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Some Views of College Life
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Jud. T. Strickler '96.
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Jud. T. Strickler, '96.

The flight of migratory birds southward, and the fall of red and yellow leaves eastward, do not more clearly proclaim the autumn and predict the winter, than the annual assembling of students in our college centers. Uniform as the procession of the seasons, or the alternations of day and night, regular as the rhythmic movements of the heart, or as the flow and ebb of the sea, do these student waves sweep inward to the fountains of learning, and thence outward, a river of health and life, we would hope, to humanity. The water from the mountains flowing seaward,

impregnated with organic and inorganic impurities, is gathered from the ocean's expanse into the bosom of the clouds, only to fall in fertilizing showers upon the thirsty land. And so these colleges, now bustling with activity and thronged with students, incapable of creating, can only refine, purify, and qualify such material as is given them, and then distribute it for the benefit of mankind.

And yet were one who knows somewhat of the mysterious revelations, which come from the Delphic Caves of human life, to forecast the student's future, as he steps on the campus for the first time, he would not picture it all sunshine: He might tell of defeats as well as of triumphs - of glooms as

well as of glories - while unto each
one it would be said: Lo, many a hope
which you entertain shall fail of fruition,
while many another, now dearly cherished,
will, when realized, be but dust and
ashes on your lips; thornless or fadeless
flowers to ^{be} plucked and fashioned into
chaplets for the brow are not found. Nay,
doing your best as a faithful and
successful worker, peradventure you may
not escape the railing of malicious
tongues - your abilities may be disparaged,
your motives misconstrued, your reputation
maligned, and obstacles and impediments
may be purposely placed in your way,
just as cruel savages would impede
the progress of their hapless victim when
running the gauntlet for dear life.

And now does any one say, you have sadly darkened my ideal of college life, and crushed the hopes that were throbbing in my bosom? If so, let him turn unto a higher and purer ideal which no earth-clouds can permanently obscure, and to seek a faithful hope which shall be an anchor to the soul, holding it fixed and firm amidst all the drifting tides of adversity and disappointment, and unmoved by all the rude storms of fate.

Aside from books, laboratories, athletics, there are other important things for the college-man's attention. Let him cultivate observation, perception, comparison, imagination, reflection, judgment. Life is a mental gymnasium in which the mind can be exercised in every direction

and posture. This truth must be so obvious to a reflective mind, that we scarce need attempt its demonstration, nor even its illustration.

There is another aspect in which the relations of the curriculum to intellectual culture should be considered. Its study, whether in books, on the athletic field, or in our daily associations, is a study of truth. Now truth is food for the intellect; the mind was made to know, as the eye to see or the ear to hear, and by knowledge it grows and is invigorated. Not only so, but remembering the indissoluble bonds which bind our intellectual and moral natures in the unity of the human soul, truth and virtue are intimately connected - right thinking and right doing, correct knowledge and correct

action. While, on the other hand, an intellect
befogged with ignorance, beclouded with
sophistries, inevitably misguides and corrupts
the moral nature. The college-man has
offered him a rich body of truths for the
nourishment of his mind. There are new worlds
for the ambitious warrior to conquer; new
lands for the adventurous seaman to
discover; and new truths for the philosopher
to unfold. The fleet-footed racer, as he
speeds to the goal; the swift-winged bird,
as he sweeps over us or soars to the
clouds; have pleasure in the exercise of God-
given power: and so the college-man, in
the exercise of his power in the conquest
of new fields of knowledge, and in the
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Other influences are brought to bear

upon us - some good - some evil. May we not say that he who is ever awake to the brighter side of college life is more blessed than the pessimist? Familiar with the degradations and imperfections of human nature, the college man is likewise familiar with its nobilities - lives struggling up to the infinite light - lives sinking in the degradation and darkness - lives glowing with generous self-sacrifice and noble devotion - and thus his own soul, with this food for pity, and food for love and admiration, daily is purified and grows more catholic. Often, are we witnesses of scenes that not only thrill the soul, but gentle as the calm light of early dawn, open up to our vision some of the most beautiful manifestations of human character or conduct.

The true collegian working faithfully at his tasks, finds himself, day by day, not only growing in intellect and strength of moral character, but also in purity of affection and in refinement of sensibilities. College associations give us constant lessons in the cultivation of kind and gentle manners, which are the outgrowth of true and active sympathy, and in that charity which does not behave unseemly, and which so beautifully adorns any life. The college man, above all men, is and ought to be, a "gentle-man". And when, as it sometimes happens, Calibans come into our ranks, with coarse speech and rude behavior, which would be offensive in an ox-driver or a scavenger, it is a sad thing for the college, but a sadder

for those sufferers who seek its aid.

Times change. Habits and customs will fluctuate like the fashions of the season. But the necessity for men, capable, courageous, conservative, intelligent, manly men will always exist. Let not the endeavors of your alma mater be in vain.

Commencement Oration of Judson T. Strickler, Class of 1896
Transcribed by Nick Bloom, June 2009
Edited by Don Sailer, September 2009

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