

# James Waddell Tupper

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**A**UTUMN touched College Hill in 1906 with all its familiar magic. Campus trees slowly turned into flaming torches. In Pardee Hall, President Warfield welcomed the class of 1910 into the fellowship of Lafayette men, while the members of Calumet planned a somewhat less formal reception. In November the bells of old South College pealed forth tidings of a 33-0 victory over Lehigh; three trolley poles were rudely pulled from the wires during the celebration at the foot of the Hill. There were other familiar signs: the annual crop of shining new faces and fraternity pledge buttons, the pleasant odor of burning leaves on the campus, the scholarly figure of "Dad" March in his book-strewn study in West College, and the cries of "Hit it up!" from windows in McKee as freshmen scampered across the quadrangle.

Amid these usual accompaniments of Lafayette Septembers, weather-wise undergraduates soon detected a severe chill in the intellectual climate. No sophomore Simon Legree wearing the white hat of the Calumet Club could have concocted a more gruelling freshman ordeal than that which was about to be inflicted by a handsome, lusty, young Adjunct Professor of English, newly imported from Harvard.

Although James Waddell Tupper arrived in Easton with the freshmen of 1910, he came with the express purpose of making life uncomfortable for them. For some time previous to 1906, the Trustees had been concerned by their discovery "that the philological phases of English were being emphasized at the expense of the practical phases; that students were learning more about the history and etymology of words than how to use them." To remedy this situation, the new Adjunct Professor, trailing clouds of glory from Cambridge, was "authorized to put into practice the methods of instruction in Freshman Composition now in vogue at Harvard." The reward for this formidable assignment was a stipend of \$1500 a year. With the passing of time the salary was increased, but Freshman Composition came to stay. It soon was known more intimately as "Tup's English" and

many freshmen fondly believed that Tupper invented it especially to plague them. They soon learned that to split an infinitive was to deserve a fate worse than death, and that to look with complacency upon fuzzy, woolly sentences was to jeopardize their immortal souls.

Dr. Tupper lost no time in carrying out his mandate from the Trustees. Every freshman was required to write a daily theme of one hundred and fifty words and to de-

**This is more than a biography. Inasmuch as 88 per cent of all living alumni have been under the influence of Dr. Tupper, this story about one of Lafayette's greatest teachers will awaken many a memory, cause many a rueful grin. A Pepper Prize winner, Class President, and also a former instructor and theme sorter under "Tup", the author of this article is today a full professor of English occupying the chair of American Literature in Bowdoin College.**

posit it promptly in a theme box in South College; in addition to this indignity, every fortnight he had to produce an essay of seven hundred and fifty words for the same insatiable maw. These papers were gathered together religiously by an ogre who seemed to stand behind the door with a stop-watch. Later a legend came to be widely believed that Dr. Tupper's instructors ate and slept in the theme room, emerging bleary-eyed only to draw their salaries and to replenish their pots of red ink. The compositions were corrected meticulously in scabrous scrawls and were then filed for reference or revision. If a hapless author reached the door a split second after the papers were due, or if he misspelled more than two words, he received an "E" for his pains. To test the efficiency of this system, an undergraduate once copied two or three pages of Walter Pater's best prose with three words purposely misspelled. The theme bounced back with an "E." Tupper relished the *bright* thing as well as the *right* thing. A daring freshman in 1921 received "A" for a theme on "Spring Fever" by turning in a blank page entitled, "Spring Fever, The Effects of ...." The following year when 27 men tried to duplicate the feat, they received "E's"! Audacity paid dividends under Tupper only when it was original.

This course in academic Brussels sprouts was received without enthusiasm. Whenever its director walked across the campus with that long stride which has since become so familiar to generations of Lafayette men, he was greeted with jeers and cat-calls. The victims of the daily-theme grind enjoyed venting their outraged sensibilities by derisively yelling, "Rah, rah, Harvard" with a vocal embroidery of deep maledictions and a 1906 version of the Bronx cheer. Dr. Tupper recalled pleasantly how he was given his "L" and plenty of it during that fateful first year! Despite this incipient revolt, the demand for daily themes remained inexorably fixed.

Sophomores with conditions in English 1-2 quickly learned that the new professor was the only man in the faculty who could reestablish their class standing. Others began to catch something of their teacher's contagious enthusiasm for his subject, to share his respect for words that could be made to laugh and cry, and to understand his delight in lean and sinewy sentences. Two years later when the class of 1910 published their *Melange*, they dedicated it to James Waddell Tupper with affectionate admiration. Other classes and a number of grateful students have since dedicated volumes to their former teacher, but it is doubtful if any later tribute was more welcome than that paid by the first class to taste the rigors of the daily-theme diet.

It was the teaching of Professor W. J. Alexander, of the faculty of Dalhousie University, that impelled James Tupper, then an impressionable sophomore, toward his later career as a teacher of English letters. From Alexander he caught a scrupulous regard for textual accuracy and an intense scorn of sentimentality which were to be further strengthened by subsequent graduate study at Johns Hopkins under James Wilson Bright. After taking his doctorate at Baltimore in 1895, the young teacher returned to his native Canada to serve an apprenticeship at Western University,

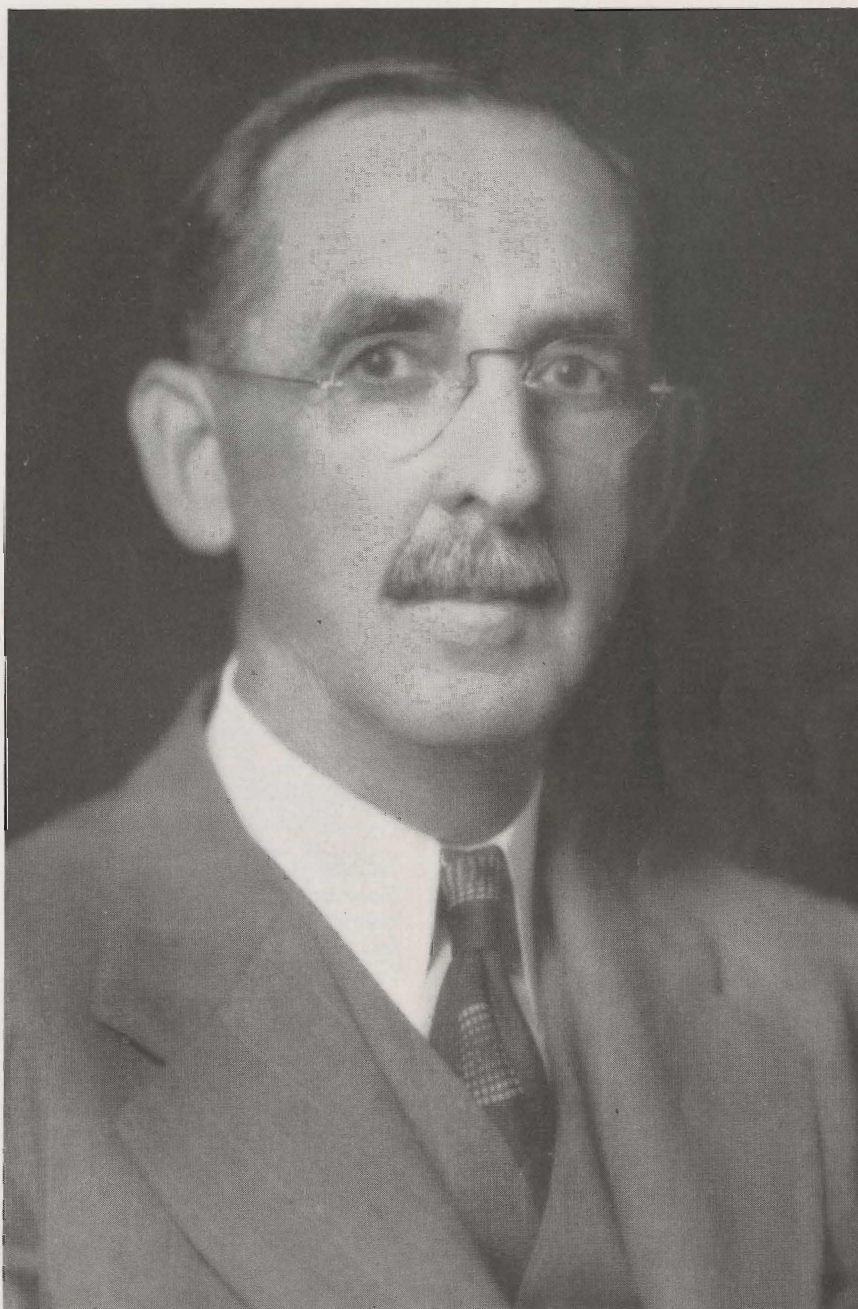


Ontario. In 1900 he was called to Bryn Mawr to succeed William Allan Neilson, and in 1902 he joined the notable company of teachers of composition assembled by Dean Briggs at Harvard. In Cambridge, Tupper learned what graduate schools of English too often ignore; namely, that writing and thinking are organically related, and that the first obligation of a department of English is to teach students to read intelligently, to think clearly, and to write acceptably. These were the burning convictions that the new Adjunct Professor brought to Lafayette 37 years ago last autumn.

James Tupper's appointment by President Warfield in 1906 was a pleasant variation of the apostolic succession, a laying on of hands. One of the enthusiastic sponsors of his candidacy for the Lafayette position was Professor Bright, his teacher at Hopkins. Bright happened to be a disciple of the great Francis Andrew March, and a graduate of Lafayette with the class of 1877. Now a generation later, Bright's own disciple was to carry on the humane tradition at his Alma Mater.

"Tup's English," which began amid ominous mutterings of an undergraduate rebellion, soon wove itself firmly into the fabric of the College. It united all freshmen in a bond of sympathy by subjecting them to a common peril. Like vaccination in childhood, there was no way of avoiding it. Moreover, if the vaccination failed "to take," one had to be vaccinated again and again. Although the inoculation was sometimes painful, it often provided valuable immunity. Even those stern daughters of Rhetoric: Unity, Coherence, and Emphasis, turned out to be jolly girls with a sparkle in their eyes and a kick in their heels. Students with *English 1-2* safely behind them encountered no terrors in the long written reports required in other courses; more often than not, they carried away from Freshman English a wholesome respect for the hard, bare bones on which the language hangs, and an abiding reverence for clean and competent prose. And, best of all, successful completion of the ordeal made men eligible for "Tup's Survey" (*English 3-4*), the magic key which unlocks the doors to Tupper's other advanced courses in the drama and poetry of the Renaissance, invitations to endless delight.

In these courses "Tup" is in his



PROFESSOR JAMES WADDELL TUPPER

true element, for James Waddell Tupper is one of the few genuinely great teachers of undergraduates of his generation in America. Had he decided upon a career of productive scholarship at Hopkins or Harvard, he would undoubtedly have become an able director of research; happily for Lafayette, he preferred to teach, and teaching has been the passion of his life. Critics of the lecture system often underestimate the influence of a great teacher; they forget that the literature of the past often needs a living interpreter. James Tupper meets this demand triumphantly. His lectures not only cover the subject, they invari-

ably illuminate it. He brings to each class hour a buoyant enthusiasm which draws its power from sound scholarship and a fresh reading of the text under consideration. His hatred of cant resembles in its intensity that of Dr. Samuel Johnson. His fierce scorn of all forms of sentimentalism make it impossible for him to "slop over" or to resort to the shop-worn generalizations and professional clichés of the popular lecturer. "Tup's lectures" have given hundreds of Lafayette men their first exciting glimpses of critical penetration, disinterested judgment, and intellectual poise. To hear him read or comment upon a



memorable passage of English poetry is to experience the sensations described by Eliphaz the Temanite when he testified, "A spirit passed before my face: the hair of my flesh stood up."

James Tupper does not fit into any of the familiar professorial patterns. He is not absent-minded; his dress is not eccentric. He is not a fertile source of those whimsical and picturesque anecdotes which are popularly believed to moisten the bifocals of middle-aged graduates at alumni dinners. He fails to measure up to the notion that a college professor should be a vaguely benevolent old fuddy-duddy, too simple and childlike for life outside the campus gates. Although it is inevitable that he should command the devotion of many of the ablest undergraduates in every college generation, he has never been conspicuously "popular." He has never kept an eye anxiously focused on the fluctuating barometer of undergraduate opinion or stooped to flatter the campus "big men." All the king's horses could not induce him to address a football rally or a freshman smoker. The least sentimental of men, he once shocked a class by chuckling over the faulty syntax of a line in the Lafayette *Alma Mater* which we all sing so fervently—and ungrammatically.

No college teacher has ever received more loyal affection than that lavished upon Tupper by the young instructors who began their careers under his kindly direction. These "sons of Tup," who are now teaching successfully in scores of colleges and universities, owe their former chief a debt exceeded only by that acknowledged by his former students. This latter group includes seven members of the Board of Trustees, a majority of the Lafayette men teaching at their own college, and an ever-increasing army of alumni, many of whom are deployed around the globe in their country's service. Those students who majored in English owe the heaviest debt of all. Under Dr. Tupper's direction in honors courses and seminars, they were taught unflinching respect for intellectual integrity, restless impatience with glib half-truths, and merciless standards for self-criticism. For many undergraduates, the experience was an intellectual coming-of-age. Happily, too, the majors in English were privileged to see the man in his home as well as the teacher in his classroom. They discovered that

his teaching was of a piece with his life. And, if they were very lucky, they came to know the gracious mistress of the square white house on East Campus, Mary Harmon Tupper. She, too, "belongs."

Thirty-seven years is a long time as academic tenures go in this world, and James Tupper knows the joy of having become a cherished part of the College he has served with such rare distinction and devotion. At seventy-three he has reached an age when college professors begin to receive the deference due to a phenomenon sometimes described as "a grand old man." But James Waddell Tupper, who is still doing business at the same old stand, can never become "a grand old man." *Grand* he assuredly is (has there ever been a time when he was anything else?), but *old*? Old he can never, never become, for he will always be as young as the green, springing freshness of the noble literature which he has so gladly taught.

## Two Alumni to Be Elected to Board of Trustees

Two alumni will be elected to the Board of Trustees of the College for terms of six years by means of a ballot to be mailed this spring to all former students.

Under the regulations as first promulgated in 1890 by the Board and amended from time to time, the Alumni Council, serving as a nominating committee, will submit a minimum of four names to the electorate.

With the objective of being truly representative of the general alumni body the Alumni Council prior to its January meeting sent a letter to all class agents, former Council members, and district club presidents and secretaries asking for recommendations. From the list of names received, together with a paragraph or two enumerating the qualifications of each nominee, Council was in a position to invite men with interest in the College

and with talents that can be useful to the Board.

Men overseas will receive the ballot by means of first-class mail.

## Lafayette Night Classes Start for Fourth Year

For the fourth year lights in the classrooms and laboratories are burning at night at Lafayette College for the men and women being trained in fields essential to the war effort under the auspices of the Engineering, Science and Management, War Training Program.

Professor William S. Lohr, head of the Civil Engineering Department, and director of the program, states that a total of 110 men and women are enrolled in four courses that began on January 10 and extend for a period of about sixteen weeks with classes two evenings a week. The courses, now being given, all on the college level, are listed under the following titles: "Basic Chemistry for Industry," "Plastics," "Industrial Chemistry," and "Metallography and Heat Treating or Iron and Steel."

In the first three years since the introduction of the courses in 1941 a total of 1491 men and women have been enrolled, with 950 receiving certificates for the successful completion of their courses.

## Maroon Basketball Team Wins Lehigh Series

A Lehigh basketball team bolstered by the addition of Majczan, a former Moravian star, was out in front for all but the last two minutes of the second game between the two old rivals but the Maroon spurted and a beautiful one-hand shot from the side of the floor by Tony Shvoretz in the closing seconds won the game for Lafayette 46-44.

The first game, played in December prior to the graduation of Captain Basil McCabe was won by Lafayette 43-30. Bob Magee, football captain-elect, reported for the team at the beginning of the winter term on January 10 and landed a berth as a starter. He and Frosh Shvoretz each tallied 14 points in the second Lehigh game.

At this writing the Lafayette all-civilian team coached by Physical Education Director Arthur Winters is embarked on a ten-game schedule. Rutgers cancelled its schedule for the reason that the Army trainees at that institution are using the gym as a mess hall.

### BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

Dec. 15	Temple	Home
" 18	Lehigh	Home
Jan. 19	Lehigh	Away
" 25	Rider	Home
" 29	Lehigh	Away
Feb. 12	Haverford	Home
" 23	Newark U.	Home
" 25	Rider	Away
Mar. 1	Haverford	Away
" 4	Lehigh	Home