
VIII—A Subscription with Reflections

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(The reflections which here follow were occasioned by my having to subscribe seventy-five cents to a new students' journal.)

THE enclosed seventy-five cents, like all other money, speaks for itself. If *The Rebel* goes on as it has begun I am sure it will have no difficulty in knocking the public out of their seventy-five cents's. To me *The Rebel* came as a real enlightenment. I realized that I had been, without knowing it, a rebel for thirty years past; in fact ever since the time when I sat on the benches of University College and speculated on men and things with the same irresponsible freedom that *The Rebel* shows to-day. I found, if I remember rightly, much to criticize and much to alter. In fact the whole college of those days seemed gradually subsiding, for want of a little active interference on my part, into the mud of its own foundations. I found, too, upon diligent inquiry, that this

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same situation had existed before, very notably indeed, in the generation of the older graduates ; in fact, had existed and persisted and seemed to follow the good old college like a ghost—the ghost, if one had to name it, of Academic Discontent, that has moaned and wrung its hands at the gates of colleges and academies from the time of Plato to the age of Theodore Roosevelt. It is credibly reported that in Plato's later days his students used to gather in little knots among the trees of his Academy, and shake their heads at the kind of "dope" that Plato was "putting over" in his lectures. It had, they said, no "punch." And it is equally strongly affirmed that the students of Aristarchos of Samos denounced his theories of lunar motion as "chestnuts"; that the students of Marsiglio of Padua were openly heard to avow that "the old man was going 'batty'"; that the students of Sir Isaac Newton at Cambridge said that they were "simply sick" of hearing about gravitation, with the same old joke each year about the apple ; that the students of Adam Smith at Glasgow said that if he could only cut out his everlasting

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“division of labour” for a lecture or two and get down to common sense, they might listen to him. Nay, worst of all, I have seen students in the back of my own classroom shake their heads and murmur that my lectures are “bum stuff” to what they used to be.

Yet I have grown to know that out of the empty breath of discontent is blown the inspiration of the future. And I have ceased to regret that academic discontent should be. On the contrary, I am even inclined, as a professor, to harbour a little bit of academic discontent of my own. Discontent, perhaps, is a word a trifle too strong; in the quiet and regulated life of a professor no passion as strong as that can find a place; for the life of a professor passes from middle age to seniority and from seniority to senility with the measured and majestic transit of the harvest moon passing over the ripened field of corn, and mellowing all that it illuminates. But if ever a professor could voice a wish for a change in the methods or aspect of universities, I may say that it often occurs to me that our colleges would be greatly brightened if there

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were no students; if the professors could saunter undisturbed among the elm trees in friendly colloquy, lecturing—for they know no other form of conversation—to one another; if the library and the campus could enjoy at all seasons the quiet hush that now only falls on them in August; if the deep peace where learning loves to brood were never broken by examinations and roll-calls—and—dear me, I see that I am unconsciously falling into poetry; suppose that I loop the loop clear into it and continue:

“Oh, that the peace where learning loves to brood
Were never broken by the student rude,
And that the corridor and classroom dim
Sheltered the prof. but quite excluded HIM!
Thus the professor, free from every care,
Might settle down in comfort on his chair,
And while the noiseless years in gentle current flow
Pursue profound research or, better, let it go.”

Let me, in conclusion, draw your attention to the elegance of the introduction of that Alexandrine couplet at the end of the verse, a neat trick which I had of my instructors at University College thirty years ago.