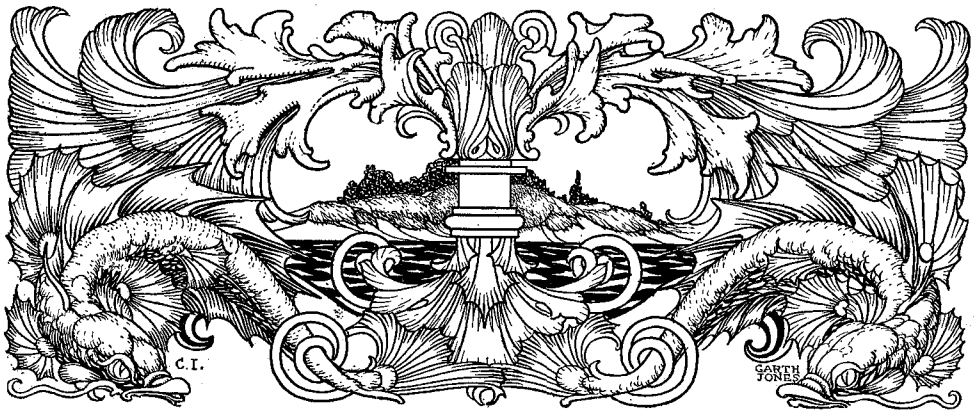


THE AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATE

BY CLAYTON SEDGWICK COOPER

FIFTH PAPER: THE COLLEGE MAN AND THE WORLD

"HOW crooked can a modern business man be and still be straight?"

This question was propounded at a college dinner in New York by a young lawyer who, in behalf of the recent graduates of an Eastern university, had been asked to give utterance to some of the first impressions of a young alumnus upon his entrance into the life of the world. The question was not asked in a trifling manner, but it represented the query which inevitably arises in the mind of the graduate of ideals and high desires who to-day leaves his alma mater to plunge into the confused business and professional life of our times.

The question awakens the inquiry as to whether the colleges of America are to-day sending into the world trained leaders or subservient followers; whether graduates enter their special careers with a real message and mission, or whether, however optimistically they may begin their work, their high purposes are buried or not beneath the rush of practical and material affairs.

More than half a million students are to-day studying in our secondary schools and institutions of higher learning, with a money expense to the nation involving many million dollars. Tens of thousands of teachers and trained educators are devoting years of hard and faithful service in preparing these American youths for life. Are these students, after graduation, assuming real leadership? Are they contributing vision, judgment, and guidance in great national enterprises sufficiently definite and valuable to compensate the country for the sacrifices in time, money, and life that are made for the support and continuance of our educational institutions?

There seems to be a difference of opinion concerning this subject even in these times of vast educational enterprises. A business man of high repute wrote to me recently as follows:

> I do not consider that our colleges are meeting the requirements of modern business life. From your own observation you must know that the most conspicuously successful people in business were conspicuously poor at the start, both financially and educationally. Grover Cleveland, who was not a college graduate, once said that the perpetuity of our institutions and the public welfare depended upon the simple *business-like* arrangement of the affairs of the Government.

This is the frequently expressed opinion of men of business and affairs, who present the successful careers of self-made men as

an argument against collegiate education. This argument, however, fails to take into account that the same dogged persistence which has brought success to many of our present-day leaders in industrial and national life would have lost nothing in efficiency by college training.

Ask these masters of the business world who have risen by their individual force what they most regret in life. In nine cases out of ten the answer will be, "The lack of an opportunity for education." And they will usually add: "But my sons shall have an education. *They* shall not be handicapped as I have been." For the practical proof of the genuineness of this feeling, one has simply to read over the names in the catalogues of the great universities and colleges of America, where the names of the sons of virtually all the great business and professional men will be found.

While, therefore, we must take it for granted that Americans generally believe in a collegiate education, we may still question whether the colleges are really equipping for leadership the young men whom they are sending into our modern life. What, after all, do the colleges give? Out of one hundred graduates whom I asked what they had gained in college, twenty-one said, "Broader views of life," or perspective. Long ago John Ruskin said that the greatest thing any human being can do in the world is to see something, and then go and tell what he has seen in a plain way. To make the undergraduate see something beyond the commonplace is still the purpose of education. This enlarged vision is often the salvation of the individual student. It furnishes the impulse of a new affection. It attaches him to some great, uncongenial task. It gives him a mission great enough and hard enough to keep his feet beneath him. It saves him by steadying him.

THE ART OF RELAXATION

But no graduate is equipped for either mental or moral leadership until he has learned the art of relaxation. Both his health and his efficiency wait upon his ability to rest, to relax, to be composed in the midst of life's affairs. A real cause of American physical breakdown has been attributed by a famous physician "to those absurd feelings of hurry and having no time, to that breathlessness and tension, that anxiety of feature and that solicitude of results, that lack of inner harmony and ease, in short, by which with us the work is apt to be accompanied, and from which a European who would do the same work would, nine times out of ten, be free. It is your relaxed and easy worker, who is in no hurry, and quite thoughtless most of the while of consequence, who is your most efficient worker. Tension and anxiety, present and future all mixed up together in one mind at once, are the surest drags upon steady progress and hindrances to our success."

We find that one of the supreme purposes of education in ancient Greece was to prepare men to be capable of profiting by their hours of freedom from labor. In his writing upon education, Herbert Spencer gives special attention to the training that fits citizens for leisure hours.

The American college graduate is quite certain to receive early the impression that efficiency is synonymous with hustling; that modern life, in America at least, as G. Lowes Dickinson has said, finds its chief end in "acceleration." His danger is frequently in his inability to concentrate, to compose himself for real thoughtful leadership. Many a graduate takes years to get over that explosive energy of the sophomore, which spends itself without result. He takes display of energy for real force. His veins are filled with the hot blood of youth. He has not learned to wait. He is inclined to put more energy and nervous force into things than they demand. Like all youth, he is inclined to scatter his energy in all directions. He is therefore in danger sooner or later of breaking down physically or mentally, or both, and in spending the time which should be utilized in serviceableness in repairing the breakages of an uneconomic human machine. The average American graduate rarely needs Emerson's advice for a lazy boy, which was, "Set a dog on him, send him West, do something to him."

College training must give a man permanent idealism. Too often the graduate is inclined to fall into the line of march. He begins to worry and to lose his attractive gaiety and buoyancy. His habits of thought and study are soon

From an etching by Thomas Wood Stevens

THE LIBRARY AND THE THOMAS JEFFERSON STATUE, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

buried beneath the myriad details of business life or nervous pleasures. He becomes anxious about things that never happen. His anxiety about future happenings or results takes his mind from present efficiency. He becomes tense and tired and irritable. The attitude of composure and self-assurance which for a time he possessed in college is changed to a fearsome, troubled state, the end of which is the sanatorium or something even more baneful. I have sometimes thought that for a month at least I should like to see the office signs, "Do it now," "This is my busy day," "Step quickly," replaced by the old scriptural motto, "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

How shall our colleges assist American youth to secure the art of relaxation and to obtain the ability to relieve the tension of the workaday world by beneficial and delightful relief from business strain? Such gifts will often be the chief assets of a college man's training. Business men, and professional men, too, frequently reach middle life with no interest outside their specialties. When business is over, life is a blank. There are no eager voices of pleasant pursuits calling them away from the common round and routine tasks. It is too late to form habits. The rich rewards that education may give in leisure hours are lost, swallowed up by a thousand things that are merely on the way to the prizes that count. This is a terrific loss, and for this loss our colleges are in part at least at fault.

In certain institutions, however, we discover teachers who realize that a real part of their vocation consists in giving to at least a few students habits of real and permanent relaxation.

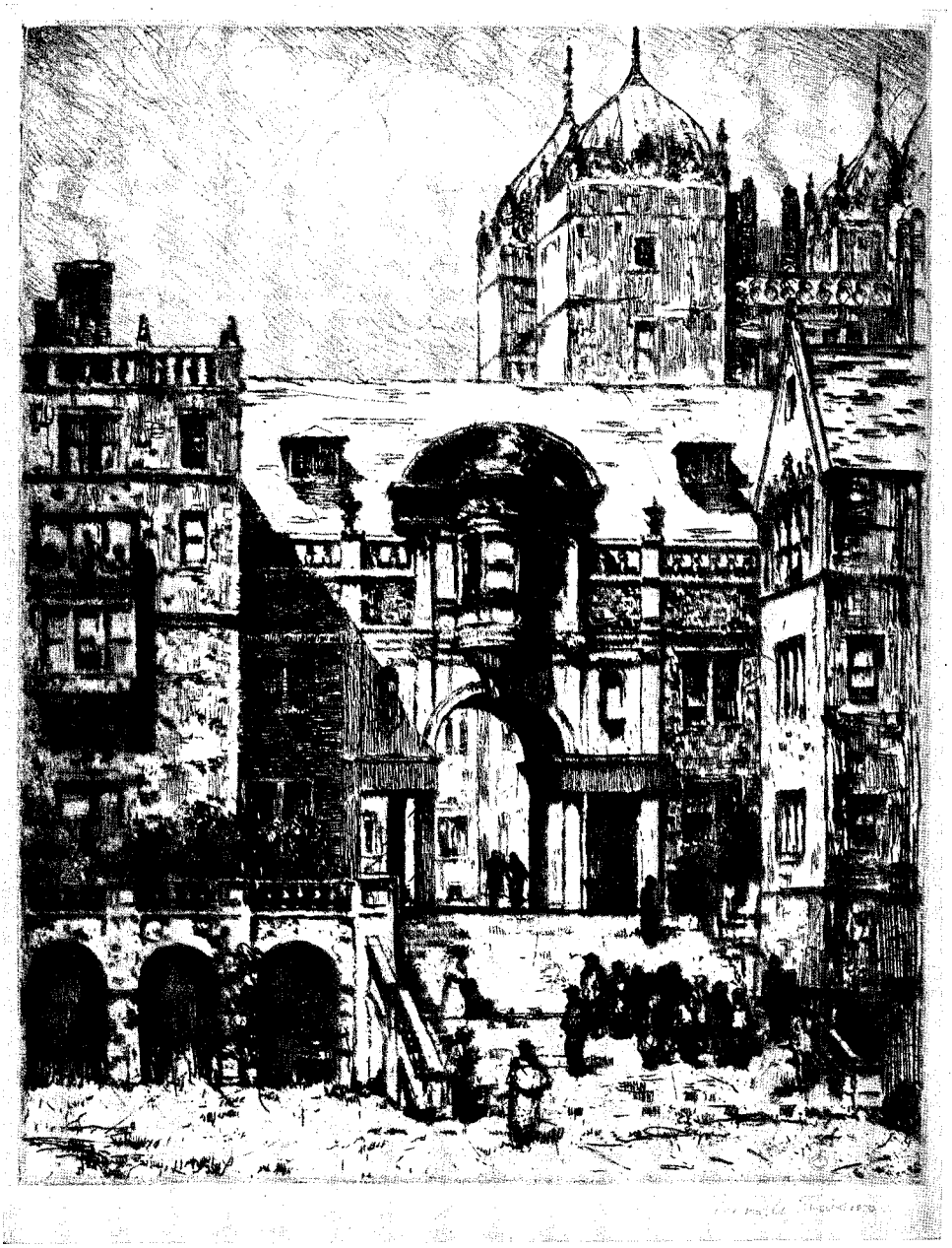
In a New England college recently I found a professor spending two afternoons a week in cross-country walks with students to whom he was teaching at an impressionable age habits that could be continued after college days. These walks occurred on Sunday and Thursday afternoons. With rigid persistence he had followed the plan of walking with his students for six or eight months, a sufficient time in which to form habits. He explained his object by saying that during his own college career he had engaged in certain forms of athletics which he was unable to pursue after graduation. While his college physical training had benefited him physically, he nevertheless found himself quite without habits of bodily relaxation. He was deprived of apparatus and the opportunity for many out-of-door games, but had found an immense value in walking. In passing on to these college boys this inclination for out-of-door relaxation, he was perhaps contributing his chief influence as a teacher.

Why should not habits of this kind be definitely organized and carried out by the physical department of our colleges? The opportunity to study trees, plants, and animals, and to become watchful for a hundred varying phases of nature, would furnish no small opportunity for projecting the influence of college into later life.

These tendencies toward relaxation take different forms according to individual tastes. One graduate of my acquaintance finds outlet for his nervous energy in a fish-hatchery. To be sure, he bores his friends by talking fish at every conceivable opportunity, and people frequently get the impression that his mind has a piscatorial rather than financial trend, as he loses no opportunity to dilate upon his latest adventure in trout; and yet his physician was doubtless right in saying that this man, the head of one of the largest financial institutions in America, owes his life as well as his success to this special form of relaxation.

A graduate of one of our large Western technical schools who is at the head of a big steel foundry has a private book-bindery, where with two or three of his friends the life of the world is lost evening after evening in the quiet and delightful air of books and book-making. The best treatises upon book-binding line the walls. Old and rare editions of the most famous masters are carefully sheltered in cases of glass. One end of the room is filled with his printing- and binding-machines. He showed me a beautifully bound volume which he himself had printed and bound. As he lovingly fingered the soft leather, reading to me his favorite passages from this masterpiece, I discerned in him a different man from the one I had often seen sitting in his grimy office discussing contracts for steel rails for China and bridge girders for South America. A deeper, finer man had been discovered in the hours of recreation. When asked how he happened to become interested in a matter so antipodal to his life-work, I found that the tendency started in college days, when he had been accustomed to browse among the books in the old college library under the faithful and regular guidance of a professor who once every week took his students to the library with the express purpose of inculcating a love for old and beautifully bound books.

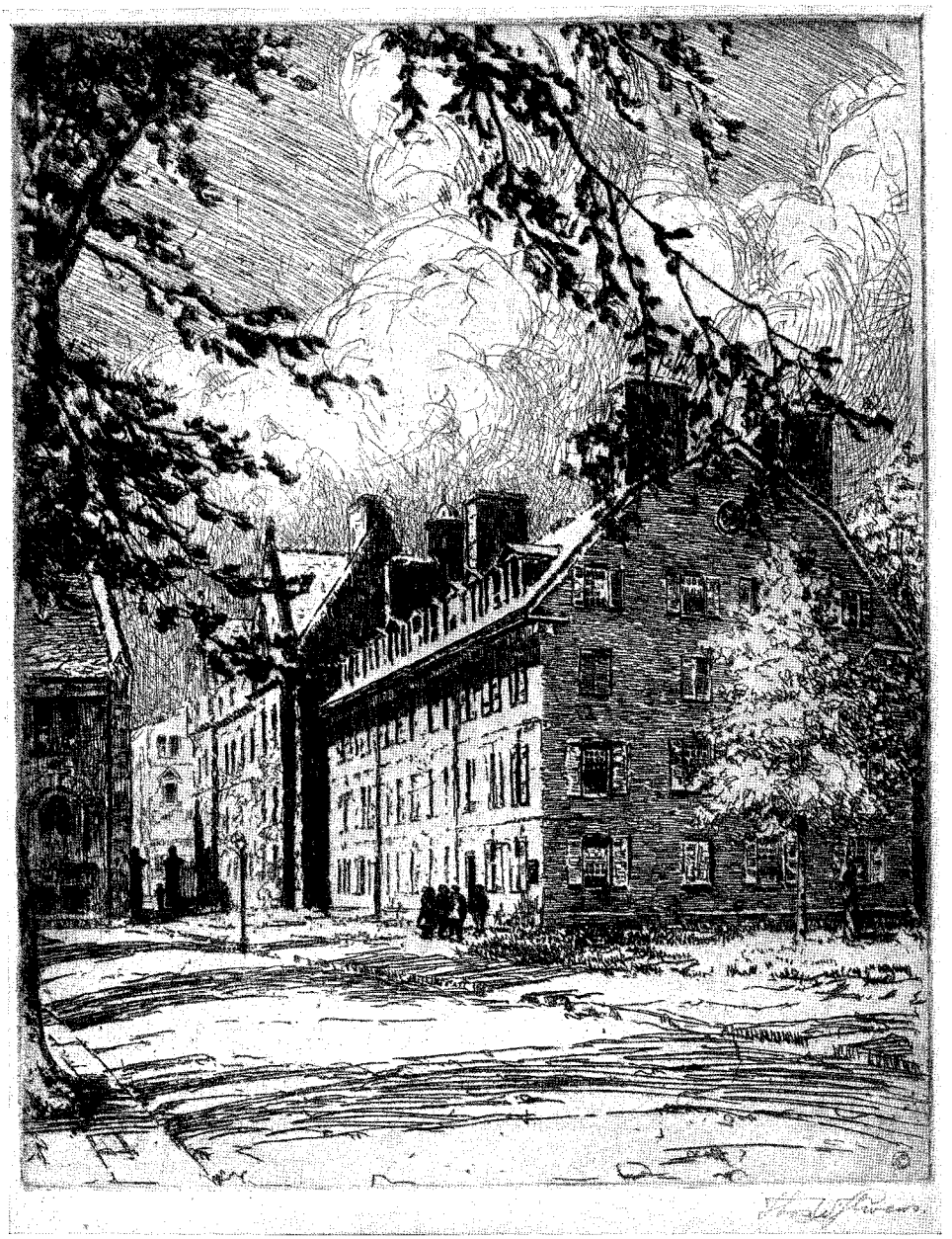
The college, moreover, should start the graduate interest in philanthropic and serious enterprises which in themselves furnish suitable as well as pleasing relaxation to hundreds of American university men. Letters received from scores of recent



From an etching by Thomas Wood Stevens

THE ARCH BETWEEN THE DORMITORY QUADRANGLE AND THE TRIANGLE, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

graduates, many of whom are taking a large share in moral, social, and philanthropic endeavors, state that the beginnings of their interest dated with their experience in the Christian associations, settlement houses, boys' clubs, and charitable organizations of college days. One man of large philanthropic interest received his first view of a field of opportunity and privilege by hearing a lecturer on social betterment tell of finding a homeless boy hovering over the grating of a newspaper building on a winter night. The story touched a chord deep in the hearer, who

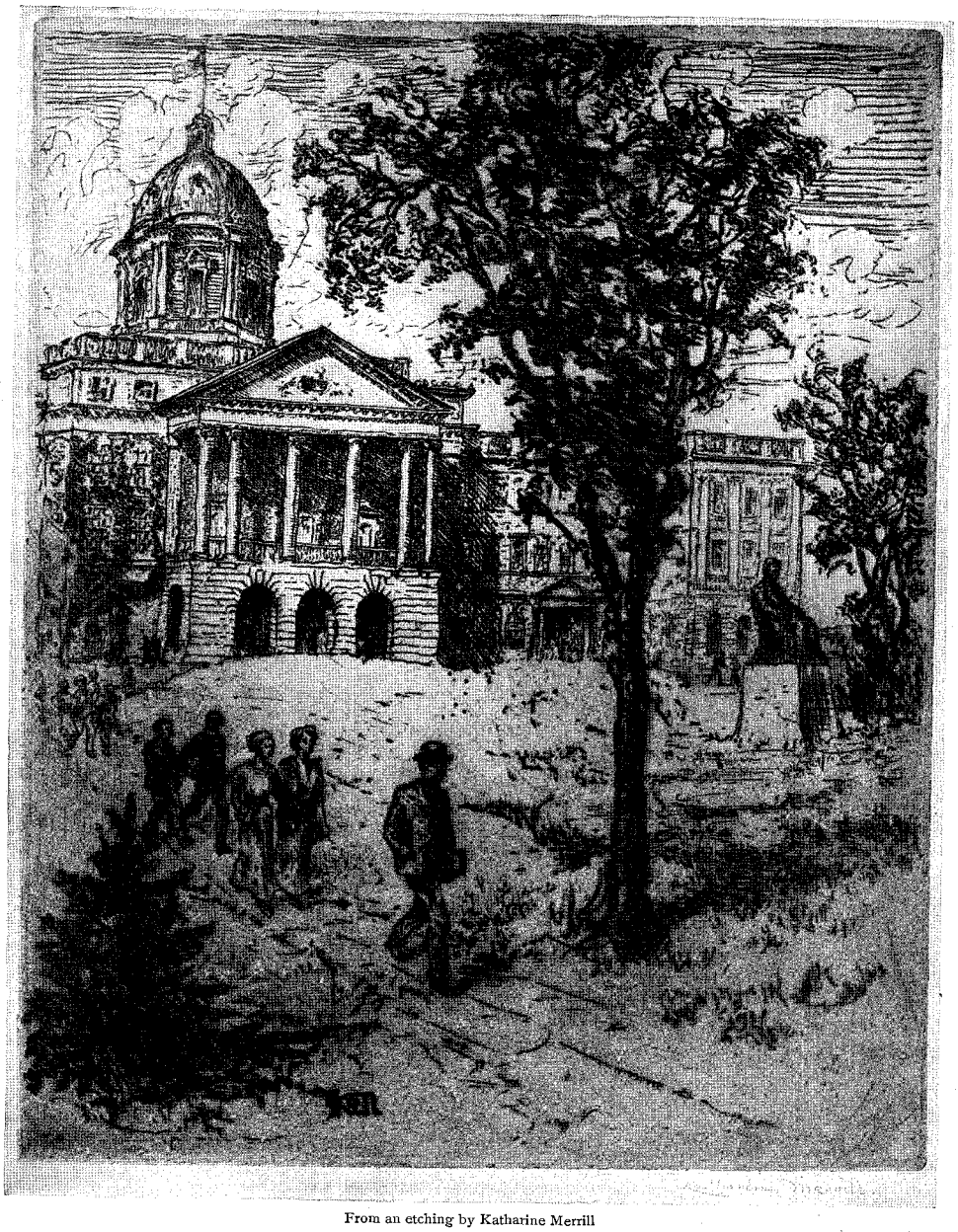


From an etching by Thomas Wood Stevens

OLD SOUTH MIDDLE, YALE UNIVERSITY

saw this vision of a world until then unknown to him—a world of suffering and hunger and cold; and when in later life it was made possible, he devoted his influence and his fortune to the erection of a home for friendless boys.

What is the college accomplishing toward the solution of that vital subject, the question of the immigrant? The possibilities of dealing with such far-reaching international problems is indicated by the influence of a college debate upon the subject, "What shall we do with the immigrant?" Through his reading and investigation of the subject, a certain student who engaged in this debate received his



From an etching by Katharine Merrill

THE MAIN HALL, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

first impetus toward what has proved to be one of the main contributions of his life to the nation by the establishment of Italian colonies that are probably as effective as any plans which are being suggested or utilized for the betterment of our foreign population.

MENTAL RESOURCEFULNESS

According to President John G. Hibben of Princeton, graduates on the average earn only six dollars per week at the start. He justifies this low earning power by saying, "It is our endeavor to create a high potential of mental possibility rather than actual attainment."

We are inclined to consider efficiency only as expressed along social, economic, industrial, or mechanical lines. It is not strange in a period when financial standing bulks large in the minds of a comparatively new people that the recognition of

the learned classes should be less noticeable than formerly. Yet reactive tendencies from strictly utilitarian education are evident. Individual and ideal aims of education are beginning to emerge above the commercial and mechanical aims. Already the salaries of college presidents and college teachers are increased, offering additional incentive for men of brains and scholarly achievement. Masters of industry who have been slaving for industrial and social progress are now becoming eager to push their accomplishments onward to mental and spiritual satisfactions. How otherwise can we explain such establishments as the Carnegie Foundation, the millions of Mr. Morgan for art, the vast sums contributed to religion and education in this and other lands? The ethical and social ideals of to-day are attaching thousands of our best youth to far-reaching endeavor. There is a new quest for that philosophy of life which, as Novalis stated it, could indeed bake no bread, but would give us God, freedom, and immortality. These are the signs of a new age of mental productivity—an age in which scholarship and learning will have a value for themselves; when people will appreciate that it is not merely the book one studies, but how he studies it that counts; that if we can produce a man of scholarly, thoughtful ability, we are sending into the world a person who will be proficient along any line in which he may engage.

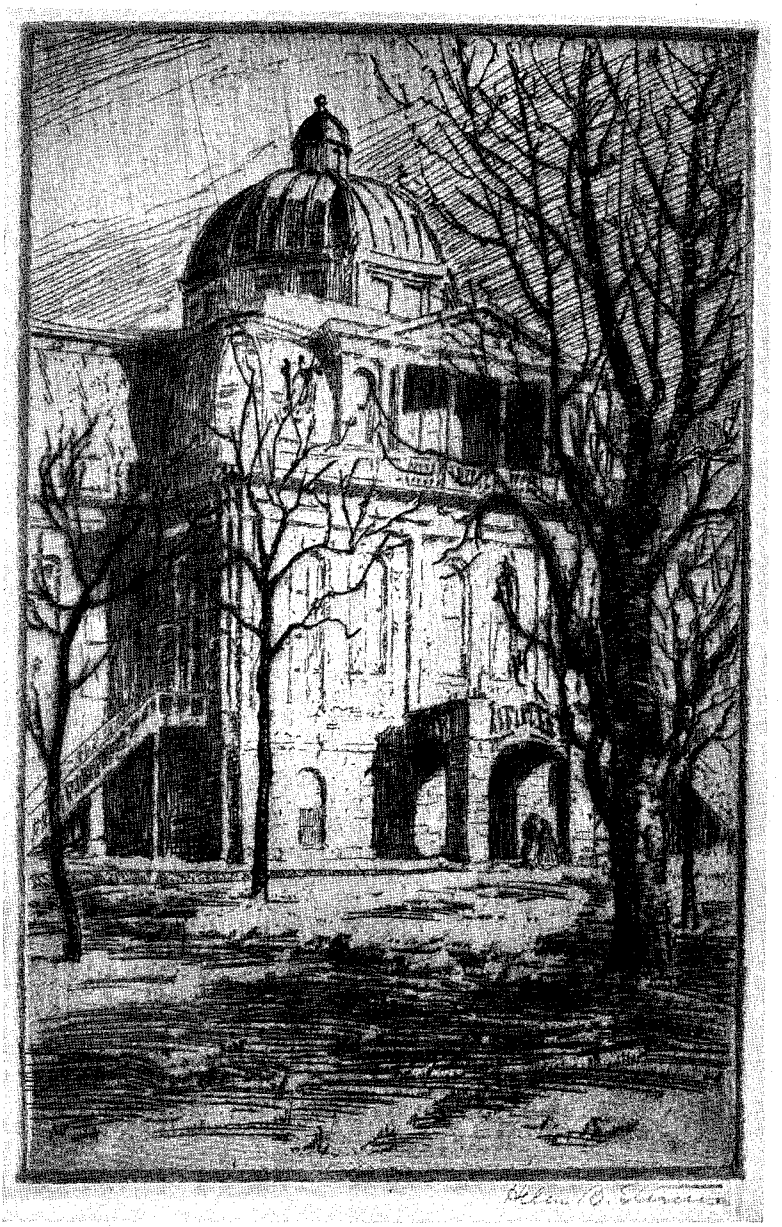
In a Harvard address a few years ago, it was remarked by Mr. Owen Wister that America possessed only three men of unquestioned preëminence to whom students could turn for academic tuition in their respective lines. I believe it was Edmund Gosse who said that America had not produced a single poet deserving to rank with the unquestioned masters of English poetry. While these statements may be questioned, one realizes the general truth behind them when we contrast the marvelous and expensive architectural equipment of American universities with the paucity of great men and teachers.

The trend of the times, however, is slowly but certainly toward a new individualism. Attention is being focused more and more upon the values of life rather than upon the volume of life. The college graduate may not be able to deliver an oration in Hebrew in the morning and in Latin in the afternoon, but he is able to think through and around his problem, and this is mental resourcefulness, truly a chief aim of collegiate education and one of the first necessities for success. Emerson's prophecy may be realized in our day:

> Perhaps the time has already come, when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertion of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life cannot always be fed on the sere remains of frozen harvests. Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce shall one day be the pole star for a thousand years.

The challenge is to our undergraduates. And it will be accepted. The colleges will teach men to think, to be mentally alert and resourceful, and then the man will count in the leadership of modern life, in the sense intended by Dr. Simeon who, upon seeing a trained graduate approach, exclaimed, "There comes three hundred men."

In order to accomplish this, however, the college must make it a point to teach principles rather than dogmatic methods. Too often our systems of learning are too bookish. The boy is inclined to get the impression that there is only one way to do a thing, and that is the way he has learned from his professor or his text-book. A business man told me that he was recently obliged to dismiss one of his college graduates because the young man could not see or think of but one way to work out a mechanical proposition. His training had circumscribed him, cramped, limited, and enslaved him instead of freeing him. He was unable to move about easily in his sphere of chosen activity. He had gained a prejudice rather than a principle. He still lived in a classroom, though out in the world. His progress was waterlogged in academic conservatism.



From an etching by Helen B. Stevens

UNIVERSITY HALL, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

LIFE-WORK PROPAGANDA

It is, moreover, time for constructive action on the part of both college and alumni in the matter of directing students to their proper calling. While it is impossible for our colleges to make great men out of indifferent raw material, it is possible to assist undergraduates to discover their inherent bent or capacity. Until the student has made such a discovery, the elective system which is now general in our American institutions is something of a farce. The lazy student, undecided in his vocation, uses it as a barricade through which he wriggles and twists to his degree, or at best is tempted in a dozen various directions, selecting disconnected subjects, in no

one of which he finds his chief aptitude. The elective system to such a student is an art-gallery without a key, a catalogue without the pictures. He does not know what he wishes to see.

This undergraduate ability or inclination is not easily grasped either by himself or by others. It requires study and discriminating sympathy, to extricate a main desire from many incidental likings. Frequently the desire itself must be virtually created. It is a common remark among American undergraduates, "I wish I *knew* what I was fitted for." The college is under deep obligation to serve the nation not merely by presenting a great number of excellent subjects, which, if properly selected, will land the young man in positions of leadership and usefulness; but it may and must go beyond this negative education, and assist the student actually to form his life purpose.

American institutions of learning are at present neglecting an opportunity *par excellence* for presenting different phases of life-work to undergraduates, especially emphasizing the relation of this life-work to the great branches of leadership and modern enterprise. There are hundreds of students being graduated from our institutions to-day who have not decided what they are to do in after life. Even if we assume that these men are prepared in an all-round way for life, it must be realized that they are severely handicapped by the necessity of trying different lines of work for years after graduation before fixing upon their permanent vocation. They not only miss the tremendous advantage of enthusiasm and impulse of the young, but they are also in danger of drifting rather than of moving forward with positive and aggressive activity.

A NEW COLLEGE OFFICER NEEDED

I SEE no possibility of bringing undergraduates to a decision of their proper life-work without the assistance of a new office in our educational institutions. A man is needed who can treat with students with real human interest, as well as with teaching intelligence. He should not be the college pastor, who is looked upon as a professional religionist, and therefore shunned by many students who need him most, but one definitely and actively responsible for the development of leadership. He should be a close student of college affairs, sympathetic with students, human, high-minded, natural, and keenly alive to humor and social interests. In some institutions this man might hold the leadership in philanthropic, religious, and social-service interests. It might be his privilege to arrange lectures by leading men of the country who were filled with zeal for their callings. The man who could make possible the endowment of such a chair in a great university would be doing a great work for his country.

LEARNING AND INVESTIGATION

BUT while the American undergraduate may consistently look to the college to furnish him with ideals and with the methods of making these ideals effective, the world looks to the college for definite and advanced information. The college, with its accumulated stores of intellect, its apparatus, and its unusual means for observation, owes the world a debt that none but it can pay. And this is the gift which the college has given, and is still giving, to the world so quietly, so unobtrusively, that the world scarcely dreams of the source of its gain. Let one think of the myriad signs of modern progress by which society is being constantly carried forward. Behind the scenes you will find some quiet, hidden worker in a laboratory or library, an unpractical man perhaps, but one through whom a new realm of possibilities in science or industry or letters have been revealed.

What is the world's interest in these men—men who are so generally underpaid that much of their best work is made impossible by the necessary outside labors to support their families, who, beyond their own personal satisfaction, have as little recognition as perhaps any workers of modern society? When the world demands expert knowledge in industry, science, literature, and art, the college may well reply, "When are you going to show your gratitude for the self-sacrifice and far-reaching labors of thousands of devoted men whose work is both a challenge and an example to the world to-day?"

And this example of the man who learns to devote himself to one thing is not lost upon the undergraduate, to whom example is ever stronger than precept. Indeed, it is this tendency to learn how to

do one thing well that is bringing the colleges into the attention of the modern world. The secret of genius is to be able to seize upon some concrete, near-at-hand piece of work, to see it with unobstructed and steady vision, and then, out of the rich treasure of knowing how to do one thing thoroughly, to draw by insight and expression the general principle.

For, after all, the contribution of the college to the world is often one which cannot be fully analyzed. It is not discovered in a thorough knowledge of a curriculum or in the statistics of athletics any more than a foreign country is discovered in a guide-book or in a hasty recital of its industries. There is no master word to express what a college career may mean or should mean to American youth who in years of high impression experience with a multitude of their fellows

Days that flew swiftly like the band
That in the Grecian games had strife,
And passed from eager hand to hand
The onward-dancing torch of life.

After we have said much concerning the life and the work of the American undergraduate, there is still a valuable thing which the college should impart to him, and through which he should become enabled to present with greater charm and with greater force the message which is in his soul. This valuable thing, at once both idealism and incentive, is the undergraduate's *individual* message to the world. It may be composed of knowledge, the ability to think, the faculty of relaxation, and the power to do faithfully and successfully some given task. These things, however, are all dependent upon the *spirit* of the actor, upon his vision, his determination, his ambitious and unflagging attempts. The true modern university contributes to the world a great-minded and a great-hearted man, to whom college life has been a soul's birth as well as a mind's awakening. It gives to its youth that peculiar but indispensable thing which burned in the heart of the young art-student who stood before the masterpiece and said, "I, too, am a painter."

THE END

THE UPPER CHAMBER

BY LIZETTE WOODWORTH REESE

OH, high and still!
As still
As drip of dew
In August, when no gusts do pass;
And marigolds, a score or two,
Pour their thick yellow down the grass
Under my neighbor's sill.

My neighbor 's gone. She went,
A little gray, a little bent,
A day or two ago.
Just now I saw her plain,
From the dull shop across the lane,
Homeward coming slow,
Her gay, plaid shawl
Upon her head,
Her apron filled with bundles small.
I had forgot that she was dead!

I hope that still place holds for her
Some common little thing,
Fit for remembering,
A bit of years that were;
A tall chair painted black,
With gilt rose on its back;
A dish or jug;
Or else a braided rug
Of red and blue,
The kind she used to make
On rainy days, when her old house did ache
With memories through and through.

For such a simple thing was she,
Close to the earth, as flower or tree,
A sweet and honest country wife,
Bound to a hard, belovèd life;
I hope that He,
Lord of that Chamber fair,
Some homeliness keeps for her there,
Some bit of long ago,—
A rug, a chair,—
Else will she miss it so.