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*XIV—The Old College and the New  
University*

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*(Written for the "McGill Annual" of 1923.)*

I HAVE it on tradition that in the year 1860 or thereabouts, the way in which a student matriculated into a college was, that the venerable gentleman named the Principal called him into his office and asked him who his father was, and whether he had read Virgil.

If the old gentleman liked the answers to these questions, he let the boy in.

Nowadays when a student matriculates, it requires in the first place some four pages of printed regulations to tell him how ; after which there is demanded two weeks of continuous writing, and the consumption of at least twenty square yards of writing paper.

One of these two systems is what we now call Organization ; the other is not. I dare not doubt for a minute which is the best. There is the same

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difference as there is between a Court Martial and an Appeal to the Privy Council, so that it would be folly, if not treason, to express a preference for the older plan.

But like many other things the plan was not wholly bad. For they do say that sometimes the venerable Principal would keep the boy talking for half an hour or so, and when the youth left, he would say, "Remarkable boy, that! Has the makings of a scholar in him!" And the little matriculant, his heart swollen with pride, would hurry away to the college library with a new fever for Virgil's *Aeneid* burning within him. By such and similar processes there was set up in the college a sort of personal relationship, not easily established nowadays even by the "contact" section of the "Committee on Friendliness."

For nowadays every matriculant is just a name and a number, and when he gets to the first year he is merely a "case," and in his second year simply a "seat," and in his third year a "condition," and in his fourth year, at the best, a "parchment," and after that not even a memory.

There can, of course, be no doubt that present

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days and present things are better—none whatever. To anybody who attended a place that was called a “college” and had three hundred students, it is wonderful to come back and find it grown—or at any rate swollen, inflated, shall I say?—into a University of three thousand students, with a President instead of a Principal, and with as many “faculties” and departments and committees as there are in the League of Nations. It is wonderful to think of this vast organization pouring out its graduates like beans out of a hopper. It is marvellous, I repeat, to reflect on the way that everything is organized, standardized, unified, and reduced to a provable sample of excellence.

The college athletics of the older day, how feeble they seem by comparison now. The group of students gathered round the campus in the October dusk to cheer the football team—each cheering, or calling, upon some poor notion of his own as to the merits of the play—how crude it seems beside the organized hysteria of the Rooters Club. The college daily journal of to-day with its seven columns of real “news,” and

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needing' nothing but a little murder to put it right in line with the big one-cent papers, the organs of one-cent opinion,—how greatly superior it is to the old time *College Journal*. That poor maundering thing made its appearance at irregular intervals, emerging feebly like the Arctic sun from behind its cloud of debt, and containing nothing, later in the way of "news" than a disquisition on *The Art of William Shakespeare*.

Or take the college library of the old days, how limited it was, with its one ancient librarian, with a beard that reached his girdle, handing out the books one by one, and remembering the students by their faces. As if up-to-date students had any!

The old college is no doubt gone and we could not bring it back if we would. But it would perhaps be well for us if we could keep alive something of the intimate and friendly spirit that inspired it.

Whereupon, I am certain, someone will at once propose a University committee on brotherly love, with power to compel attendance and impose fines.