

# The Tillotson College Bulletin

(A Memorial Issue)

AUSTIN, TEXAS, JANUARY, 1945



MARY ELIZABETH BRANCH, Ped.D., LL.D.  
1881-1944

A Good Friend, An Alert and Progressive Educator, a Sincere Christian,  
and the Late President of Tillotson College.

## In Memoriam

This bulletin is dedicated to the memory of President Mary E. Branch as a token of our appreciation of her. As an executive, she was forceful and efficient, as a companion, she was genial and kind, and as a friend, she was loyal and true. To know her was to be influenced by her; to meet her daily on the campus, was to learn to live on a higher plane. Loyal to God, to her friends, and to herself, she inspired others with her sense of responsibility and sacrificial service. President Branch was untiring in her efforts to improve the college. She left a record of outstanding achievement in educational, civic, and religious circles. We are poorer now that she has gone from us.

## THE LIFE AND WORK OF THE LATE MARY E. BRANCH

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(The following article is composed of excerpts from addresses delivered by William H. Jones at memorial services for President Branch in Moorestown, New Jersey and in several communities in Texas.)

Six months ago, a light went out in our great State of Texas. It was a bright and luminous light that shed its rays in all directions and blessed all whom it touched. That light was the radiant and forceful personality of Miss Mary E. Branch, distinguished president of Tillotson College. President Branch died on July 6 in a Camden, New Jersey, hospital. Her death was caused by an unsuccessful operation on an internal goiter. She was born on May 20, 1881, in Farmville, Virginia, the daughter of Tazewell and Harriet Branch. Her father was for a period a member of the legislature of the State of Virginia. She grew up in Virginia and received her higher education in the normal department of Virginia State College, Petersburg, Virginia. Later she continued her education at the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University, and the University of Chicago. From the latter, she received the degree of bachelor of philosophy in 1922 and the degree of master of arts in English in 1925 and did some additional work toward the degree of doctor of philosophy in the School of Education. Her career as an educator consisted of twenty years of service as a member of the faculty of her Alma Mater, Virginia State College. After leaving Virginia State College, Miss Branch taught English for one year at the Sumner Junior College, Kansas City, Kansas. From 1926-1930, she served in the position of dean of women at Vashon High School, St. Louis, Missouri. In August of 1930, she came to Tillotson College at the invitation of the officials of the American Missionary Association, under whose auspices the college is operated, to serve as its president until her recent death.

When Miss Branch arrived in Austin, Tillotson was in a notorious state of decline—everything was dilapidated. All of the buildings were in need of repair;

the campus was grown up in underbrush and weeds, and the classwork which was being done was not up to standard. At that time, no one was proud of being a Tillotson graduate. The United States Department of Education had just recommended, as a result of its findings in a survey of all the Negro Colleges in America, that Tillotson should be closed.

Miss Branch was, therefore, assigned to a difficult task, one that required wise leadership and energy if the college was to be continued and built up again. She shouldered these responsibilities and bore them with confidence and with a smile. She sent her teachers into all parts of the Southwest in search of good students, and it was not long before the enrollment began to increase by leaps and bounds. With her own hands, she helped with the planting of flowers, shrubbery, and in doing whatever else needed to be done in making the campus more beautiful.

Very early in her administration, Miss Branch established the policy of offering tuition scholarships to the two highest ranking students in the graduating classes of all accredited high schools in Texas, and this greatly improved the quality of the student body. She made Tillotson a place of excellent training for every phase of life into which its graduates might step, but she was especially bent on making education practical. Her key word was "work," and she was committed to the task of training people to do things with their hands. Miss Branch had a strong and almost instinctive contempt for people who refused or disliked to work.

Shortly after her arrival at Tillotson, Miss Branch instituted a four-year home economics department which is still unique among Negro Colleges of the Southwest. Outstanding, also, among her achievements as president of Tillotson College was the building of the library from only two thousand serviceable volumes to more than twenty thousand volumes at the time of her death. Miss Branch's reputation as an economizer is almost legendary, for she could make a little money go a long way.

President Branch travelled far and wide from coast to coast in order to further the interest of Tillotson College. And the college's power of attraction lay chiefly in the magnetism of her personality, for she was a dynamic and colorful woman, and those of us who have heard her speak will never forget the strength and clearness of her voice, her delightful sense of humor, and her charming smile.

Miss Branch was born a Methodist, reared as an Episcopalian, and adopted

Congregationalism when she was made president of Tillotson College. A commendable trait of hers was that she made her personality felt both in the local community and in the nation. Not only was she president of Tillotson College; she was an active leader in the N.A.A.C.P., state and national interracial organizations, and served one year in the exalted position of Assistant Moderator of the General Council of the Congregational Church. For her prominence and achievements, she received the celebrated awards of the degrees of Doctor of Pedagogy from Virginia State College and Doctor of Laws from Howard University.

One could not know President Branch for any length of time without sensing that the central thread around which her entire mental and spiritual life was woven was an overpowering interest in poor people. She was very sympathetic toward those who were socially and economically handicapped, and she often expressed the conviction that the destiny of mankind rests with the impoverished and the lowly, and she was their champion. Because of this vital concern with the poor, President Branch lit a light at Tillotson that radiated throughout not only the Southwest but the entire nation.

The crowning achievement of Miss Branch's administration was the securing in December of 1943 of the class "A" rating for Tillotson College from the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. This rating placed Tillotson at the forefront of the Negro Colleges of the South and laid a foundation for the future program of expansion.

It is our great regret that Miss Branch's life should have ended before she reached the scriptural three score years and ten, for she looked forward to and zealously worked for a day when her race should enjoy the same rights and privileges that are enjoyed by all other American citizens.

And so at this hour our minds recall the image of a woman with a big sympathetic heart; a woman who has left ambitions that will spur, inspire, and challenge Negro youth; and the first woman of her race to achieve the presidency of a four-year, class "A" college.

In the untimely death of Dr. Mary E. Branch, the State of Texas, the Southwest, and the Nation lost a person of untiring effort, personal magnetism, competence, sympathetic guidance, and excellent leadership—a distinguished Negro, a noble American. But we live in the faith that on some bright and cloudless morning in the endlessness of time the

great voice of God shall sound and the earth and the sea shall give up their dead and our spirits will again be joined with her spirit in an everlasting companionship.

(The following poem was written by Mr. Maceo T. Bowie, a junior at Tillotson College and son of Mrs. Smead Bowie, 5310 Indiana Street, Chicago, Illinois, and is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Mary E. Branch, deceased president of Tillotson College.)

### YOU ARE GONE

You are gone—  
As in the night the flower,  
Never to return after the dying hour,  
Leaving us to weep forever more,  
For you are gone to some other shore.

You are gone—  
As the setting sun,  
That returns to the west when the day  
is done,  
Leaving the earth black with night,  
For you are gone far out of sight.

Your light was as bright as the Eastern  
star,  
That gives its gleam from a world afar,  
But now you are gone,  
Your light is out—  
We are left sad in a world of doubt.

Pure were your ideas,  
Like the thoughts of a dove,  
Knowing only the true meaning of the  
word love.  
Your heart was white and just as clean  
As the snow that covers the earth with  
a wintry sheen.

Yes you are gone—  
To a Heaven I know,  
To let your light shine from some other  
shore,  
But when it shines, it'll be so bright,  
We'll see it's beam on the darkest night.

We'll always love and respect your name,  
For nothing on the campus will be the  
same—  
The birds and flowers will seem all  
alone  
They'll miss you too, for you are gone!  
—Maceo T. Bowie.

### Metropolitan Church Pays Tribute to the Late President of Tillotson

The choir of the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church, under the direction of Mrs. M. E. Lewis, presented a special vesper program on Sunday afternoon, November 26, in commemoration of Miss Mary E. Branch, late president of Tillotson Col-

lege. The choir rendered many spirituals as well as great hymns of the church. The memorial address was delivered by William H. Jones, Dean and Acting President of the College. At the close of the program, a special offering was lifted to purchase an evergreen tree to be planted beside Miss Branch's grave as an expression of the desire of the members and friends of the Church to keep their memory of her always green.

### Tillotson Opens With Banner Enrollment

#### Teaching Staff Enlarged

Tillotson College opened its first semester's work with the registration on September 11 and 12 of five hundred and one students—the largest number of students to register in the fall semester in the institution's history.

Addressing the student body and faculty at the opening chapel assembly of the year, Acting President Jones said: "This is the greatest student body in numerical size, and, for some reason, I am led to feel, the greatest student body in quality, ability, and variety of talent that this institution has ever had. Here on this campus is assembled a powerful nucleus of potential racial leadership and citizenship for the future. And I beg of you, all of you, not to waste this golden opportunity that now is yours; for education is the greatest of all wealth; it is the indispensable tool with which you will fashion your destiny. The day has gone when men can live successfully without considerable education."

New members who were added to the staff for the present year are: Reverend **James Wiley Brown**, A.B., Clark University, B.D., Gammon Theological Seminary, B.D., Chicago Theological Seminary, additional study in social science at Fisk University, who is serving as dean of men, college minister, and assistant professor of philosophy; **Maxine Lombard**, B.S., Tillotson College, M.S., University of Iowa, who is assistant professor of home economics; **Joy Belle Ross**, B.S., Prairie View State College, M.S., Kansas State Agricultural College, as associate professor of home economics; **Virginia F. Curry**, A.B., A.M., University of Kansas (Phi Beta Kappa), as assistant professor of Romance languages; **Fannetta Luberta Morrow**, Mus.B., Talladega College, M.A., University of Pennsylvania, as assistant professor of music; **Esther G. Nelson**, A.B. with honors, Tillotson College, A.M., University of Denver, as assistant professor of English; **Maery Lou Street**, B.S. in Business Administra-

tion, Tuskegee Institute, as instructor of commercial subjects; **Ora Lee Wilson**, B.S., Houston College for Negroes, graduate work, Prairie View State College and the University of California, as instructor of English; **Maurice E. Richardson**, A. B., Tillotson College, as registrar; **Luberta Harden**, B.S., Tillotson College, as assistant dietitian; **Bernice Johnson**, A.B., Tillotson College, as assistant librarian.

### New Personnel Officers Assume Duties

Both the offices of the dean of men and the dean of women are being filled this year by new appointees. The new dean of men is the Reverend James Wiley Brown who is also the college minister. Reverend Brown is a graduate of Clark College and Gammon Theological Seminary, Atlanta, Ga., and of the Chicago Theological Seminary. He has also done additional graduate work in social science at Fisk University. While he was a student at Clark College, Dean Brown served as editor of the Clark College Mentor, president of the Philharmonic Society, and co-chairman of the Atlanta Student Interracial Council. Dean Brown served as assistant to the dean of men and university minister while he was studying at Fisk, as pastor of Congregational churches in Alabama and Texas, and as dean of instruction and professor of social science at St. Philips Junior College.

The position of dean of women is being filled by Miss C. Ruth Upshaw who has served Tillotson for thirteen years as teacher and director of music. Miss Upshaw has studied at Fisk University, New England Conservatory of Music, Chicago Musical College, and holds the degree of bachelor of music from Talladega College. Miss Upshaw has played an important role in the life of the institution in offering training and guidance to students who have come under her direction. She brings to her position, therefore, not only a knowledge of the policies and practices of the college but a familiarity with the problems and needs of the institution.

The Reverend Emmanuel Campbell, former dean of men and college minister, is now serving as principal of the Douglas High School of El Paso, Texas. Early in December he was joined in wedlock to Miss Jewel D. Cheney, a 1944 graduate of the commercial department of Tillotson College. Mrs. Ruth M. Porter, former dean of women, is now employed as a nursery school director in Los Angeles, California.