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ONWARD!

DEVOTED TO THE BEST INTERESTS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE, WHOLLY ORIGINAL AND IMPERSONAL, AND IN NO WISE SECTIONAL OR SECTARIAN.

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HE grand difference between monarchies and republics is this: the essential characteristic, the distinguishing trait of the former, is concentration; of the latter, diffusion. This difference is everywhere seen—in government, morals, religion, and, most of all, in education. In the strict sense, popular education is a term applicable only in republics, for it means not only the education of the people, but education by the people. Although France and perhaps England, may claim to surpass us, in that they give gratuitous instruction, and Prussia, whose common-school system is probably in advance of ours, may plume herself upon it; still the fact remains, that only in America do the people educate themselves. It is well for governments which squander the earnings of the mass by enforced taxation to educate the children gratuitously; but we must ascribe it to the desire that the glory of the State may be reflected back upon the sovereign, or to the fact that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, still none at all is destruction to tyrannies, as France has proved in her revolutions.

In our country democratic principles have spent their full force upon our colleges; and though they have robbed them of the aristocratic lordliness and dignity which surround the British universities with a halo of glory, they have given in return a popular character which more than makes good the loss. A college is now but little removed from the highest schools, in point of access. Within its walls are found mingled plebeian (if there be any such rank among us) and civilian; the country sends more than the city. The only question is the financial one, Who is to pay for it? This once settled, the road is easy. Far back in the old country-house the education is begun at home; then through the old district-school, until it is thought possible to spare the favored child from farm-work; then he may be sent to some neighboring academy, where he begins to "fit." And often in these things there is a moral heroism, silent, but full of sublimity. The old farm and homestead are mortgaged, the eldest daughter learns a trade, or a son finds a clerkship in the city, or some other similar expedient is adopted to give to one of the family what all would perhaps like, and all may be worthy of. Then love must make the selection. Now follow the self-denying struggles of four years, the pinching life during term-time, the "teaching school winters," and, finally, graduating with a load of debt that must require the best labor of the best years of life to repay. These are actual pictures. These are the self-made men of whom the country may be proud; these are the men whom their country afterward cherished. Of such was America's greatest statesman.

This ease of access makes young men at college a truly heterogeneous mass. The playful sarcasm of the brothers who are left at home has always been that "the fools are sent to college to make them equal to the rest." Certainly the first clause is true in too many instances; many do graduate from our colleges who can scarcely translate the modernized Latin of their own diplomas, and whose powers of action have been weakened, instead of strengthened, by their four years course. But these are comparatively rare cases; and every where, and in all time, wheat and tares do not grow apart, each in its own peculiar field, but they are mingled. The discipline of life is a sufficient test; those who have relied on wealth or descent are seldom heard of more.

Yet this very commonness has a tendency to make us forget the peculiar interest and solemnity of a college life. Education may begin at the cradle; but with the graduation-day the formal, conventional training ends. Woe to him who gives no promise of future greatness before this final day, or to him who is under the fatal ban of some ruinous habit. What a man is at this time he always remains; the school-dunce may become a college leader, but after this last trial, if still a dunce, there is no retrieving. And woe to him for whom good people sigh and shake their heads. In after years it will almost surely be said of him, "he was the best mathematician in his
class," or, "the best writer"—"but"
Pity is all he can have, for reformation is now become practically impossible.

Nor is this at all strange. Young men enter college at all ages from fifteen to twenty-eight, but generally the four years will be perhaps about midway between these extremes. This is preeminently the formative period of life; and apart from the course of study, which of itself is enough to give a turn to the thoughts and habits, there are other multiform influences, the most constant and powerful that a man can ever meet in life. Some consideration of the general and specific peculiarities of college-life is the main object of the present article.

The first and most obvious characteristic is its isolation. City and country are about the same in this particular; despite all the manifold advantages of society in the larger towns, which, could the fair sex be required to testify, we should find are made the most of, the college is still, to all practical purposes, a cloister. The college is a miniature world; in it are mingled almost all the forms and relations which make up human society. Home is forgotten in the lapse of time; the playmates of boyhood die, or marry and "go West," which, to the Eastern man who stays at home, is about the same thing; so that when the student returns to spend vacation, he sees strange faces, and finds himself the object of painful curiosity, instead of the affectionate interest he had hoped for. This peculiarity of isolation is one of the strongest sources of influence. It necessarily results in the formation of friendships which are omnipotent, almost, in their power of awaying the student. Each one has his two or three intimates; and more than this, every Damon finds his Pythias. In all life there is nothing else like these friendships.

College-life is also unique in being wholly a period of training. In this particular it differs from boyhood, when one always has something to do, and from manhood, when a man learns by acting. But here are four years devoted exclusively to training; they are a period of reservation, during which a man is to refresh and try himself before he makes his first and decisive venture—as in the Olympic games of old. To pass from college into active life is literally to pass into a new world, except in respect to mere physical relations. He who has always been a spectator is now and henceforward to be an actor.

Again, a college education has a decided tendency to conservatism. Indeed, this is the tendency of all scholastic learning; that the man of collegiate education is especially notice-

able as the break to the popular phrenzy. A large part of his educational course is devoted to the study of the past, and the past is conservative. After dwelling for years among moldering monuments, reviving departed grandeur, and tracing nations to their downfall, the American scholar has little sympathy with blind popular radicalism, for in this he sees threatened that danger and that destruction which befell them of old.

The course of study in our different colleges is substantially the same. The subjects scarcely differ, but there are various differences in authors and arrangement. The first two years are given to the classics and mathematics; the third year adds the natural sciences; and the fourth is given to English studies, in the line of intellectual and moral philosophy. This is the usual outline. Without vindicating this course against those who condemn certain parts of it, (which would be scarcely in place here), we may pause a moment to speak of one frequent objection to it, namely, that it comprehends too much, and thereby allows him who pursues it but a very superficial knowledge. This is the favorite argument of those who would have an elective course. But the end of a collegiate education is not to develop any one particular faculty, but to educate the whole man. It is not intended to make a man an assemblage of Greek roots or mathematical formulas, but to make a well-rounded, symmetrical character, one who shall not know all about one thing, but as much as possible about all things. A college course does not profess more than to set a person in the right path, to teach him the alphabet of science, and those who go the furthest and acquire the most in life cannot be said to more than master the elements.

Each year has its peculiar character. The first is one of hard study, before the verdant youth learns the existence of any royal road to learning, or of any "helps to read." The second year is rowdyish and Young-American. In this the student begins to feel how highly he is honored by being a collegian; he opens communication with Sophs at other institutions, and glories in stroking his obstinate upper lip, and in being called a "college boy." The third year is a transition state, bringing with it some feeling of dignity to be maintained, and of responsibility to be met. The last is one of quietness and thought, for now the time is near when the world must be tried; the period of training is nearly over.

It is difficult to decide the relative importance of the four years. The first half might stand alone, perhaps, but the last could not. The first two years are merely receptive;
there is little or no call for thought. The student learns syntax and calculus, numbers and rules. But the severer discipline of mental philosophy demands the vigorous exercise of whatever power the student possesses; and if this is not given this part of his course is only lost time. This period is probably the one which most expands the whole mind. Age it is that generally produces the difference, but, generally speaking, the third year shows the most rapid and observable mental development.

The outward life of an American college is monotonous in the extreme. A few colleges value sleep as did honest Sancho, but in most cases students are drummed from their beds at daylight, and receive their first installment of mental *pabulum* while the wants of the bodily man are yet unsatisfied. Breakfast over, study comes next, for the few who like it; for the rest, whatever they do like, and can manage to do. Formerly, the monotonous was broken in a thousand ways—the chapel became a stable; the tutor was hung in effigy; some unfortunately verdant or oxbuous youth was "smoked out," or dragged out; a dulcet horn sounded, with the same perseverance as when the priests blew them around the walls of old Jericho; a "torpedo" exploded, and opened all the windows rather hastily; the bell was turned up, on a cold night, filled with water, and left to freeze; or, as Holmes has it,

"_____ a cannon-bullet, rolling,
Came bouncing down the stairs."

But the days of "scrapes" are almost by. Some may mourn them, but college officers assuredly will not. On the whole, it is just as well that they are gone; young men may find all rational amusement in steadier ways. Yet, as the new convert looks back upon forsaken sins, so the memory will run back to some long-ago-passed and almost forgotten "time." There is keen pleasure in study, but there is sometimes a keener one in play. None but those who have participated in such scenes can realize the delight which college pranks afford. The predatory excursions to some neighboring henery or orchard (*excrutus pro praddi*), the sudden consternation caused by the watch-dog's honest bark (*inomnis canis*), the hasty and cloth-rending scramble over a high picket-fence (*confius fugac*)—think of these. This was Romulus making an excursion—modernized, of course. Then came the midnight feast of *themselves and flow of * .-.

This was Epicurus and his set. Sometimes the (dark) "lantern dimly burning" was put in requisition; and at some door there came, not a gentle tapping, but such a thundering rap as opened both the door and the eyes of the sleeper within. This was Cataline and his crew. So did collegians dramatize the ancient masters.

We have said that college is a miniature world. It has its customs, and its own peculiar vocabulary; indeed, so many are its phrases, that some one has actually published them in book form, making a volume more curious than elegant or interesting. No one will need an explanation of the word "pony." Students all understand what "sucking" is, and it is a very simple thing when once one has learned how; but for the benefit of the uninitiated, we will observe that it is to obtain, while one is reciting, that aid from books or properly prepared "sucking-papers" which should have been sought before recitation. These and similar expressions, which originated none knows when, are handed down from class to class, and are the inseparable property of the college.

But there is a sober side as well as ludicrous. Here are tragedies, enacted before God and the angels, but concealed from man, which, if walls had tongues as well as ears, could be told us. Many a student has sat through the darkening night in speechless agony. Countless forms of mental conflict meet a man here; conflicts, too, greater and fiercer than ever come again to the same person. Disappointments in study's honors or in society-struggles, when the aim of years has failed, and the thought of past effort serves but to aggravate; sharp revolutions, when wounded vanity revenges itself on its hapless possessor; these are hard, but they are trifles. There comes a letter to some pale student. The friend whose purse has always been at his disposal can no longer help him; or his surviving parent has suddenly passed from earth; or one dearer than all, she for whom he was enduring mountain-loads, has deserted him. He may crush the fatal missive, and walk his floor till day creeps over the mountain-tops afar; but study comes again; the dear friend may know it, but from all else the wound must be speedily covered up. Another, whose rollicking laugh and ready wit earn him the title of "good fellow," hears from his mother, as she beseeches him to forsake his evil companions and midnight revels. He, too, sits through the quiet night, and thinks on present, past, and future. Perhaps he yields to the appeal— alas that so many do not! The struggle is often terrible. Nowhere does, nowhere can temptation present itself in so strong, constant, various, and persuasive a form as to young men in college.

There is still another scene to view. Sea-
sons of remarkable religious interest, such as the recent one, especially pervades colleges.
Let us tread reverently then! There is an unusual hush; sports are suspended, and no noise accompanies the passing to an fro at recitation-hours. Frequent meetings are held; and few are seen outside the buildings, except perhaps a solitary couple, walking over the grounds. Here is a room whose occupants are resolved to drive away their growing uneasiness by revelry; oaths and ribald jests float upon the air; while near by is the room of some one who then seems near akin to the ransomed above. What struggles at such times take place within college walls earth has no tongue to tell, and man should not have courage to hear. The eternal destiny of many souls is probably decided at times like these.
At some of our largest colleges many students are personally unacquainted with one another, and some ludicrous mistakes arise from this circumstance. We recall one, which we may be pardoned for giving, although it is old.

"At the beginning of the term, a newly-fledged Sophomore met a Senior at the railroad station. Taking him at once for a 'sub,' he accosted him, offering to show him the way, and insisted on carrying his carpet-bag, to which the new-comer assented. On their way up the Soph detailed at length the peculiar advantages of his society; the Senior listening quietly till they reached the college buildings, when he thanked him for the kindness of carrying his carpet-bag, and promised, if the Soph would call at his room some day, to supply him some information which might perhaps be of use to him in future electioneering.

Colleges also have, or rather had, a rigorous system of caste. An amusing instance of this is found in the following extracts from college-laws, which were in force for some years after 1764.

"A Freshman shall not play with any member of an upper class without being asked; nor is it permitted to use any acts of familiarity with them, even in study-time.

"In case of personal insult, a Junior may call up a Freshman and reprehend him. A Sophomore in like case may obtain leave from a Senior, and then he may discipline a Freshman, not detaining him more than five minutes.

"Freshmen are obliged to perform all reasonable, errands for any superior, always returning an account of the same to the person who sent them. When called they shall attend and give a respectful answer; and when attending on their superior they are not to depart until regularly dismissed.

"When a Freshman is near a gate or door belonging to college or college-yard he shall look around and observe whether any of his superiors are coming to the same, and if any are coming within three rods he shall not enter without a signal to proceed."

Customs like these were the fruit of a little aristocracy that remained in our English blood after our forefathers' exodus, and needed many years to wholly die out. No justice could be obtained for such truly absurd forms, for it was not pretended that the "discipline" really was worth anything to its recipient, and the pleasure of tyrannizing in turn, when ripper college years had given dignity and importance, would seem but a small compensation. But all such practices, as well as the system of caste altogether, are now nearly done away with, and it is a fortunate thing that it is so. This is partly owing to the growing prevalence of democratic principles (taking them in a strictly literal, not party sense), but mostly to another cause, to be now treated of. This brings us to the last and most striking peculiarity of colleges which we shall mention, namely, their societies.

A survey of the peculiar characteristics of college-life would be very incomplete without some notice of these extended and powerful organizations. Probably every college has at least one professedly literary society; but in our largest institutions they are in a flourishing condition, and the rivalry between them is constant and intense. But in some, at least of the smaller colleges, these are barely alive; the others have killed them. These others are the societies which differ from the first-named in being secret, and in electing their own members, while the purely literary ones are open to all. These merit particular attention.

De Quincey says, in his own way, "A double mystery surrounds secret societies; 1st, What do they do? and 2nd, What do they do it for?" Doubtless many would like well to know; yet these are questions easier asked than answered, for two little reasons: those who do not know cannot be expected to tell, and those who do know are bound not to. Nevertheless, we shall endeavor to answer both these questions further on; and we hazard the assertion that no one will dispute the truth of our solution. And first we will allow the same author to give his explanation of Free-Masonry. "The first part of initiation," he says, "is in the Grand Master's drawing his sword, and asking what the candidate has in his pocket. On being told, he thunders out, 'Fork over.' The second part (and the more interesting), is—Brandy." We fear many members of college secret societies could test..."
tify that both these operations have been realized to their cost in their own experience.

But we will treat the matter seriously. Most persons will be disposed to consider college societies as mere transient, pleasant associations; yet the truth is, that not the study, or the Faculty, or any thing else which it is possible to meet in the course of human life, so affects a man as these organizations. Most young men are plastic, and these bodies mold them as earthen vessels in the hands of the potter. Thirty years ago they were comparatively few; but now we believe there is not an Eastern college, at least, which has not as many as two or three. Yale has one which boasts its descent from Oxford; but most of them are American-born. We will name a few of their advantages and disadvantages further on. Of late, some attempts have been made to destroy them—Princeton and Harvard, we believe, taking the lead. We cannot help regarding the movement as unwise, because it will be utterly useless; it is entirely impossible to uproot them; and even if this could be done, during the next decade they would spring up thicker than ever. They are inseparable from our colleges.

And first, to the question, "What do they do?" we answer, nothing, in the capacity of an association. It is not at all likely that they are literary gatherings, unless ostensibly. If you ask for their "story," like the poor organ-grinder, they have no story to tell. Their secrecy is an iron safe, with no treasure within; the whole thing is in the vault of secrecy itself.

The second query, "What do they do it for?" demands a more extended reply. This must be answered as though it were, "Why do they do it?" for they have no end in view for whose accomplishment they labor. The cause is very easily given. Secret societies have existed from time immemorial. We remember nothing in ancient or modern history which furnishes so good a parallel to college societies as the Eleusinian Mysteries of Greece; although the comparison is very defective, for these were the offspring of religious superstition. But they are alike in doing nothing at all, yet for very good reasons. The Essenes, the Jesuits, the mysterious associations in the German States during the Middle Ages, and the Know-Nothings in modern days, are examples of societies formed for some definite purpose; but the secret organizations of colleges spring merely from the natural inclinations toward society. The ordinary intercourse of life, and of college-life especially, is not sufficient to satisfy the longing for companionship; and hence these bands of "brothers" are formed. The closer the members are drawn together, the more satisfactory it is to the human heart; and in this view, secrecy has an irresistible charm. We so love to get apart by ourselves, and enjoy one another's company when and where the world can not see. This is the "secret;" and this is all.

We assert, and probably no reflecting man will gainsay it, that college societies (except the purely literary ones) are an evil; yet they are not an unmixed one. They satisfy the longings of many a lonely heart; they are invaluable, many times, in assisting their members, both while in college and after leaving it; they excite emulation; they give a man friends, brethren. They have also wrought much good in the destruction of college caste. Freshmen now are the objects of the most painful, if not altogether disinterested, solicitude; class-distinctions are now almost entirely overlooked. This is democratic, and as it should be.

Yet their evils, in the eyes of the world, overbalance these. So their own members have oftentimes testified. They raise barriers in social intercourse themselves, shutting the gate upon all outside of their own little world; they excite strife and jealousies; they present temptation in its most forcible and seductive forms; they make a man lose his individuality, for they are tyrannical things—one rule, and the others are ruled. These are great evils; but of late years they have been much counteracted by the formation, in many colleges, of a society whose cardinal principle is anti-secrecy.

There sometimes seems to be a peculiar sanctity investing college buildings themselves. A century or so, in these modern times, confers as much of an air of antiquity as a thousand years on the broken temples and monuments of Greece. No one can walk long through college-halls without feeling a subdued awe creep over him. Here were once men like himself, men whose lives and deaths were heroic. They once trod these passages, and these walls echoed their voices; but now they are scattered; many are above, singing eternal songs. And for a picture of loneliness let one go in mid-winter to an empty college building, and, knocking at room after room, await his answer. Answer? The college herself has sent all over the world her answer to the demand made upon her by civilization, in its growing wants.

Commencement also brings its peculiar feeling; no other time of life has the solemnity
which attaches to a graduate’s parting day. The college is a mournful place; it seems to offer a mocking parody on human life, in bringing together those whose hopes and aspirations are most ardent, and in permitting them to form friendships which must be straightway and completely sundered. As the eye shoots far down some long avenue of elms, one might almost fancy he could even hear faintly the retreating footsteps of the many who have preceded him. The same old trees have rustled in the ears of hundreds before, with the same pensive, breathing murmur. To and fro among these almost imperishable time-marks walk class-mates and friends, enjoying their last hours together. The day speeds, the night passes; and the past four years are gone as truly and as irrecoverably as Greece and Italy. There is now a new earth.

Yet memory never completely loses hold of these departed days. College-graduates are everywhere remarkable for the fidelity and affection which they cherish for their Alma Mater. Years of toilsome life only augment this feeling; once a year there is the customary reunion, when the emotions of buried years are passed over again in a few hours. College friendships are the most enduring of all earthly ties. They go with the former student everywhere; and when the last separation comes, it is not too much to believe, in humble faith, that they will be recognized after the final day.

Such is an incomplete account of American college-life. The colleges themselves would furnish a fruitful and suggestive topic for history; some of them have struggled long and manfully through pecuniary embarrassments. Yale College was founded in 1700, by donations of books from several clergymen. From such beginnings many colleges sprang; but now they number some twenty, and count their graduates by thousands.

And America may well be proud of them: for education is the life and essential condition of a free government. Not one could be spared to-day without serious detriment; there is room for all, and the country should cherish them with unremitting affection. To use a college-phrase, they are, taken together, a great institution.” Said Laing: “It is not that a duke has £50,000 a year, but that a thousand fathers of families have £50; that is true national wealth and well-being.” This is a maxim of political economy; but it is quite as true in every part of national life; the true glory and dignity of any country is the greatest advancement of the greatest number. Stately old monarchies may point to their universities, with their gowns and wigs; but it is the glory of America that she stands before the world not represented by a few who comprise in themselves all the learning of their times, as were the old classic States; but herself representing herself, as the pioneer and exemplar of modern civilization.

*This is not intended to include any but the oldest and principal ones.*