

EDUCATIONAL LIBERTY.

Thoughts Suggested by Prof. Perrin's Speech—How Harvard Grows.

In writing to one of Yale's alumni on the Pacific coast, of the Class of Seventy-One, the editor of the ALUMNI WEEKLY called his special attention to the speech at Brooklyn by Prof. Perrin in which Yale was so keenly and clearly analyzed. The following letter, received in reply, was not offered for publication, but seems eminently fitted for it:

Dear Sir: I am very much obliged to you for your favor of the 17th inst., inclosing me a copy of the YALE ALUMNI WEEKLY, of that date, and calling my attention to the speech of Prof. Bernadotte Perrin, at the dinner of the Brooklyn Association, 10th inst. Professor Perrin's analysis of the constitution and spirit of the undergraduate body, at Yale, is very interesting. Undoubtedly, a certain cohesion and strong class feeling are engendered by the system of fixed studies pursued, during the first two years. Without a question, this cohesion and class feeling have their strong points and their good sides, in all matters relating to aggregate action, mass-discipline, etc., etc., and they probably lie at the bottom of much of that grit and determination, that *esprit de corps*, that has made the "Yale Spirit" so famous upon athletic and other fields.

Yet, it must be remembered that the constant tendency of all modern education is towards broader expansion along the lines of individual liberty. It is the genius of the age. By assiduously cultivating and ministering to it, there is no doubt that President Eliot has vastly popularized Harvard, and given to her an expansion and growth never before known in her history. For, just in proportion as she has become more universal, as she has more and more realized the term "University" (*universitas*), so has she been able to satisfy a greater number and variety of mental ambitions and to widen the circle of her intellectual influence. Instead of attempting to dictate to the youth of the land what it must study, she has endeavored to discover what it wanted to study, and has thrown open to it all the highways and the byways of learning. Many persons think that Harvard's success is due to her age. But this is a mistake. It is not due to her age, but to her youth. Hundreds are flocking within her walls, not because of the *praeclarum et venerabile nomen*, but because she is taking the most advanced positions way out upon the frontiers of educational thought and of educational liberty.

The rapid growth, within the last few years, of young intellectual giants like Cornell, the University of Chicago, and a dozen others that might be mentioned, abundantly proves that an American university, at least, is not founded and can not live on the veneration of ancestors.

Of course, what I am writing is not intended to institute comparisons prejudicial to Yale. She is far too strong and far too firmly fixed in the affections of her alumni to fear any comparisons from any source whatsoever. It is her very strength itself that makes it easy for her to acknowledge and to profit by the good points of all her sister universities. But, of one thing you may rest assured, the broader and the more liberal Yale becomes, in mapping out her courses of study and in dealing with her undergraduates, the greater and stronger will she become and the more in touch with the civilization that is and that is to be. The day of fetters and straight-jackets for the mind is rapidly vanishing. Mental aspirations, to-day, demand that the entire universe of knowledge shall be open and accessible. They will not tolerate anywhere any drawing of the veil. The university of the future must be broad and must have the largest views, the widest aims. There must be no enforced worship, whether intellectual or religious. In fact, compulsory worship is a contradiction in terms, and, therefore, an impossibility. All worship is and must be the spontaneous adoration of the free, not the cringing homage of the slave. The students must be taught that mental elevation and culture are

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great privileges to be eagerly sought, not tasks and burdens to be dreaded and shunned. He must be taught to look upon knowledge as a loving discipline, not as a scourged galley-slave. I am one of those who believe in tempting and enticing young men to learn; one of those who think that learning can be made delightful, because it is delightful. I do not believe in compulsory knowledge. I even doubt if there be such a thing. I never, in my whole life, learned anything that I did not want to learn. The only reason I ever mastered it was because it was pleasanter to do so than to remain ignorant of it.

TWO COMPULSORY ESSENTIALS.

There are only two things that should ever be compulsory at an American University, and they are,

- (1) That its students should, always and everywhere, behave like gentlemen, and,
- (2) That they should keep up to a fair standard of scholarship.

And by this last, I do not mean that they should be required to maintain a mere technical excellence, supposed to be determined by an arbitrary scale of marks, but that they should be expected to show a proper zeal for intellectual development along the appointed or the chosen paths of the curriculum. For I know full well that it is not the man who is getting the highest marks in a recitation that is deriving the most benefit from it. Often, the reverse is the case.

The human mind is a very complex and subtle organism. It cannot be limited or coerced beyond a certain point. Things that seem very important and worthy of all mental effort to me, may seem comparatively trivial and unworthy of acquisition to my next door neighbor. And from his point of view and his special aims in life, he may be correct.

There is no absolute standard of scholarship. It is all relative. No man knows or can know everything. No two men know or can know the same things equally well. The great thing to impress upon a student is that knowledge is power; that the more knowledge he has, the greater his power; that all knowledge is good; that none is to be despised; that, just in proportion as he requires it, he lifts himself up to that higher plane where achievement becomes a pleasure and life a success.

The mandate of the old theology was: "Do this, or you will be damned." The mandate of the new theology is: "Do this, and you will win the love of Heaven and the approbation of your own conscience." May we not hope for a similar reform in the mandates of study? Let us eliminate the damnation of non-performance and, in its place, substitute the surpassing pleasure of performance. For learning is pleasant. It needs but the contagion of enthusiasm to make it so.

Let our teachers study with their hearts as well as with their heads. If they have not this divine spirit of the propaganda, then let them go out into outer darkness and the desert and fast

and pray until it comes to them. And, if it come to them not, then let them eschew teaching and put far away from them the thought of it. Peradventure, they would make a success of sawing wood. And it is far better to lop sticks than minds. The great teacher is the one who can give to his pupils the thirst for learning, for all learning, who can make them feel the exhilaration that comes from its possession and its mastery. The greatest university is the one that possesses the greatest number of such teachers.

Pardon me for troubling you with these few crude reflections, hurriedly jotted down, and suggested by your kind favor of the 17th instant.

Thanking you for your courtesy, and with best regards,

Very truly yours, GORDON BLANDING.

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