easier to celebrate worth that is comfortably departed, than to recognize worth still stubbornly in situ. Preston arranged, when he took on the Presidency, that his predecessor Robert Henry had a continuing role as professor of Greek literature, and that the proffered resignation of Henry's supporter James Henley Thornwell was rejected by the trustees. "Some there be that have no memorial"—Henry is one of the few Carolina presidents for whom no building is yet named—, but Preston had ensured Henry's experience was not


49 La Borde, p. 308.


51 The suggestion first came from a newspaper, the Telegraph (Columbia, SC), January 17th 1848, which proposed naming a building for Preston himself; see Edwin L. Green, History of the Buildings of the University of South Carolina (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan, 1909), pp. 14-15.
lightly discarded. And when Preston himself gave up the Presidency, though he busied himself with extramural duties, he continued his involvement with the College, through reelection as a trustee. It is fitting that the renewed Preston College include emeritus colleagues among its faculty associates, an inclusion other programs might emulate.

Eighth, finally, and perhaps most relevant of all to this College, Preston made a pastoral concern with individual students central to the collegiate ideal. At Carolina, Preston's forceful predecessor, President Thomas Cooper, had emphasized rather the legal or contractual nature of the faculty-student relationship, repudiating the traditional idea that faculty stood in loco parentis to their students. Perhaps only those who have not themselves been parents, or godparents, misidentify in loco parentis as a claim to authority. Preston, himself a parent, but one who lost his only child when she was of college age, saw the parental metaphor, not in terms of authority, but of concerned interest. "My government," he told his students, "will be tempered by the affection of a parent. If I see you preparing yourselves to go home to delight a father's pride, my bosom will swell with a parent's pride."52

Nor were these empty words. He lived on campus, in the old president's house at the head of the Horseshoe, and it is reported that "his fireside and his table had always a welcome for the student."53 In later years, he was specially exercised over the cost of college for poorer students, and he had at least one student who could not afford the regular charges board with his own family.54 Moreover, unlike his freethinking predecessor Cooper or his combative successor the Presbyterian Thornwell, Preston seems to have had the rare gift of being able to speak freely with his students of his own religious values and beliefs, without any of the conflict, cant or coerciveness that official religiosity commonly brings to campus.55 The renewed Preston College, with resident faculty, is in its pastoral ambitions faithful also to the original Prestonian ideal.

"To celebrate the memory of departed worth has, from time immemorial, been considered as a duty, not less salutary to the living, than respectful to the dead." Though Preston himself already anticipated the day when the South Carolina College would be renamed and reborn as a full-scale university, the small aristocratic classics-dominated antebellum college of Preston's day served a different age from our own.56 How hard it is

52 Preston, Address, p. 11.
53 Rion, p. 12.
54 Green, p. 55.
55 See, e.g., Preston, Address, p. 11; La Borde, p. 307, describes Preston as "an humble worshipper in the Episcopal communion.
56 J. Belton O'Neall, L.L.D., Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, 2 vols. (Charleston: S. G. Courtenay, 1859), II, 531-535 (p. 535); Rion, p. 13; Green, p. 55. It was O'Neall, formerly one of Preston's political opponents, who in 1845, on the Carolina Board of Trustees, engineered Preston's appointment as President.
for us now to credit the superlatives in which his students and contemporaries spoke of him, as "a perfect specimen of a man, without fear and without reproach,"57 "an extraordinary man... the first of orators,"58 "the bright particular orb of the South Carolina bar, ... the golden-mouthed Ulysses of the United States Senate,"59 "the Cicero of the American Senate,"60 "one of their greatest public men,"61 "man of eloquence and of genius, the scholar, the patriot, the Christian gentleman, the friend... whose genial spirit and fervid heart enkindled a flame of love in every bosom."62 Can we now believe it? Yet how remarkable, how relevant, how inspiring, how salutary, how worthy of our respect and commemoration are Preston's actual achievements here at Carolina. How right it is that the renewed Preston College should seek to celebrate Preston's memory. May it do so for many years to come.

*Stet fortuna domus.*

57 Rion, p. 7.

58 O'Neall, p. 534.

59 Rion again.

60 Obituary in the South Carolinian, quoted by Miller, as in n. 2, p. 38.

61 Resolution of the faculty, May 23 1860, in La Borde, p. 312.