

MEMORIES AND STUDIES

II. THE TRUE HARVARD¹

WHEN a man gets a decoration from a foreign institution, he may take it as an honor. Coming as mine has come to-day, I prefer to take it for that far more valuable thing, a token of personal good will from friends. Recognizing the good will and the friendliness, I am going to respond to the chairman's call by speaking exactly as I feel.

I am not an alumnus of the College. I have not even a degree from the Scientific School, in which I did some study forty years ago. I have no right to vote for Overseers, and I have never felt until to-day as if I were a child of the house of Harvard in the fullest sense. Harvard is many things in one — a school, a forcing house for thought, and also a social club; and the club aspect is so strong, the family tie so close and subtle among our Bachelors of Arts that all of us here who are

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in my plight, no matter how long we may have lived here, always feel a little like outsiders on Commencement day. We have no class to walk with, and we often stay away from the procession. It may be foolish, but it is a fact. I don't believe that my dear friends Shaler, Hollis, Lanman, or Royce ever have felt quite as happy or as much at home as my friend Barrett Wendell feels upon a day like this.

I wish to use my present privilege to say a word for these outsiders with whom I belong. Many years ago there was one of them from Canada here—a man with a high-pitched voice, who could n't fully agree with all the points of my philosophy. At a lecture one day, when I was in the full flood of my eloquence, his voice rose above mine, exclaiming: "But, doctor, doctor! to be serious for a moment . . .," in so sincere a tone that the whole room burst out laughing. I want you now to be serious for a moment while I say my little say. We are glorifying ourselves to-day, and whenever the name of

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Harvard is emphatically uttered on such days, frantic cheers go up. There are days for affection, when pure sentiment and loyalty come rightly to the fore. But behind our mere animal feeling for old schoolmates and the Yard and the bell, and Memorial and the clubs and the river and the Soldiers' Field, there must be something deeper and more rational. There ought at any rate to be some possible ground in reason for one's boiling over with joy that one is a son of Harvard, and was not, by some unspeakably horrible accident of birth, predestined to graduate at Yale or at Cornell.

'Any college can foster club loyalty of that sort. The only rational ground for pre-eminent admiration of any single college would be its pre-eminent spiritual tone. But to be a college man in the mere clubhouse sense — I care not of what college — affords no guarantee of real superiority in spiritual tone.

The old notion that book learning can be a panacea for the vices of society lies pretty well shattered to-day. I say this in spite of

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certain utterances of the President of this University to the teachers last year. That sanguine-hearted man seemed then to think that if the schools would only do their duty better, social vice might cease. But vice will never cease. Every level of culture breeds its own peculiar brand of it as surely as one soil breeds sugar-cane, and another soil breeds cranberries. If we were asked that disagreeable question, "What are the bosom-VICES of the level of culture which our land and day have reached?" we should be forced, I think, to give the still more disagreeable answer that they are swindling and adroitness, and the indulgence of swindling and adroitness, and cant, and sympathy with cant — natural fruits of that extraordinary idealization of "success" in the mere outward sense of "getting there," and getting there on as big a scale as we can, which characterizes our present generation. What was Reason given to man for, some satirist has said, except to enable him to invent reasons for what he wants to do. We might say the same of edu-

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cation. We see college graduates on every side of every public question. Some of Tammany's staunchest supporters are Harvard men. Harvard men defend our treatment of our Filipino allies as a masterpiece of policy and morals. Harvard men, as journalists, pride themselves on producing copy for any side that may enlist them. There is not a public abuse for which some Harvard advocate may not be found.

In the successful sense, then, in the worldly sense, in the club sense, to be a college man, even a Harvard man, affords no sure guarantee for anything but a more educated cleverness in the service of popular idols and vulgar ends. Is there no inner Harvard within the outer Harvard which means definitively more than this — for which the outside men who come here in such numbers, come? They come from the remotest outskirts of our country, without introductions, without school affiliations; special students, scientific students, graduate students, poor students of the College, who make their living as they

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go. They seldom or never darken the doors of the Pudding or the Porcellian; they hover in the background on days when the crimson color is most in evidence, but they nevertheless are intoxicated and exultant with the nourishment they find here; and their loyalty is deeper and subtler and more a matter of the inmost soul than the gregarious loyalty of the clubhouse pattern often is.

Indeed, there is such an inner spiritual Harvard; and the men I speak of, and for whom I speak to-day, are its true missionaries and carry its gospel into infidel parts. When they come to Harvard, it is not primarily because she is a club. It is because they have heard of her persistently atomistic constitution, of her tolerance of exceptionality and eccentricity, of her devotion to the principles of individual vocation and choice. It is because you cannot make single one-ideaed regiments of her classes. It is because she cherishes so many vital ideals, yet makes a scale of value among them; so that even her apparently incurable second-rateness (or only

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occasional first-rateness) in intercollegiate athletics comes from her seeing so well that sport is but sport, that victory over Yale is not the whole of the law and the prophets, and that a popgun is not the crack of doom.

The true Church was always the invisible Church. The true Harvard is the invisible Harvard in the souls of her more truth-seeking and independent and often very solitary sons. *Thoughts* are the precious seeds of which our universities should be the botanical gardens. Beware when God lets loose a thinker on the world — either Carlyle or Emerson said that — for all things then have to rearrange themselves. But the thinkers in their youth are almost always very lonely creatures. “Alone the great sun rises and alone spring the great streams.” The university most worthy of rational admiration is that one in which your lonely thinker can feel himself least lonely, most positively furthered, and most richly fed. On an occasion like this it would be poor taste to draw comparisons between the colleges, and in

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their mere clubhouse quality they cannot differ widely:— all must be worthy of the loyalties and affections they arouse. But as a nursery for independent and lonely thinkers I do believe that Harvard still is in the van. Here they find the climate so propitious that they can be happy in their very solitude. The day when Harvard shall stamp a single hard and fast type of character upon her children, will be that of her downfall. Our undisciplinables are our proudest product. Let us agree together in hoping that the output of them will never cease.