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*VII—Little Glimpses of the College  
Future*

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THE LENGTHENING OF THE COLLEGE COURSE

*The Final Result if College  
Courses keep Getting Longer  
And Longer*

(*Harvard Commencement Day of 1950. Current Press  
Report of the President's Speech to the Graduating Class.*)

THE President, in his valedictory address, spoke with deep feeling, and was frequently interrupted by the sobs of the graduating class. They had now been together, he said, more years than he cared to count. They had come together as young men; they had spent the energetic years of their middle age together in these venerable halls, and now with advancing old age it had become absolutely necessary that they should graduate before they died. He felt that it was hard indeed to part. He could not but contrast on this occasion the

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organization of the college and the new meaning which graduation from Harvard had acquired with the almost unbelievable condition of things which he could recall as actually existing in his youth. In those days men graduated from the university after perhaps no more than eight or nine years of study. He himself had actually seen a Harvard degree given to a man—a brilliant man, he admitted—who had spent only six years at the college. Under such conditions education was necessarily slipshod and incomplete. It was customary, as he remembered, for men to go no further in Conic Sections than page 150; as to what came after page 150 there had prevailed a regrettable indifference. He was glad to say that he could see men seated before him this morning who had done the entire book (*applause*). In earlier days students were allowed to go out of Harvard knowing something of plane trigonometry but absolutely ignorant of spherical (*groans and sobs*). No such man could get out now (*renewed groans*). He, himself, and he said it with emphasis, would rather keep a man at Harvard till he died than send him out

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adorned with the college degree yet ignorant even of the simplest spherical formulæ (*applause*). Such a thing was unfair to the graduates themselves. They went out into the business world ignorant and ill-equipped. They fell an easy prey to the rapacity of the business man. No such thing, he ventured to say, could happen to-day.

In continuation, the President said that he was assured that any one of the venerable gentlemen seated before him in the graduating class would meet with nothing but respect and consideration during his life in the outside world. His life might indeed be short. That he would not deny. But it would, he hoped, be full (*applause*). Experience had taught him that it was better to be short and full than not to be. In conclusion, he congratulated the venerable gentlemen before him on their long and sustained acquirement of knowledge. He could see men in front of him who had learned in their Latin Grammar not *some* of the irregular verbs, but *all* of the irregular verbs. There were men before him who knew what came after the first book of

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Xenophon's *Anabasis*: men who had read not one Canto of Dante's *Inferno*, but all of it: who had read and appreciated not merely a part of English literature, but the whole of it. This, he said, was education indeed. He did not wish to keep the class seated too long and he would gladly request some of the older members to lie down if they wished to do so. But he would like to detain them, and the audience long enough to invite their consideration of the question as to why a Harvard man should ever graduate (*applause*). This question, he was pleased to say, was being earnestly debated by the corporation. Funds would probably be available within a short time to render graduation unnecessary, and to keep the Harvard men of the future at college until removed by death. The increasing comfort of the dormitories, the continued improvement of the food in the college halls, together with the fearful rise of the cost of living in the outside world and the spread of Bolshevism and other dangers, rendered this reform more and more desirable. He felt that in turning these venerable gentlemen out into the cold

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world, the college was performing an ungrateful task. He shuddered, to think of what might happen if a Bolshevist should get hold of one of them. The corporation was engaged, however, in looking round for new things that could be studied. It was felt that there must be something left if one could only find it. In conclusion, he would like to ask the audience to step out quietly as he observed that some of the senior graduates were asleep.