

Robert Thomas Kerlin
Professor English, VMI

Robert Thomas Kerlin was born March 22nd, 1860, in Harrison County, Missouri, of Kentucky parents.* His first American ancestor came from Wales to Philadelphia with William Penn. Dr. Isaac Newton Kerlin, long the distinguished head superintendent of the State Institution for the Feeble Minded at Elwyn, Pa., and the American pioneer of scientific methods of educating and developing feeble-minded children represented a branch of the family that did not migrate southward. The traits of the Welsh, distinguished for their love of poetry and their inclination to mysticism in religion, and of the Quakers are traceable in all branches of the family. The pioneer spirit seems to have been strong in the ancestors of our subject. They were among the earliest settlers of Kentucky, and then his parents and grandparents moved to the frontier settlements of Northwest Missouri about 1840.

Here his father, as his family increased,

* Thomas Lindsey and Nancy Jane (Jeffries) Kerlin.

acquired several small farms which he
farms supplied with fine live-stock. He was
especially successful in the breeding of Berkshire
hogs, ^{and} Southdown sheep. Purchasers of his stock
came from the adjoining counties in times
when high-grade stock was scarce in the new
state. ~~The Civil War deprived him of~~

The Civil War deprived him of his property
in slaves and live-stock and left the family
poor in all but land. Incurring debts to re-stock
and repair his farms, he died of fever before
this was accomplished. Our subject was left ^{fatherless} at
the age of eight years, ~~fatherless~~ and in the
financial condition of the large family of eight
children had to go to work on the farm. His
schooling was limited to some four or five
months or less, in the year. But his work
on the farm and in the school-room were equally
diligent.

All of the younger boys being eager for
a better education than the rural district school
afforded, the ^{homestead was} ~~farms were~~ sold and the family
moved to Albany the county-seat of Gentry
County, where Robert received in his sixteenth
and seventeenth years, two ~~of~~ terms of high-
school training. In the ^{spring} ~~summer~~ of 1882, before
he was seventeen years old, he ~~was~~ began his
career as a teacher, having received a certifi-

case and appointment as the teacher of a public country school. In the fall of 1884, at eighteen, he entered Central College, Fayette, Mo. Here he pursued the regular course of academic studies, which was severely classical. The traditions of the University of Virginia and of the older colleges of Virginia prevailed at Central, for the faculty were mainly Virginians. In his freshman year he won the Alexander M. Dockery Scholarship Prize for the highest general average grade in the college. He received the Master of Arts degree in 1890, doing the special work required for this degree in English literature.

He pursued graduate studies in his English, history, ^{and} philosophy at Johns Hopkins University, 1889-90; Harvard, 1894-5, 1898-9; and at Yale 1905-06. At the two latter he had the honor of receiving scholarships, and at Yale he received the degree Doctor of Philosophy. In this institution he was also appointed for one year Instructor in English, 1906-07.

His career as a teacher has given him a variety of experience in various parts of the country. His first experience, as already noted was in a country school at \$25⁰⁰ a month. Then, interrupting his college course, he taught one year in Bellevue Collegiate

Easton, Caledonia, Mo., where his department was Mathematics, for which his earliest aptitude asserted itself. After graduation and a year of specialization at Johns Hopkins he was called to the Chair of English at Missouri Valley College, Marshall, Mo., where he remained four years consecutively. Later after two years at Harvard and three years in the ministry of the Southern Methodist Church he taught another year in this institution. Then after teaching a year in Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas, he came to the Chair of English in the Missouri State Normal School at Warrensburg, Mo., where he continued until ~~going~~ ^{he went} to Yale. From Yale he went to the Virginia State Normal School at Farmville, where he taught for the two years immediately preceding his appointment, in 1910, to the Chair of English in the ~~Institute~~ ^{Virginia Military Institute}.

From April to November, 1898, he held a commission in the Spanish American War as Chaplain of the Third Missouri Volunteers. His regiment was stationed at Camp Alger. His correspondence to the St. Louis and Kansas City papers was published later in book form under the title of The Camp-Life of the Third Regiment.

His other books are entitled as follows,
The Church of the Fathers (1901); Mainly for
Myself (poems 1898); Theocritus in English Literature
 (1910). This last work has been highly praised by the
 chief literary and learned journals of Europe and America.
 Since the work is of an unusual character some
 extracts from a few of the reviews may be here given:

A THOROUGHGOING STUDY of all that the title implies. . . . The monograph should be of great interest both to the student of English and to the student of Greek.—The American Journal of Philology.

The one important thing, which is the direct influence of Theocritus upon the long line of English poets, is very carefully studied.—The Nation (New York)

A careful and exhaustive study of the subject.—The Athenæum (London)

His summary and conclusion bear witness to the amount of research he has undertaken in preparing this volume, and although it is essentially a book for the critic and the student, it embodies a great deal of matter that is of high interest to the rank-and-file lovers of literature.—The Academy (London).

It is a very interesting example of a type of literary study which is somewhat rare in this precise form,—the study of the influence of a single classic writer upon modern literature. . . . No other work deals so exhaustively and scientifically with the matter. . . . His own criticism is scholarly and just. . . . The book is a sound and scholarly piece of work.—The Spectator (London).

This thesis, so far as I am aware, the first of its kind, will prove extremely useful to thorough students of English literature. Every lover of our poetry has long realized that we are greatly indebted to the Greeks for much in it that is most beautiful and inspiring. Heretofore no one has attempted to lay on the measuring rod and fix the extent of that indebtedness to any one of the Greek masters. Dr. Kerlin has attempted this—and very successfully—in the case of Theocritus.

He was wise in his selection of his subject. The nature of the work of Theocritus is so distinctive, both in subject-matter and in the exquisite skill of its handling, etc.

The work has been well done and was well worth doing. We owe a debt to Dr. Kerlin.—The South Atlantic Quarterly.

Dr. Robert T. Kerlin's book, Theocritus in English Literature, was wrought out in consultation with me, so that I have had a good opportunity to take account of its qualities. It seems to me a useful work of reference, and (barring a few errors of the press and one or two matters of minor importance) thoroughly well done. To the student of the English lyric, and especially of the English idyll, it is a distinct boon. One may or may not agree with Dr. Kerlin's preferences among translators and adapters, but the most complete dissent would leave the substantial value of his book unaffected. The Index and the Appendixes will save much time to the investigator of the subject.—Albert S. Cook [Yale Univ.]

This book . . . will always be valuable.—The Classical Review (English).

All lovers of Theocritus must be grateful to Dr. Kerlin for this laborious task, so well accomplished. - The Classical Weekly (American)

This exposition will be useful especially to the historians of English literature: they will find in it some interesting contributions to the study of the sources of various authors, valuable helps to the history of taste, the history of translation, the history of culture, But the admirers of Theocritus, even they, will be grateful to Mr. Kerlin for having contributed to the glory of their poet. - Revue des Etudes Grecques (Paris).

Of such character were the numerous and elaborate reviews of this work in the realm of English and Greek Scholarship.

Besides the above-mentioned books, Dr. Kerlin has written many articles on literary and philosophical subjects for the magazines of the country. The Methodist Review, The South Atlantic Seemann Review, The American Journal of Philology, and The Arena. Of this last magazine he was Associate Editor from 1905 to 1910, during which time he contributed articles on The Main Currents of Thought in the Nineteenth Century. In 1902-04 he served on a commission of the two ^{countries}

chief branches of the Methodist Church in
 America to compile a new hymn-book. This
 appointment, carrying with it considerable honor, came
 in consequence of certain articles he had written
 on poetry. ~~At~~ The summer of 1910 ~~was~~ he
 spent in Europe - this being his second trip abroad -
 as lecturer on the staff of the Bureau of University
 Travel. Literature, history, and art were his topics.
 This work was particularly congenial to his tastes. But
 as it separates him from his family he
 gave it up. The last two summers he has had given
~~charge of the work~~ ^{the courses of instruction} in the
 Summer School of the University of Vermont,
 where, on the shores of Lake Champlain, he spends the
 summer pleasantly with his wife and only ~~son~~ ^{child},
 a daughter of three years old.

about him at 30/10 -
 in mother name of Joseph
 wife name of Joseph

Wife -

Adeline Katherine Koster
 Jersey City, N.J.

Her Father: Christian Koster } ~~Prussia~~
 " Mother: Helene Katharine von Bergen } Germany

Daughter: 1) Katharine Elizabeth (Nov. 28, 1909)
 " ~~2~~ 2) Constance ^{Elsal?} (May 1, 1913)
 " 3) " " "

R. T. Kerlin.

Two of my uncles John and Jared Kerlin were in Morgan's cavalry. I used to hear them tell of doing exploits, bold and hard riding both toward and from the enemy. I know nothing definite. They were Kentuckians, of course - my father's brothers.

R. T. K.

I am a member of the Fortnightly Club, Lexington of the Southern Educational Association; and of the Modern Language Association of America.

the outcome if the law is not vindicated this time.

Opposes Postponement.

It is said that the officers ought to take a stand and create sentiment for these condemned men. Personally, I am not governed by public sentiment, and if public sentiment were demanding that these men be free I would be found asking that the law be carried out, and as an officer who has honestly tried to discharge his duty as required by law, I make this appeal to you. I also appeal to you on behalf of the citizens of Phillips who have suffered long and patiently from the insults of such men as Mr. Kerlin, who have tried to mould public sentiment without stating the facts as they existed.

I have remained silent in the face of what has been said about these cases, hoping that some one would make an investigation with an end in view of ascertaining the facts and with a motive prompted by that desire, and not by money, and when such an investigation is made it will be determined that what I have said is true.

You state that you will treat this report confidentially, and in this connection I may say that you may do so, if you so desire, or you may give it such publicity as you may desire. This matter is immaterial with me.

If you care to call on me again, I shall be glad to respond with a frank statement. I do not have the record in each case at hand, but you have access to the court records and a careful reading of the record will disclose that what I have said is true.

I, therefore, hope that you may allow the law to be carried out and justice done in these cases.

Very respectfully,

JOHN E. MILLER,

Prosecuting Attorney.

Text Of Kerlin's Arkansas Letter

(Special to The News.)

Lexington, Aug. 24.—Following is a copy of the open letter written to Governor MacRae, of Arkansas, in reference to the execution of negro participants in the Elaine insurrection, the writing and publication of which was the basis of the action by the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute in dismissing Colonel Robert T. Kerlin from the faculty:

Lexington, Virginia.

May 25, 1921.

His Excellency, Governor Thomas C. McRae,

Little Rock, Arkansas,

Dear Sir: Not in the history of our Republic has a more tremendous responsibility before God and the civilized world devolved upon the shoulders of the chief executive of any state than has devolved upon yours in re the Negroes of Phillips county, condemned for murder to death in the electric chair and so sentenced by the courts of your state. In the case of six of those condemned men the sentence of death has been sanctioned by you, and you have appointed the day of their execution.

It is a deed to be contemplated with extreme horror. In the execution of those men a race is suffering crucifixion. I entreat you to take the matter into your private chamber and give it an hour's earnest consideration, as before the Eternal Judge.

Have those men been dealt with according to justice, according to the principles of civilized and humane governments?

An article of Magna Charta, the historical foundation of our rights and liberties, declares that

"No freeman shall be taken or imprisoned or dispossessed or outlawed or banished or in any way destroyed . . . except by the legal judgment of his peers or by the law of the land. To no one will we sell, to no one will

we deny, or delay right or justice."

Article VII of our own "Bill of Rights," placed by the founders of the Republic themselves in the federal constitution, assures to every accused person "trial by an impartial jury," the right of witnesses in his behalf, "and the assistance of counsel for his defense." Another article of the same forbids "cruel and unusual punishments."

Was the Trial Fair?

Can it be maintained that these men have been tried and sentenced according to the principles of these charters of our free government? I entreat your excellency to review the entire case with the utmost candor and absolute courage.

Consider, first, the iniquities of the peonage system, which, as tenants and share-croppers, these men were accused of conspiring to end. Those iniquities are partly known to the world, and are indisputable. Exorbitant interest, to treble and quadruple the lawful rate, for money advanced; outrageous prices for supplies at the plantation commissary or store; arbitrary division and sale of the crops by the landlords; no statement of accounts, no settlement—is this not peonage? and was not this system prevalent in Phillips county? More than this: when the individual tenant, grown restive under such oppression, dared ask his landlord for a settlement or raise any question about his landlord's dealings with him, was he not treated as an "insolent and bad nigger," and beaten, driven out, or terrorized into silence? The inevitable recourse of tenants so enslaved and abused, if any recourse whatsoever should occur to them, was such banding together as they effected in the Progressive Farmers' and Household's Union. And no crime was there in that. For that was a peaceable union, founded for legitimate purposes.

As for their instigating or beginning a riot, the evidence adduced in the case as tried before the supreme court of Arkansas abundantly and conclusively disproves that. It was not until they were threatened and molested that they armed themselves. That they should provide themselves with weapons and carry these to their meetings seems condemnatory. But consider the provocation. And were they assured of the protection of the law? Not even in their church. Misguided and reprehensible to the point of madness may have been their action in arming themselves, but it was not criminal.

Nor did they use those arms but in self-defense. It was not until that church at Hoop Spur, filled with men, women and children, at night in lawful meeting, was fusilladed that any negro fired a shot. Then in the days of the "riot" following, were the Negroes of Phillips county not indiscriminately hunted, harried, and shot down, like beasts of the jungle? Fifty or 60 negroes, four or five white men—that was the ratio of killed. Was this a riot of the blacks or of the whites?

Subjected to Cruelties

Consider, next, the cruelties to which the hundreds of negroes, men and women, were subjected who were herded into stockades or crowded into lock-ups. The time will yet come when the world with full knowledge of this will be revolted by such Congo barbarity.

Then came the travesty of a trial in the circuit court at Helena. Ninety-two men, without legal counsel, without witnesses, without knowledge of court procedure and their rights, some of whom were whipped, tortured in electric chairs, and terrorized into pleading guilty to murder in the second degree, were sentenced to prison terms ranging from one year to life. Sixty-seven of those, I understand, are yet in prison serving the life sentence. Twelve men, likewise tortured, were sentenced to death, and six of these are to be executed

June 10th.

I submit to you the testimony of some of those 67 convicts who were brought from their cells in the penitentiary to testify in the trial of the case before the supreme court of Arkansas. Sykes Fox thus testified: "I pleaded guilty to second degree because they compelled me to do it. I didn't know any other way—plead guilty or go to the electric chair. . . . I testified the way I did before because I was whipped up to it. I have the signs, the marks of it, right here. . . . They took me out of the jail and into a lower room in this house . . . and whipped me with a strap, which must have had something on it; it burnt me every lick. He would say, 'You know so and so,' and I would say, 'Yes, sir' . . . I don't know how many licks they hit me, no more than about 150. I had to lay on my stomach about five days."

John Martin thus testified: "I was made to say what I did. I was whipped awful bad, and they told me if I didn't acknowledge that I had a gun there, they were going to put more on me. They had done whipped me so I could hardly sit up; I was raw. One of the straps they whipped me with had copper or brass on the end of it. . . . I have the marks across my back now. If they had whipped me again on those sore places I couldn't have stood it. They beat me up so and were beating other people, that I had to say something another to keep them from beating me to death. . . . I am 54 years old. I was never in any trouble before this trouble."

So runs the testimony of witness after witness—testimony I would accept as infallibly true, did my life depend upon it. Can this be called a trial in a court of justice? In any other country, as Turkey or Russia, we would give it another name.

Your excellency, I make this appeal to you in the confidence that it will be considered as made in the spirit of respect and duty. I have no disposition to doubt your courage, your integrity, or your force of character. I seek but as a fellow-citizen to encourage you to a heroic duty. There will be two voices commanding you to contrary courses: one the voice of the tempter of all men to pursue the policy of compromise and submission to the ill-guided multitude. Pontius Pilate, delivering the innocent Man of Galilee to the mob for crucifixion and Barabbas the robber to freedom is the type of the coward who inherits the contempt—and the pity—of mankind, by the side of the betrayer, Judas Iscariot.

The Still Small Voice

Then there is the "still small voice," never to be silenced. It bids you stand for the eternal right against all consequence, stand as a champion of human nature, a vindicator of human dignity. Such is your sublime opportunity. The eyes of the world would turn upon you in admiration did you act with manifest justice, with heroic virtue, in this case. I beseech you to heed the "still small voice."

You have appointed June the 10th as the date of execution for those six men. Until that day they have a respite to prepare for their appearing before the throne of the Judge of all the earth. The same respite have you for you, too, though in the flesh, shall that day stand before the throne of Almighty God, to be judged. It is not mine to declare the oracles of God, but this is my profoundest conviction, that God is testing men in this life, and that upon you he has put this test. You might well deem yourself the most fortunate and honored of men. Heaven itself has appointed you for this redemptive act. To thrust it aside were to deny God—the refusal of an atheist.

Public officers, I know, are wont to be governed by public opinion. But the nobler sort change and create

public opinion. Your opportunity knocks at your door. Reject it, and the brand is on your brow. Accept it, and instead of the brand, it is the crown.

By birth and rearing I am a Missourian, born of Kentucky parents. Being of the same stock and traditions with the people of Arkansas, I have not the slightest feeling of hostility towards them, but, on the contrary, only a profound solicitude that they with you may rise in moral courage to meet this test and stand not in disgrace but in honor before the world. Just and humane dealing will accomplish, as terror and violence will not, the ends desired: a mutually profitable cooperation of the races, security and happiness for the white race, goodwill and useful service from the colored race, with prosperity and advancement as its reward. But beyond these ends is the end above every other—justice for justice's sake.

Calls on the Pulpit

I pray that every pulpit in Arkansas, of whatsoever creed, will in the Sundays to intervene before the date of this awful execution, preach not merely the gospel of mercy, but the eternal law of righteousness with its sure concomitant of divine retribution as proclaimed by all the prophets of God and writ large in human history. The sin of silence could not be condoned in a preacher of the gospel in Arkansas at this time.

I have written this as an open letter that it might be an appeal as well to the people of your state, to their Christian conscience, their justice-loving spirit, their humane instincts. Would that they might encourage you to rightful action by petitions without number, signed by every person in the state who revolts at legal murder.

In a book which your people revere it is written:

"Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, either take a gift; for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

That command is older by thousands of years than magna charta and our federal constitution, and is still valid. Is it possible that, 19 centuries after Calvary, a crime like that of Calvary is to be committed in a land where the Bible is an open and revered book, and the people are of the stock that has led the world in civilization? Almighty God forbid!

If there is any misstatement or misrepresentation in this letter I shall gladly welcome correction as vindicating, so far, the imperilled honor of a state.

Yours respectfully,
ROBERT T. KERLIN.

**Was Not Warned
Says Col. Kerlin
Dismissed V. M. I. Instructor
Gives His Side Of Controversy With Directors**

Lexington, Va., Aug. 26.—Colonel Robert T. Kerlin, of the Virginia Military Institute faculty, when asked today about the correctness of the statement in a Richmond dispatch appearing in the Lynchburg News of Wednesday, that the board of visitors at its June meeting "suspended action with the understanding that he would refrain from such activities (inter-racial) in the future," said there was absolutely no basis for such a statement. The question of his future activities, he said, was not raised.

BEFORE THE BOARD OF VISITORS OF THE VIRGINIA MILITARY
 INSTITUTE IN THE MATTER OF THE ELAINE INSURRECTION LETTER OF
 COL. KERLIN.

Questions by Mr. Gwathmey.

Q.1 Col. Kerlin, you are sent for this morning, and the President of the Board has stated to you the general object of our request that you appear, and has asked me to present to you the matter about which you are requested to appear.

The Superintendent, on June 13th, wrote to you a letter in which he states that he received through the mails a copy of the "Helena-Arkansas World" of June 9th, containing copies of letters of the judge and a copy of letter of State's Attorney in the so-called Elaine Insurrection cases. And further states in the letter that references were made to you and to a letter written by you to the Governor of Arkansas and states that the references are of such a character that he feels it his duty to present them to the Board at the meeting to be held at the end of the week (meaning at the present session of the Board). On the same date you wrote a letter addressed to Gen. Nichols stating that in response to his request, you are sending him with this letter a copy of your letter to Governor McCrea. I am handing you now the newspaper clipping which you enclosed to the Superintendent with your letter.

Ans. That is correct.

Q.2 Gen. Nichols has also forwarded to us a newspaper clipping from the "Helena World" of June 9, 1921, which was sent to him containing printed letters from J. M. Jackson, the Judge who conducted the trials in the Elaine cases, and also the letter from John E. Miller who represented the State in those trials. I am now handing you this clipping that you may read it.

Also, on June 13, 1921, Mr. E. M. Allen, apparently of Helena, Arkansas, wrote a letter to Gen. Nichols, in which he says "An article printed by the "Associated Press" signed by one Robert Kerlin, claiming to be a member of your faculty, has been called to my attention. This article is so full of untruths and false statements that before taking it up with Kerlin, I would like to know if this man is a member of your faculty, his age and experience.

and whether or not you approved the article before it was printed." There are some other allusions in the letter, and he concludes - "The printed article is a gross reflection upon the people of this county and state, and if sanctioned by you, our people will wish to bring the real facts to your attention."

I am handing you this letter that you may read it in full and for your inspection.

Ans. That is correct. I have seen that letter.

Q.3 The Board of Visitors, Col. Kerlin, has gone over these papers and is inclined to consider your action in criticising the conduct of the courts in a sister State in a matter involving intense public feeling, as not only indiscreet but most improper and injurious to this institution, as coming from one who is a professor at a State Educational Institution in Virginia.

Before, however, taking any action with reference to the subject now before the Board, you are invited to appear and state your position. The Board now invites you to make such a statement and begs that you will confine your statement to the only matter before the Board, which is a criticism of the courts and conduct of trials in a sister State.

Ans. I see nothing indiscreet or improper in a citizen of one State in a certain section of the country, in speaking out publicly his views of the acts of the courts of justice, particularly a neighborhood State or a State of the same section. The courts are public instruments of justice -- if in a citizen's judgment, according to the evidence carefully considered, the courts have not rendered justice, it is not only proper for a citizen to criticise but it is a duty. As for my conduct in this case, I don't believe, and I did not believe at the time of writing the letter that it would be injurious to the institution which I am trying with all fidelity to serve. In what way it can be injurious has not been stated to me by this Board, nor can I think that in a military institution, particularly where the fundamental virtues of manhood

courage and action, and justice in thought and action are inculcated and developed by all the discipline, such action on the part of a professor cannot be regarded otherwise than exemplary. If so, such action instead of being injurious to the Institute, will be beneficial, inasmuch as it will attract to its instruction and discipline parents who desire their sons to be taught by men who stand for right and justice at whatever cost. I think, Mr. Gwathmey, that is my answer to the specific question to which I am confined -- namely, the criticism of the courts.

At this point the letter of Gen. Nichols, which was mentioned by Col. Kerlin, is produced. It appears that the original letter from Gen. Nichols to Mr. Allen has not yet been put in the mail and it is now handed to Col. Kerlin, and the Board has not seen this letter.

The President of the Board states that he had seen this letter.

Questions by Col. Kerlin.

Q.1 May I ask the President of the Board if this is the letter which they saw, and wish to call attention to one paragraph which differs from the copy presented to me for my examination.

Ans. (Mr. Peyton) The letter which is now before the Board is in my recollection a copy which was shown me by the Superintendent. Of course I cannot be absolutely positive, because I have not the copy before me, but I think this is the original copy which I saw.

Q.2 Mr. Chairman, may I ask if this letter or a copy has been shown to any other members of this Board?

Ans. (Mr. Gwathmey) If any other member of the Board has seen this letter or a copy has-been- of it, they will kindly so indicate to Col. Kerlin.

(President Peyton) It may be that the copy which I was shown was a corrected copy. I am under the impression that it was a corrected copy; Gen. Nichols having perhaps made some correction in the original draft of the letter which he first

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dictated. All other members of the Board said they have no recollection of having previously seen the letter.

(By Mr. Gwathmey) Col. Kerlin, I believe I am expressing the opinion of the Board in stating that ^{after} in consideration of this letter to the Governor of Arkansas, ^{it} was, in its opinion, calculated to inflame public opinion in the State of Arkansas and elsewhere and to create a sentiment which would be adverse to this Institution, and I am sure that the Board will consider the position which you have stated before it, together with the letter from Gen. Nichols to Mr. Allen, which is now produced, and advise you further of its action.

(Col. Kerlin) Mr. Chairman, I wish to make a request of the Board before dismissing me from the room, that as I strictly confined myself according to your direction to the single question of the criticism of the courts of a sister State, I now desire as a favor from the Board that I be permitted to put this whole matter of writing this letter in its proper setting by setting forth my general activities in regard to inter-racial relations in the South. I make this request in view of the very great seriousness, particularly of the question which you put before me as regards my standing with you, and the momentousness of the whole matter of inter-racial relations in our part of the country. I make this request as a favor and I believe, in justice to myself, because this particular action can be understood rightly only when the motive and the principles of my general activities are understood.

(Mr. Gwathmey) Col. Kerlin, the Board in considering this matter heretofore, has considered that it would be improper to consider the question of inter-racial relations or any other question than the question before the Board, arising out of your letter to the Governor of Arkansas. Of course, I cannot express at this time the answer of the Board to your request, but am sure they will consider your request in executive session.

Mr. Chairman, may I state what prompted me to make this request?

A (Pres. Peyton) Col. Kerlin, the committee consists of

Mr. Keith and Mr. Gwathmey, who are in charge of this matter and its discussion with you; therefore either they will have to answer your request or the Board has to take it into consideration.

(Mr. Gwathmey). Col. Kerlin, the Board had heretofore decided not to go into any discussion of race questions before this Board, I am sure, however, the whole matter will be further considered in executive session and the conclusion of the Board certified to you.

(Col. Kerlin). Mr. Gwathmey, I asked permission this last time simply to state what prompted me to make this request. I will state in one sentence why I asked your permission, not to go into inter-racial relations, but my relations to the question of inter-racial relations.

(Mr. Gwathmey). I can see no objection to your stating that position, provided it does not enter into a discussion of the racial question.

(Col. Kerlin). That is understood. I was prompted, gentlemen, to request to be allowed to make a full presentation of my activities, because of the fact that the Superintendent before your mid-year meeting, advised me to ask this Board if I might set forth my activities in this matter, saying that he had sent my book, "The Voice of the Negro", to the President of the Board. That is all, Mr. Chairman, that I have to say.

Copy to file
Sept 7 Some Corrections '21

It had not occurred to me that anyone who knows me could think I was capable of teaching "Social Equality" as between the white and black races. But such a rumor has gone abroad and perplexes people. Therefore I make a positive denial. Never have I thought of putting forward this doctrine, never have I done so. I do not believe that, in writing or speaking, I have ever used the expression. If any man can refute this let him speak out or stop lying.

It has also been rumored that I have been to colored churches in Lexington oftener than to white. I have been in Lexington eleven years. Four times, all told, I have been in colored churches: twice to hear a bishop of that race, twice to hear a song service. Let who will make the most of that.

A third false rumor I refute. Never have I spoken in any colored church here or elsewhere, at anytime—not that I think this would be a crime, but some people's consciences seem to have become suddenly over-tender. Once in Lexington I was advertised to lecture in the Colored Methodist church in behalf of the convict camp fund, of which Mr. Frank Glasgow is treasurer, but the lecture was called off for want of an audience. Three times in the past year I visited the convict camp and carried the gospel message of hope to wretched men, as I think Christ would have done. Has my secret maligner done so much as this little?

I cannot hope to chase down and blast with the truth all the false rumors malignancy may invent. I can but trust people of intelligence to ask whence and wherefore ere believing the incredible.

ROBERT T. KERLIN.

STATEMENT OF COLONEL R. T. KERLIN TO V. M. I. BOARD

Sept. 9 '21
Editor the County News—Desiring my own townfolk to have a full knowledge of my activities, utterances, and views in inter-racial matters, I ask you to print this statement, which I was permitted to read to the Board of Visitors at Richmond, Aug. 20, 1921. By your request, because of lack of space, I cut out one-fourth but indicate the nature of excised matter:

"Board of Visitors,

"Virginia Military Institute,
"Lexington, Virginia.

"Gentlemen:—Your inquiry at your June meeting concerning my 'Open Letter to Governor McRae' relative to the execution of the Elaine Negroes has placed me in a position where it is but just to me, in view of the misapprehensions aroused, that I should receive a full hearing from you and the interested public regarding all my activities and utterances pertaining to inter-racial affairs. I entreat your patience, therefore, to listen to a recital, necessarily personal in character and unavoidably lengthy, but as brief as is consistent

with clearness and completeness. The importance of the issue, both as it affects me individually and as it affects the Institute, and, I may add, as it affects the entire country, but particularly the South, should be ample justification of the large attention I request.

"To anticipate the evidence which, I am sure, will be absolutely convincing, permit me to assert at the outset, with all emphasis, that I have never given utterance to a single idea on the question of the Negro and his status and treatment in our civil society which is not in accord with the soundest traditions of the South, which is not in accord with the principles of a number of truly representative Southern organizations now engaged in enlisting the interests and activities of the substantial and intelligent part of the people of every community of the South in behalf of the improvement of conditions, which, finally, is not in accord with the Christian doctrine preached in our churches year in and year out, doctrine that all men who endeavor to follow Christ desire to practice and see prevail. Nothing that any open and fair mind can pronounce disloyal, radical, unreasonable, or offensive to the most sensitive intelligence, can be adduced from any utterance of mine. Never, for one moment, before any audience, have I been unmindful of my Southern birth and rearing and of my connection with an old and renowned Southern institution of learning that I have always held in esteem and sought to honor.

"As for my motive throughout, it has been solely to promote such inter-racial adjustment as would secure to both races the fullest measure of prosperity and happiness, with mutual good-will and co-operation instead of perpetual friction and frequent outbursts of mob violence that disgrace and imperil our civilization.

"Nine years ago in recognition of the need of enlightened leadership in dealing with the problem of the races in the South the University Commission on Southern Race Questions was founded. This commission, consisting of one representative from each of eleven Southern state universities, has been actively engaged in these years upon a program of investigation, enlightenment, and improved race conditions. I place before you a resume of its work written by one of its members, President Alderman, on one occasion addressing this commission said:

"It is wise that . . . patient, wise, scientific, just men should labor at the problem (of the races) and seek to place it where it belongs, among the great economic and sociological questions of the time."

"The appeal of the commission has been from the first naturally to Southern college men, professors and students. In address after address the appeal has been repeated. In a letter dated April 26, 1919, it thus speaks:

"Because college men are rightly expected to be moulders of opinion, the commission earnestly appeals to them to contribute of their talents and energy in bringing this program to its consummation."

"Altogether in the spirit of this commission's appeal and program has my limited activity upon the problem been carried on. I believe that the commission itself has recognized this. Last November it invited me, at its expense, to attend

its annual meeting in Atlanta, which, however, I was prevented from doing by a previous engagement. Expressions of commendation upon my work have reached me from individual members.

"With another Southern organization of like spirit to that of the University Commission I have had a more intimate connection. This is the Inter-racial Committee, whose headquarters are in Atlanta. Under what is known as 'The Atlanta Plan' this Inter-racial Committee began something over a year ago to organize in all of the counties of the South where there was a considerable colored population joint committees of the two races to deal with all conditions or questions which might be the source of trouble. The specific objects of this plan for the Negro are as follows:

- "1. Justice in the courts and security against lynching.
- "2. Improvement of living conditions, housing, sanitation, etc.
- "3. The securing of better travel accommodations and more courteous treatment in travel.
- "4. A more equitable distribution of public school funds and the improvement of educational facilities.

"As for the effect of this inter-racial work upon the Negroes the testimony of Governor Roberts, of Tennessee, may be accepted as uncontroverted. Addressing the Tennessee Law and Order League, whose program is virtually identical with that of the Inter-racial Committee, he said:

"I have been especially impressed with the attitude of the Negroes toward the League. They have taken hold of it with a zeal and satisfaction that demonstrates conclusively that you are pursuing the proper course with respect to the treatment of the Negro. He only wants a square deal and to be protected in his life, liberty and property. This movement has wrought wonders along the line of bringing about a better understanding between the races in Tennessee."

"Last summer, at the solicitation of the Virginia Inter-racial Committee, I engaged in helping to organize committees in the counties of this state. The white personnel of the state committee under which I worked was as follows: R. E. Blackwell (President), Jackson Davis, A. D. Wright, W. H. Mann, R. E. Magill, Frank Talbott, J. P. McConnell, J. H. Dillard, F. P. Christian, Homer L. Ferguson, Asa L. Watkins, and L. Gregory Chase. At its last meeting I was added to this committee.

"As for my part in this undertaking, Mr. J. E. Pleasants, Y. M. C. A. student secretary of the state and secretary of the state Inter-racial Committee, wrote to me as follows at the conclusion of my engagement:

"I certainly have a great appreciation of the work you did, and I am satisfied that you did as much as any other man could have done under like circumstances. The men who have worked with you have assured me of your splendid spirit and of your wise handling of this work."

"Preceding this activity I was called upon by a missionary conference of the Inter-Church Society to instruct a class of Christian workers at Blue Ridge, N. C., on the subject of the race problem. Twenty-six men and women, leaders in Christian work and social service in the South, constituted the class. Evidence as to the character of my teaching is made available to you by the class roll,

which I place in your hands, and a letter from the secretary of the class. Every member of that class pledged myself to the same feelingly, in the last meeting, to follow out in his life the doctrines which had been inculcated. In the month of April of the present year I gave a course of instruction on the same subject to the Y. M. C. A. in Washington and Lee University. A letter from Mr. E. B. Shultz, secretary of the association, is laid before you for your information regarding my teachings there."

(Here I read to the board the following letter:)

"July 27, 1921.

"My dear Professor Kerlin:

"It was my privilege at the Blue Ridge Conference in North Carolina, in the summer of 1920, to attend a class composed largely of leaders in social work in the South, for the purpose of seriously studying the age-old 'Negro Question.' You were the leader.

"I am willing to admit that I entered that class with fear and trembling, because I thought that there was no solution possible, and because I felt stirring within me certain prejudices, deep-seated and of long standing. Like many another Southern man, I was afraid to face the facts.

"The one thing I most feared was that you might be a 'radical,' an espouser of 'equality,' that dangerous animal known by the uneducated but shrewd Southern 'cracker' as a 'nigger-lover.' We had suffered too much from that brand of fanaticism.

"But the first thing we were impressed with (I think I may speak for the whole class) was the unbiased spirit of scientific criticism with which you handled the subject. It became clear at the outset that you, far from obscuring any phase of the question, were insistent on bringing out 'the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.' In fact, you encouraged the class to bring out every prejudice, to bring into the discussion every fact known to them which might contradict any statement you made. You met us more than half way, for you often brought up serious objections which the class failed to think of. Your fairness, candor and largeness of vision made a tremendous impression.

"Now, as to the result: at the 'testimony meeting' we found that you had converted the whole class. We now believe that the South has nothing to fear in facing all the facts, and in applying in its treatment of the Negro question, the principles of Democracy and Christianity. We pledged ourselves, unanimously, to do what we could to that end, and formed an organization for that purpose.

"Now, if that is the self-sacrificing work that you are doing throughout the South, and I believe that it is, I want to add my humble word of unqualified approval. It is to leaders like you that we of the old South must look for a solution of the greatest question we have to face. May God bless and further your every effort. May the fine old Virginia Military Institute be proud that she has on her faculty a man who not only teaches the way but does the hard, practical work of 'blazing the trail' toward that inter-racial co-operation which, and which alone, can save the day for Southern manhood and womanhood.

"Most respectfully yours,

"FRANK S. PERSONS, II.
"Missionary - in - Charge, District No. 4.

"Archdeaconry of the Blue Ridge."

(After this letter my statement gave a detailed, orderly account of all my writings and addresses on racial matters and how their value had been acknowledged in the South. It continued with a review of the utterances of Southern men regarding our duty to the Negro. Then I proceeded as follows:)

"In accordance with the utterances of these two eminent men, truly representative of the saner mind of the enlightened South in all its history, a number of societies and organizations of the South are at the present time devoting earnest thought and labor to remedies of the menacing situation. That there is a general quickening and enlightenment of conscience and a general increase of intelligence upon the question, with a prospective general change of attitude, there is abundant evidence.

"Last summer at a conference of 'Christian Leaders' at Blue Ridge, N. C., attended by seventy odd representatives of fifteen denominations from twelve states there was adopted the following appeal to the Christian people of the South:

"The Christian Leaders' platform (1) declares lynching to be a crime against the nation's honor and calls upon the South for an uncompromising opposition to all mob violence; (2) urges laymen throughout the South to keep in close touch with the administration of justice, particularly in the petty courts, and to form legal aid societies for the benefit of the poor and unprivileged of all races; (3) urges that adequate and equitable arrangements be made for the safety and comfort of Negro travelers; (4) deplors the insanitary and bad housing conditions among Southern Negroes and calls on Christians for active co-operation in righting such conditions; (5) holds that ignorance breeds disorder, vice, and crime; (6) urges ministers to teach people to apply Christian principles to their treatment of the colored race; (7) calls on all the Christian forces to co-operate with the Commission on Inter-racial Co-operation; (8) recommends the formation of local inter-racial committees whose object will be the conservation of peace and justice for all; (9) requests the official and denominational organizations of both races to make a thorough study of inter-racial problems and work out adequate inter-racial programs."

"Gentlemen, I could go on indefinitely citing such platforms and pronouncements as this, coming out of the heart of the South, but instead I will lay before you addresses and compilations of papers that will better show what the leaders of enlightenment in the South are today thinking, saying, and doing. I believe it can be safely asserted that there is scarcely a college or university in the South which has not one or more men on its faculty who endorse the platform just quoted and who are endeavoring by their teachings and their efforts to make it prevail. With such men I can not consider it any discredit to be associated. As citizens and as educators they regard it as their duty to be leaders where enlightened leadership is so greatly needed.

"Without agitation or appeal to

passion, but only by addressing the sense of justice and of Christian duty, these men, with whom I rank myself, are seeking to bring about a juster, safer and more Christian order of society as regards the Negroes, to secure for them such fairness and humanity of treatment as will reduce the problem to its lowest possible terms and guarantee ourselves against the reproaches which otherwise we can not escape. Again, therefore, I assert that I can safely challenge any one to adduce a single utterance of mine which goes beyond what I have here cited as representing the growing and prevailing sentiment of the South, any utterance that on the ground of radicalism, or disloyalty, or harmfulness merits to be condemned. In the interests of justice and our common welfare and of our credit as an enlightened and Christian people have I done and said all, whatsoever I have said and done. To your fair judgments I submit it, with confidence of your approval.

"Respectfully,

"ROBERT T. KERLIN."

A CASE OF INTOLERANCE.

Richmond Times-Dispatch, Sept. 7, 1921.
Virginia newspapers are still discussing the action of the Board of Visitors of Virginia Military Institute in dismissing the head of the English Department, Professor ROBERT T. KERLIN. The only reason assigned at the time was that a letter written by the professor to the Governor of Arkansas "reflected upon the administration of justice in that State."

Professor KERLIN's letter was published last May, and was a solemn appeal to the Arkansas Governor to consider the cases of certain men condemned to death in that State, as he believed unjustly. He recited the facts, as he understood them, and declared that he would welcome any correction that might truthfully be made of the statements in his letter. On its face, this does not look like such a terrible affront to the majesty of the State of Arkansas. But the real offense lay in the fact that the condemned men were negroes.

This is still the blind spot for too many people in the South. They cannot see straight or reason clearly when the race question is thrust at them. In Virginia this is less excusable than in other States, since in Virginia, as The Richmond Times-Dispatch asserts, the colored man has "ceased to be a problem." That newspaper boldly pronounces the action of the Board of Visitors to be "narrow and provincial," and wholly "unworthy of the broad and kindly leadership of Virginia." In the absence of any explanation by the authorities of the Military Institute, their dismissal of Professor KERLIN will be regarded as a bad case of stupid intolerance.

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WHEREAS, the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute having taken the following action:

" The Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute having met pursuant to the call of the President of the Board again considered the subject of Colonel Kerlin's letter to the Governor of Arkansas in the matter of the Elaine Insurrection Trial.

Colonel Kerlin appeared before the Board and at his request (again presented), set forth at length in a written statement his views and activities on interracial relations in the South; other than this statement Colonel Kerlin did not present anything in relation to his letter to the Governor of Arkansas. After further discussion of the matter before the Board it is the sense of the Board that Colonel Kerlin presented no sufficient reason for excuse why a professor at the Virginia Military Institute should write such a letter as Colonel Kerlin wrote to the Governor of Arkansas, the immediate effect of which would tend to defeat the very objects and purposes which would seem to actuate Colonel Kerlin in interracial matters in the South; and,

WHEREAS it is the opinion of this Board that Colonel Kerlin by reason of his interposition in the "Elaine Insurrection" cases as exemplified by his letter to the Governor of Arkansas reflecting upon the administration

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of justice in that State, and those upon whom the solemn duty rests of enforcing the laws therein, (in which connection the Board has considered his general activities in interracial matters), has rendered his further connection with the Virginia Military Institute undesirable, and his retention in his professorship instead of promoting the beneficial ends for which the Institute was established, would prove harmful and detrimental thereto, and embarrassing to those responsible for its conduct and management and prejudicial to the interests which it is their duty to guard and protect.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute are unanimously of the opinion that the usefulness of Colonel Robert T. Kerlin at the Virginia Military Institute has ceased, and that his further connection therewith as Professor would be detrimental to its welfare, and, therefore, his immediate resignation is hereby requested, and the Secretary is directed to forthwith hand to Colonel Kerlin a copy of this Resolution."

AND WHEREAS Colonel Kerlin has replied to the aforesaid resolution by refusing to resign as therein requested; therefore, his employment as Professor at the Virginia Military Institute is hereby immediately terminated; his salary, nevertheless to be paid him until January 1st, 1922, or, until such time prior thereto as he shall have accepted other employment.

RESOLVED, further, that a copy of this Resolution be handed to Colonel Kerlin by the Secretary of the Board, and a copy forwarded by the Superintendent to the Governor of Virginia, together with the record before the Board in this connection in accordance with law.

1. "The Voice of the Negro". The tendency of this book was to create race prejudice as well as race animosity.
2. Repeated addresses before various societies in various cities.
3. Letter to the Governor of Arkansas.
4. Protests of citizens of Arkansas.
5. Appearance before the Board of Visitors at their June meeting, 1920.
6. Visit to Detroit immediately following this meeting where he addressed a radical negro organization.
7. Protests of alumni in Detroit.
8. Meeting of the Board in August, 1920, before which he appeared in his own defense.
9. Dismissal, August 20th, 1920, by the Board of Visitors assembled in Richmond.
10. Paid his salary to January 1st, 1922, and allowed the use of his quarters till March 1st, 1922.
11. Brought suit for damages still pending.
12. Lectured in Lynchburg, Petersburg, Norfolk and Richmond in the spring of 1922 to negroes in negro churches.
13. Whatever sympathy his case may have aroused has been dissipated both here and in these centres by his radical utterances.
14. Left Lexington in September, 1922, and accepted a position as Professor of English in the High School at West Chester, Penna.

*Recd to Capt
J.H. on 11/4/22
copy in
Dept's personal
files*