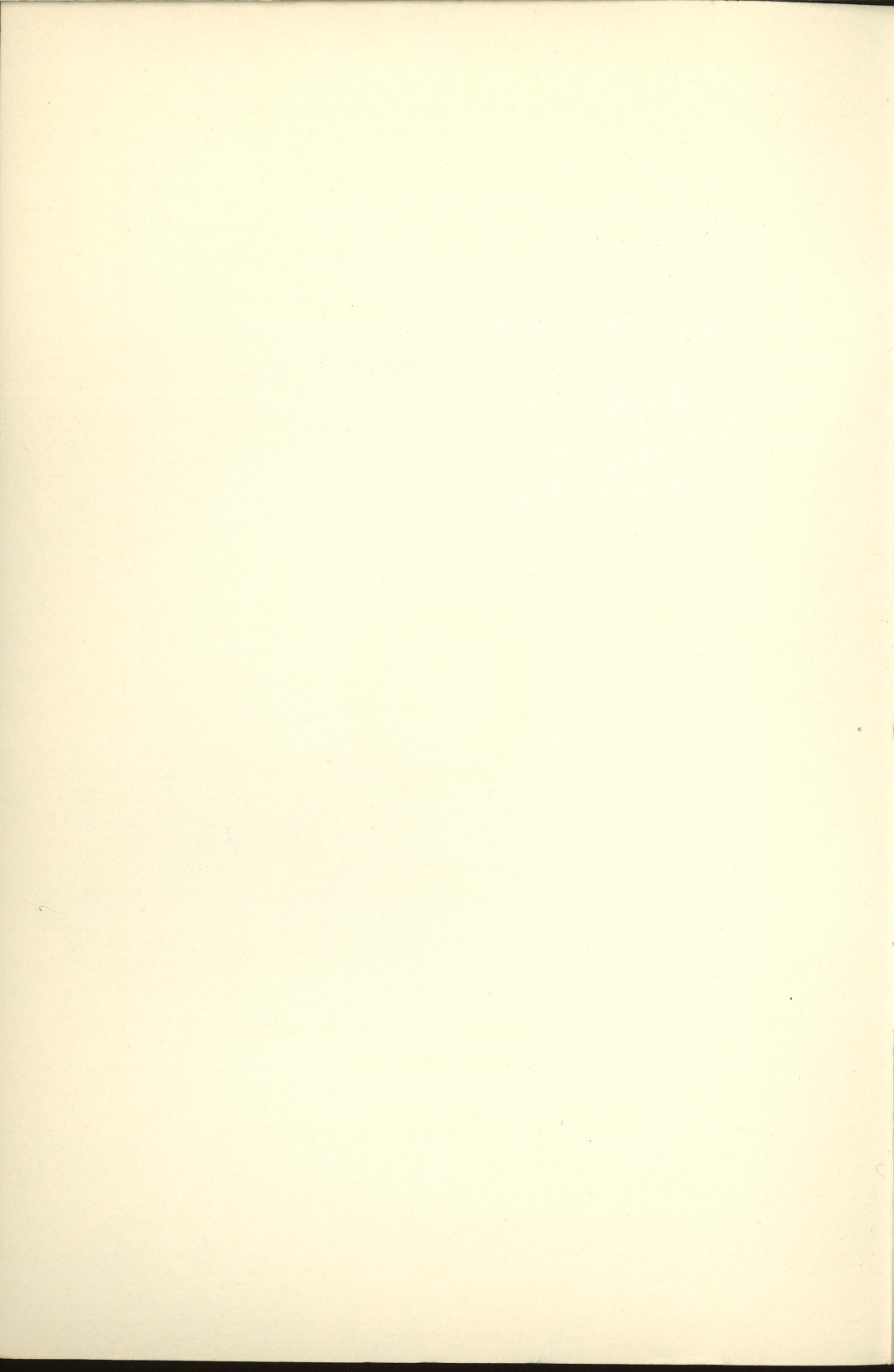


CENTENARY COLLEGE
GOES TO WAR
IN 1861

By ARTHUR M. SHAW, JR.



A PUBLICATION
of
CENTENARY COLLEGE OF LOUISIANA

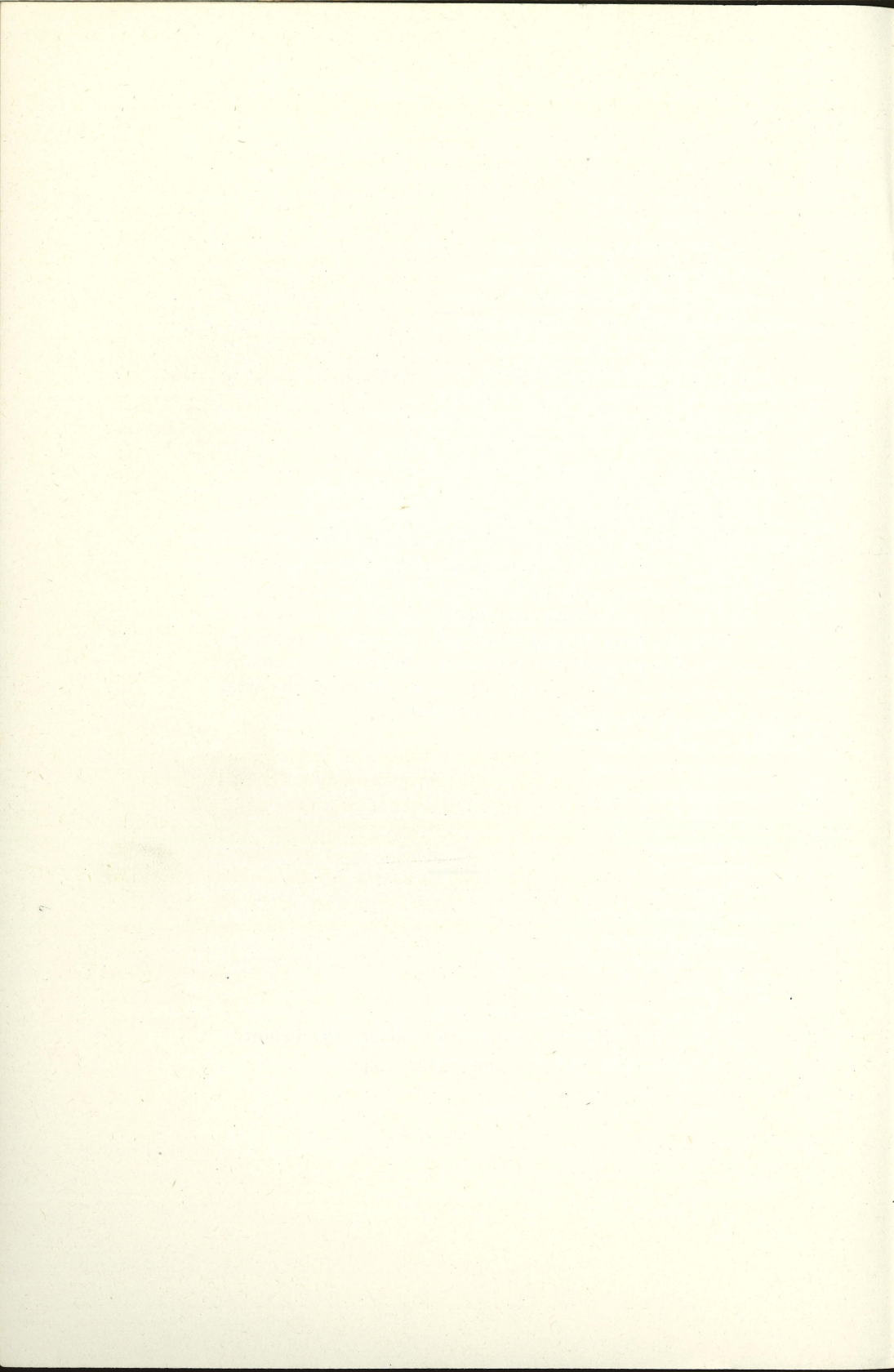


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The surrender of the last large military force of the Confederacy occurred at Shreveport, Louisiana, May 26, 1865. Some of the Centenary College boys were in that army. The present account of Centenary's part in the War Between the States was written as a contribution to the Commemoration of the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the final lowering of the Stars and Bars.

*Published by Centenary College, Shreveport,
Louisiana, May, 1940*



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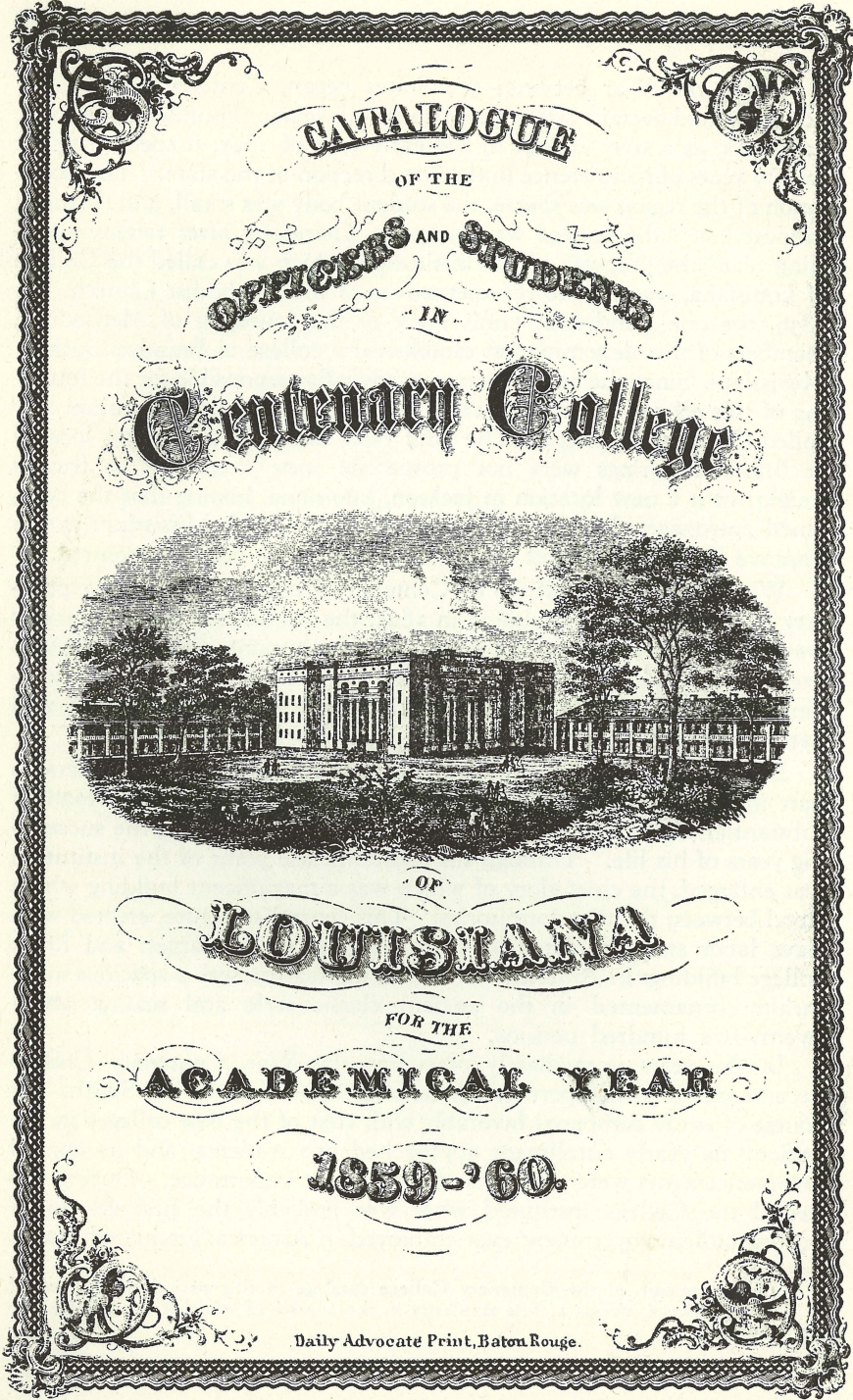
When the War between the States began, Centenary College of Louisiana had been in existence for thirty-six years. Founded in Jackson, Louisiana, as a state college in the early part of 1825, it spent the first twenty years of its existence under the direction of the state. The population of the region was sparse, the student body was small, and financial support given the college was meager. Therefore, after twenty struggling years, the property of this institution, which was called the College of Louisiana, was sold to representatives of the Methodist Church. In 1839, the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of Methodism, members of this denomination established a college in Brandon Springs, Mississippi. Since the anniversary was partially responsible for the founding of this school, or at least was the occasion of it, the institution was called Centenary College. The brief years during which it was located at Brandon Springs were not prosperous ones; therefore, its friends sought for it a new location in Jackson, Louisiana, hoping that the combined patronage of persons from that state and from Mississippi would improve its condition; and in this hope they were not disappointed.

When the representatives of Centenary College acquired the property of the College of Louisiana in 1845, the transaction was, in various ways, indicated as a merging of the two institutions, the most obvious present-day evidences of which are that the college still wears the combined names of the two schools, CENTENARY COLLEGE OF LOUISIANA, and dates its beginning in 1825.

Edward McGehee, of Woodville, Mississippi, who had a considerable part in transferring the Methodist College to Jackson, was a man of substantial means and gave generously to Centenary during the succeeding years of his life. Through his assistance the plant of the institution was enlarged, the chief glory of which was a magnificent building which stood between the two dormitories. This central structure, erected with slave labor and completed in 1857, was one of the largest and finest college buildings in America. Its crowning feature was a spacious auditorium, ornamented in the ancient classic style and seating about twenty-five hundred persons.

In the years immediately preceding the War, Centenary College became one of the important educational institutions of the South. Its course of study compared favorably with that of the best colleges in the nation,¹ its yearly enrollment approached 250 students, and its annual commencements were occasions of remarkable importance. During this period the College instituted what was probably the first system of partial student government ever employed in America; graduated classes

¹A comparison of the Centenary College catalogs of this period with those of Yale College reveals a close similarity in the courses of study at the two institutions.



Front Cover of an Ante-Bellum Centenary College Catalog.

each year which ranged as high as twenty-two in number; and conferred honorary degrees upon such men as United States Senator Solomon W. Downs of Louisiana, Governor H. S. Foote of Mississippi, and Charles A. Gayarre, Louisiana's eminent historian.

During the months preceding the outbreak of the War, the College was apparently devoting its attention to its own business, and directing little thought to the impending conflict or to its probable effect upon the school. If the school authorities anticipated the dissolution which must follow if war actually came—as they doubtless did—they avoided any official discussion of it in their meetings. It is note-worthy also that during the years which brought the country closer and closer to the bloody civil struggle the Centenary students ignored sectional animosities as a field for oratorical exploitation. The College programs of those years reveal that they chose to speak upon such philosophical and non-controversial subjects as "Virtue Essential to True Greatness", "The Poet's Mission", "The Upright Politician", and "Aims and Beauties of Astronomy".

The first suggestion in the college records that Centenary was beginning to think of the War as a probability appears in the Faculty Minutes of November 21, 1860,² wherein it is stated that

A request was made by a number of Students to have the privilege of forming a military company. This request was granted by the Faculty under certain conditions, that is, that the rules and regulations be submitted to and approved by the Faculty.

Since the election of Lincoln to the Presidency had occurred on November 6, just fifteen days prior to this meeting, it seems likely that the desire of the students for a military company was prompted by the general excitement in the South, which followed the election.

No further mention of the college military organization is recorded in the minutes until the Faculty meeting of April 9, 1861. Although this meeting preceded by only three days the attack of Southern forces upon Fort Sumter, the Faculty apparently were reluctant to believe that war was so close at hand and desired that the work of the college should proceed in an orderly way. In the minutes of this date, the following statement occurs:

The request made by a committee from the mil. company formed by the Students in College to go to Clinton on Saturday next to the presentation of a banner, was, on motion, not granted.

Before the following month had passed, the War had called the students away from their class-rooms and beyond the direction of their

²The record books from which the several following excerpts were taken are in the Archives of Centenary College.

Students have all gone to war.
College suspended.
and
God help the right!

A Page from the Faculty Minutes of Centenary College
of Louisiana, October 7, 1861.

professors. The Faculty Minutes of May 21, 1861, as recorded by the secretary, Professor A. R. Holcombe, reveal but one item of business, a statement of which followed the opening prayer. Under the circumstances, little more could have been done. The item reads:

In view of the departure of Students in consequence of the existing war, until there are but three college students remaining, be it resolved that the Faculty suspend College exercises for the present, but that the preparatory school be continued.

On July 16 of that year the Faculty met again; and it is apparent from the minutes that they had faint hope that the work of the College could be resumed in the fall. A committee was appointed to prepare a manuscript catalog for this session. At the same meeting, the Faculty passed a motion that the names of the Senior Class of 1860-61 be presented to the Board of Trustees as candidates for their degrees. T. C. Bradford, H. G. Cockerham, E. S. Drake, J. T. Hilliard, W. M. Johnson, S. W. Lipscomb, T. L. Nugent, S. H. Rose, and F. T. Stuart were recommended for the first degree in liberal arts, and William W. Farmer, R. D. Norsworthy, and William M. Jayne for the second degree in liberal arts.

On October 7, 1861, the Faculty assembled for what under normal conditions would have been the first meeting of the new college session. It was, however, the last meeting for several years; and the following paragraph from the minutes will indicate the reason:

The Faculty met on this morning, there being no college students and few preparatory students, it was resolved on motion that the President call the executive committee as soon as it is convenient.

On the large page opposite the minutes of this meeting, the secretary wrote these words diagonally across the sheet which is clean save for four brief dramatic lines, "*Students have all gone to war. College suspended, and God help the right!*" Of all circumstances connected with the colorful history of Centenary, there is none, of which its friends are so proud as of this expression of a Christian gentleman in those embittered years.

The boys marched away, and the magnificent college halls and the beautiful campus with its splendid oaks, pines, and beech trees, its magnolias and cherokee roses, were deserted. And who were these lads who left the pleasant academic life in the quiet of the Feliciana hills for the fields of war? From what homes and from what families did the boys of old Centenary come? If one will read *So Red the Rose*, Stark Young's fine story of that segment of the Old South which stretched from Natchez, Mississippi, southward along the river into the Florida parishes of Louisiana, he will find pictures of young men and their homes which typify the ante-bellum Centenary student and his environment.

The McGehee families, who comprise some of the principal characters in the book, were among the most loyal and valuable friends that Centenary ever had. Near the end of the story, the novelist causes Hugh McGehee, in speaking of the War, to address this question to his daughter:

"Lucy, don't you know that from Centenary College where Jefferson Davis went, the entire graduating class was killed to a man?"

The two items indicated in the foregoing question have persisted with considerable strength among the traditions of the College; but since neither is supported by documentary evidence, we set them down simply as traditions.

The Centenary students who marched away before the autumn of 1861 to join the forces of the Confederacy were to fight on many bloody battlefields of the War.³ Some were in the terrible fight at Shiloh; some fought under Stonewall Jackson in Virginia; they were at Gettysburg, at Atlanta, when the city fell in 1864, and at Shreveport, when the last armed forces of the Confederacy laid down their arms. In these and other battle areas, they fought with honor. Many were wounded; many others were captured and confined for long periods in northern prisons where some of them died; and others were killed in battle.

The following brief list, which may be taken as representative, tells the story of what happened to some of the Louisiana boys who belonged to the Centenary student body in the session of 1860-61:⁴

CAMP FLOURNOY—a Sophomore, from Greenwood, Louisiana, enlisted at Camp Moore in December, 1861. Became a first lieutenant, then a captain in May, 1862; and in May, 1864, was promoted to major by order of the Secretary of War. Was paroled at Meridian, Mississippi, May 10, 1865, as a major in the 19th Louisiana Infantry.

JOHN T. HILLIARD—a Senior, from New Iberia, Louisiana, enlisted at Camp Moore in May, 1861. Was made a captain in the 4th Louisiana Infantry, and was killed at the Battle of Shiloh, April 6, 1862.

LEON P. GUSMAN—a Junior, from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, enlisted at Camp Moore in June, 1861. Became a corporal and later a sergeant in the 8th Louisiana Infantry. Was wounded in the battle at Winchester, Virginia, was captured by the Federals and later exchanged. Was killed at the Battle of Gettysburg, July 2, 1863.

PRYOR W. LEA—a student in the Preparatory Department, from Jackson, Louisiana. Enlisted at Vicksburg as a pri-

³From the Student Roll of Centenary College for the session of 1860-61, the writer has taken the names of a considerable number of students whose military careers he investigated in the *Records of Louisiana Confederate Soldiers and Commands*.

⁴Most of the Centenary volunteers enlisted at Camp Moore, which was located at Tangipahoa, Louisiana, not a great distance from the site of the College.

vate in the 4th Louisiana Infantry, May, 1862. Captured near Atlanta, Georgia, August 5, 1864. Died of typhoid-malaria fever in a military prison at Camp Chase, Ohio, December 4, 1864.

JOHN P. HUDSON—a Junior, from Opelousas, Louisiana. Enlisted as a private in the 8th Louisiana Infantry, June 26, 1861. Was wounded at Sharpsburg, September 17, 1862, and taken prisoner. Died of his wound, October 10, 1862. Had been promoted to sergeant.

LUCIEN KENT—a student in the Preparatory Department, from Clinton, Louisiana. Enlisted at Camp Moore as a private in the 4th Louisiana Infantry, May 25, 1861. Was later made corporal. On sick furlough in Clinton, September to December, 1862. Died of wounds August 31, 1864.

STEPHEN D. GUSTINE—a student in the Preparatory Department, from Baton Rouge. Was a private in Nolan's Cavalry Company. Was on the Federal roll of prisoners of war, and was paroled at Shreveport, June 22, 1865.

DRURY V. REAVES—a student in the Preparatory Department, from Mansfield, Louisiana. Enlisted at Camp Moore as a private in the 19th Louisiana Infantry, December 11, 1861. Served through the war and was wounded. Was paroled at Shreveport, June 17, 1865.

ELISHA S. WILSON—a Sophomore, from Pleasant Hill, Louisiana. Enlisted in DeSoto Parish, March 8, 1862, as a private in the 9th Louisiana Infantry, and was made corporal. Died in a hospital of disease, May 16, 1862.

JOHN S. BELL—a Sophomore, from Mansfield, Louisiana. Enlisted at New Orleans as a private in the 27th Louisiana Infantry, March, 1862. Was captured and paroled at Vicksburg, July 4, 1863, and reported for exchange at Shreveport, April 1, 1864. Was on the roll of prisoners of war paroled at Natchitoches, Louisiana, June 5, 1865.

The young men listed above were all members of the student body attending Centenary College at Jackson, Louisiana, in the spring of 1861 when the War broke out. Hardly a one had attained the full maturity of manhood, and most of them were less than twenty years of age. The rolls of the College, including students in the preparatory department, numbered 245 boys. A few were too young for military service, but most of the group joined the Confederate Army; and the experiences of these were similar to those of the ten boys whose records we have given in part.

Among the important patrons of Centenary College in the 1850's were the Ellis family of Clinton, Louisiana. Thomas C. W. Ellis attended the College from 1852 to 1855 receiving his degree in the latter year. He took his law work in New Orleans at the University of

Louisiana, which was later absorbed by Tulane University. When the War broke out, he was practicing law in Amite, Louisiana. He joined the Confederate service and served as a captain in the 18th Louisiana Cavalry. After the War he achieved distinction in law and politics, and in the latter part of his career was the most popular professor in the Law School of Tulane University.

E. J. Ellis, a younger brother of Thomas, was a student at Centenary from 1853 to 1858, and later finished the Law School at the University of Louisiana. He enlisted at Camp Moore on September 29, 1861, in the 16th Louisiana Infantry. He became a first lieutenant and was later made Captain of the St. Helena Rifles. He was in the Battle of Shiloh, and afterwards served in various campaigns in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee. Captured by the Federals at Missionary Ridge, November 25, 1863, he spent the remainder of the War in prison at Johnson's Island, Ohio. After the War he practiced law, entered politics, and in 1874 was elected to Congress where he entered upon a long and successful career as a speaker. His letters written when he was a student at Centenary and later when he was a Confederate officer are remarkable for their emotional power. The following letter^s was written by E. J. Ellis to his father on April 13, six days after the Battle of Shiloh, which ended April 7, 1862:

Corinth—April 13th, 1862

Dear Pa—I will add a line extra to what Stephen has already written though I guess he has told you everything of interest in the letter which he has written. We are now resting and recruiting the men, cleaning our arms and preparing to take the field again at the call of our beloved Beauregard.

We have had a great deal of wet and disagreeable weather since the battle but today is as bright and beautiful as days ever are; the sun is warm, the buds are bursting and the birds are singing and I could lay (sic) under one of these big oaks and shutting my eyes almost dream that I was at home again and that there was no war. But the drum call or a bugle note will break the spell and bring back the harsh stern reality of civil war, bloodshed and misery.

As I finished the last page Gen. Beauregard rode up attended only by two aids to Col. Mason's tent. A crowd gathered about him and I went up. He asked kindly about the sick about our loss. Seeing one of our men who had been slightly wounded in the head, standing near with a bandage about his head, he rode up to him extended his hand and inquired, "My brave friend were you wounded?" Being answered in the affirmative he went on and said, "Never mind, I trust you will soon be well. Before long we will make the Yankees pay up, interest and all. The day of our glory is near." As he rode away after gracefully bowing to the crowd, a shout such as Napoleon might have heard

^sWe are indebted to the Library of the Louisiana State University for permission to publish the Ellis letters contained in this article.

from the lips of the "Guard," went up, "Hurrah for Beauregard, our Chief." It is strange Pa how we love that little black frenchman, but there is not a man in his army who would not willingly die in following his lead.

When and where we will fight the next battle I am unable to tell or even to guess or hazard an opinion. I believe the enemy is leaving the Tennessee River. They got enough of that place and of our troops, and unless they have an overwhelming force they wont venture to attack us. The darkest days are now upon us. The times are perilous and the weight of Southern liberty seems trembling in the balance. This will soon pass away, this war must soon close, the end of summer will not come before peace. The army is confident and jubilant; to judge by Beauregard's countenance all is going well and let us trust will end well.

The enemy may take Memphis, yes & New Orleans too. Well that would be bad but yet we are unsubdued, still determined to be free, arms are still in our hands, the soil of the South is yet under our feet and the God of the South and of right is still over us and in the end all will be well and may coming posterity be more mindful of our toils & struggles than we were of our fathers.

Capt. Taylor is not dead and hopes are now entertained that he will live. The chances are slim indeed but yet he may recover. Thomas Warner was not in the fight but when his regt. came back to Corinth he was sent out near the battlefield to assist some of the wounded. This was 5 days ago and he is still missing. The supposition is that he is a prisoner in the enemys hands. Capt. W. B. J. Moore was killed in the battle and Pat Farrel was mortally wounded, and died on yesterday. When you write to me direct (*sic*) write the No. of the Regiment and always to the care of Capt. Thompson. Thus I will get your letter. I heard from home only once since the 4 of April and that by Col. Mason who arrived this morning and told me he saw you at Amite on Saturday. The mail from here is stopped by order of the General and this is why I dont write by mail. But letters can come here. But I must close. Love to all.

Affctly Yr son

E. J. Ellis

Shortly before the battle of Shiloh, Stephen D. Ellis, a younger brother of Lieutenant E. J. Ellis, enlisted as a private. He was only sixteen years of age when he became a soldier. He had not attained college age when Centenary opened for its last session before the War, and he was not a member of the student body. However, because he was a member of an important Centenary family, we quote the letter which he wrote to his mother, four days after the Battle of Shiloh—a letter written with pencil in a boyish scrawl, but in simple and dramatic language, containing an account of his part in that bloody fight.

Corinth, Miss. April 11th, 1862

Mrs. T. E. Ellis

My dear Mother, I have been here nearly two weeks, (it will be two tomorrow since I left home) & I have only written home once since

I have been here, the reason of my seeming neglect has been on account of our march & I have been busy ever since I have been here. I was mustered into service about 15 minutes after I got here. I got here on Monday having had to lay over at Canton a day. We missed the connection there about 4 hours. On Thursday morning after I got here, on Monday, I was awakened by the long roll of the drum. I got up & we were ordered to cook five days rations & be ready to march as soon as possible. The boys myself included went at it & about 4 o'clock on Thursday evening we set sail for the court of the Yankees. We marched about 9 miles that evening which was very fatiguing to us, that night I was put on guard, for the first since I had been soldering, the next morning we started about sunrise & marched about 15 miles, & camped within about two miles of the Yankees. Sunday morning our pickets & theirs got to fighting & thus the great battle of Siloh (*sic*) commenced, we were ordered over there & we fooled around for 5 or 6 hours before we got to see a Yankee, although the battle was raging not more than half a mile from us. But when we did get into it, I tell you they made us fight a while before they let us quit. On Monday I fought for three hours right straight ahead without stopping to blow. I shot 28 times, & I think I must have killed at least fourteen Yankees, at any rate if I didn't kill that many it was not my fault. I told you all about the killed and wounded in my letter before this. I saw Luther Bowman last night, he took supper with John and me. He was well & seemed to be in fine spirits. I send with this note a goat-skin I took from the Yankees camp. Ellis Evans is sick with chills & fever. J joins in sending love & kisses to all

Yr. Affc. son
Stephen

The Ellis brothers, Thomas, E. J., and Stephen, wrote many interesting letters home during the War. From this collection, however, we quote only one more, which was written by Lieutenant E. J. Ellis in the early summer of 1862, when Southern hopes were high and when the prospect of an early Confederate victory was, in the minds of southern soldiers, bright.

Bivouac near Tupelo—Pontotoc Co.
Miss. June 9th, 1862

Dear Mother—I have only time to write a note. Day before yesterday at 2¹/₂ o'clock we left our Bivouac at Clear Creek and set out for this place. We marched till 12¹/₂ o'clock at night (10 hours) when we halted and worn out we lay down & slept till morning when the march was once more resumed & kept up till 4 P.M. yesterday when we arrived at this place. Well a nights rest has put me all "OK" and I feel as fresh as a piece of unsalted pork and ready for another march. My boys all stood the march first rate and they are all well today, at least all of them that are here some 30 men.

Poor little weakly Ellis Evans stands it all like a hero. I think his health is better. He has as much spirit and determination as anyone I ever saw. Our army is here and unaffected by our recent "FORWARD

MOVEMENT TO THE REAR". We are all confident of the result and eager to face the Yankees again. I have only one desire & that is to meet them on the soil of beleaguered Louisiana.

There Ma, I think that I would be a match for 12 of the scoundrels and here not more than 2. I constantly hear reports from Louisiana, of incursions of parties of the invaders into the interior and only this morning I hear that a party of 500 cavalry came out to the RR not far from Amite and prowled about the country and went back. This I cannot believe. If so where were the few remaining men of the country, where the boasted guerrillas of Wingfield, where were those trusty rifles and eloquent shot guns and what the use of our swamps & woods? There are some few young men & boys left in our country and the old men are there. Why did they not make the invaders trail their road back to their water prisons with their own blood? When I hear such reports I want to go back home. But I cant think that report is true. Surely Louisiana is not overrun in that way. It *can not be*.

I wish I could hear from home. But I can wait patiently and I trust that all is well.

Ma the war is almost over. By the time Autumns winds shall chill the green leaves that are whispering to the South wind above my bivouac the war will be done & I will be at home, to be severed from it no more by the clarion voice of war. Then we will have a good time once again. Time & expanse have changed me a little, sun & dirt have made me a little blacker than "I used to was" but my feelings for home are still those of yore & my love for the folks young & old at home, time, nor war, nor dirt, nor sun, nor rain can change.

The war has done me good in many ways. It has taught me patience, endurance & "to labor & wait". It has given me experience and an insight into the motives & principles by which human nature is moved more than I ever had before, it has learned (*sic*) me to be less particular in a great many things.

When I see dirt in my victuals, I take it out & eat on. If I taste it, I swallow & eat on.

If my coffee is not strong, I thank the Lord that it is as strong as it is & drink it. If my bed is hard and my head not high enough I content myself with the idea that it might be worse and go to sleep. But soldiers generally like to make out that they have a terribly hard time. Well Ma I think I have seen the dark side of soldiering and although it is tolerably hard, yet there ain't any use of calling it intolerable, or of thinking at home holding up their hands in horror at the "*hardships*". Soldiers generally get plenty to eat & clothes enough and are not over tasked not (*sic*) in one case out of a hundred. But I must close. My love to Pa, Tim, Mait & in fine the balance of the children.

Howdy to the negroes. Love to Aunt Sally, Mr. Chamberlin & etc. For you, the warmest affection that a warm hearted boy may feel for the best Mother in the world.

Goodbye

Your affect. Son
E. J. Ellis

The material contained in the foregoing pages of this brief article must be considered as only a segment of the full story of the part played by Centenary College and its students in the War between the States. Hundreds of Centenary boys were in the Confederate Army, the records of whom were as interesting, and, in many instances, as tragic, as those we have cited.

The calamities of war and defeat fell heavily upon the College. Its fine buildings were used for a time as a Confederate hospital during the siege of Port Hudson, a strategic river point sixteen miles from the site of the College. Almost immediately after the fall of Vicksburg on July 4, 1863, the Confederate forces at Port Hudson surrendered to General Banks; and during the Federal occupation of the surrounding territory which ensued, the buildings of Centenary College were used as headquarters for the invading army. Consequently, these structures suffered much damage, and many books belonging to the fine library were destroyed or lost in one way or another.

Immediately following the War, the friends of the College began the heroic struggle to restore Centenary as a vital force in the culture and education of the South. Through the devotion and fortitude of dauntless and sacrificing friends, it lived through the poverty and difficulties of Reconstruction and succeeding years; and now, in Shreveport, to which city the College was moved in 1906, it survives as the oldest college west of the Mississippi River.



