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# THE SMALL COLLEGE

BY

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## THE SMALL COLLEGE

“For combining sound scholarship with solid character, for making men both intellectually and spiritually free, for uniting the pursuit of truth with reverence for duty, the small College (and the large as well)—open to the worthy graduates of every good High School, presenting a course sufficiently rigid to give symmetrical development and sufficiently elastic to encourage individuality along congenial lines, taught by professors who are men first and scholars afterward, governed by kindly personal influence and secluded from too frequent contact with social distractions—has a mission which no change of educational conditions can take away, and a policy which no sentiment of vanity or jealousy should be permitted to turn aside.”—*President Hyde, of Bowdoin College.*

*From an editorial in The Interior of August 12, 1902.*

“ President Harlan has had the full courage of his conviction that it is no detriment, disgrace or surrender for a good College to stop calling itself by the higher-sounding name, and moreover he has so impressed his judgment upon the Trustees that [the title “Lake Forest University” is no longer to be used, except for legal purposes, but in the future will give place to LAKE FOREST COLLEGE].

“ So that now the whole world is in plain terms advised that Lake Forest [College] does not aspire to compete with the great [Universities] in offering courses for professional and post-graduate learning, but finds its duty and its pride in offering the opportunities of a well-rounded general culture under Christian influence and a wholesome atmosphere to young men and women who believe in laying foundations before they begin the superstructure. And therein Lake Forest magnifies its office without apology to any or envy of any.”

# THE SMALL COLLEGE

Reprinted from *The Interior* of August 14, 1902; revised.

In this day of consolidations, mergers, and trusts, is the "small College" to go to the wall, or else consent to be swallowed up in the large University, just as the small shop seems more and more destined to give way to the great Department Store? Such an absorption will certainly go on with increasing rapidity, unless the small College has a permanent reason for existence in the educational necessities of the Republic. If it has such a *raison d'être*, then that characteristically American institution, the College, will not only survive but in the end will thrive.

But is the small College fit to survive? Has it a distinct and permanent place in the educational equipment of the Republic? To reach an intelligent answer to that question, we must discriminate between the terms "University" and "College."

## DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND THE COLLEGE

We Americans, particularly in the Middle- and Far-West, have been guilty of great confusion in our use of those two words, "University" and "College"; and in some quarters it has become almost as risky and difficult to define the word "University" as it is the

word "gentleman." There are perhaps three fairly distinct types of Universities, viz. :

1. There is the German type, combining in one institution the departments of the Liberal Arts and Sciences, Divinity, Law, Medicine, etc. ; in which only "advanced courses" are taught, and the lecture and laboratory methods, as distinguished from the text-book and recitation methods, are used exclusively.

2. The English type of University is radically different from the German. Oxford University, for example, consists of a congeries of separate undergraduate Colleges, such as Baliol College, Christ Church College, New College, Magdalen, and fifteen or sixteen other Colleges ; while the University, which is a more or less indefinite body, confines itself to the granting of degrees, the provision of a few lectures of general interest, besides fulfilling a few general functions—athletic, intellectual, and social, such as the maintenance of the Oxford Union, etc. Ignorance of the exact function of the "University" has led many an American visitor at Oxford, after being shown Baliol, Magdalen, and the other Colleges—which seem to be and practically are "the whole thing"—to ask, "and where is the University"?

And yet no one, save the stickler for the exclusive use of German methods and German nomenclature, would dream of denying to these historic English seats of liberal learning the title of "University," though they are without professional departments and have very little of what we Americans include under



our much-used University phrases, "post-graduate work" and "special research."

3. The true American University is different again from both the German and English types. With us the University, as a rule, has been developed out of the large College through a process of gradual evolution, by means of a growing predominance of the elective system, and the substitution of the lecture and laboratory methods for the text-book and frequent recitations.

But the transformation of the "College" into the "University" has been brought about not merely, nor even mainly, by the elaborate development of the elective system securing to the student a wide range of choice during his four undergraduate years, but especially by the generous opportunities now afforded for post-graduate work and "special research," as distinguished from general culture. Indeed, it is only as graduate courses and special research become prominent that an institution calling itself a University begins to justify the assumption of such an ambitious title. It still remains nothing but a large and perhaps over-grown College.

Must a University have Professional Schools in order to justify its name? In his noble and statesmanlike Inaugural Address, Princeton's new President, Woodrow Wilson, has clearly pointed out what is essential in the relations of the University and the Professional Schools: "Professional Schools have nowhere their right atmosphere and association except where they are parts of a University and share its

spirit and method. They must love learning as well as professional success in order to have their perfect usefulness." Therefore, says President Wilson, "Professional Schools may not dispense with the University, though the University may dispense with the Professional Schools." The Professional Schools are the "historical accidents" rather than the "essential" features of a University.

Usually the genuine University of the American type has in addition at least two Professional Schools. And yet so great a University as Johns Hopkins has only one such school, that of Medicine; but on account of the rich provision it makes for graduate work and special research, Johns Hopkins would be none the less a great "University" if its Medical school were to become an entirely separate institution.

What perhaps most differentiates the American from the German University is the blending and overlapping of the "College" and the "University" in the same institution. More than that, it is the College which is the core of the "University." Far the greatest thing in Yale University is Yale College; and Harvard College is still, and we trust ever will be, the most important and vital part of Harvard University.

That there are many Colleges in the United States, and even some very small ones, calling themselves "Universities," with practically none of the distinguishing marks of any of the three types just enumerated, is a fact too notorious to need more than a passing mention. The addition of one or two professional,

and sometimes merely technical, schools to a modest undergraduate College course—especially if the bond between such schools and the College be nominal rather than organic—does not convert the combination into a “University,” however excellent the allied professional schools may be, and however worthy the undergraduate College around which the combination centers. Much less can an ordinary undergraduate College make itself any less a College, or add one whit to its own importance, simply by dubbing itself a “University” in its charter. The larger name is rather a source of weakness than of strength. The American people cannot long be fooled by mere titles. A growing demand for reality, a deepening hatred of shams, and an increasing distaste for high-sounding names for modest institutions, will lessen rather than increase the proportion of “Universities” to “Colleges.”

There seems to be no opening or demand in this country, at least for the present, for a University of the English type, made up of a number of separate and co-ordinate Colleges; and yet it is possible that some day the social needs of the immense bodies of students attending the larger Universities may force the division of their three or four thousand students into smaller groups clustering around certain subdivisions of the University which will correspond more or less to the “Colleges” making up Oxford University.

This is what Mr. John Corbin advocates in his charming book, “An American at Oxford.”

But whatever future generations may bring forth in

this regard, the problem for us of the present day narrows itself down to this question, "Will the University, either of the German or modified American type, ever be likely to take away, or to any large extent diminish, the field for the College, and especially the small College, "whose name is legion"?"

### "TOO MANY SMALL COLLEGES"

What, then, is the peculiar function, and what the special advantages, of the small College? And why are there so many of such colleges?

It is worth while to give a brief answer to this last question. Quite a large proportion of these small Colleges will probably remain not only very small, but almost entirely local, drawing practically all their students, if not from the town in which the College is located, at least from the few neighbouring counties. In the case of not a few of these purely local Colleges, a foolish local pride has doubtless tempted some of our small towns to establish "Colleges," without any possibility of an adequate support, when good High Schools would have been far better.

But it is more often true that the establishment of a modest College, drawing all its support from a radius of perhaps fifty miles, with a corps of only three or four professors and a tiny laboratory, has brought the possibilities of a Higher Education within the reach of many earnest and ingenuous youth who could not have afforded to go even two hundred miles away from home to the more expensive institution.

One sometimes hears an Eastern-bred collegian

assert dogmatically that it would be well to allow eighty per cent of these small Western Colleges to go to the wall; and it is doubtless true that, once in a while, the single rich man of some small country town does make the great blunder of attempting, by what seems to him a munificent gift of, say, one hundred thousand dollars, to add one more struggling institution to the already long list of poverty-stricken small Colleges, when he might perhaps better have served his whole State by founding a chair, by building a good laboratory, or increasing the general endowment, at some small College that had demonstrated its right to survive, and which already had a constituency at least as wide as the State, and which perhaps only needed a few hundred thousand dollars to put it on strong foundations.

But, after all is said that may be said by way of just criticism as to the superabundance of small Colleges, yet, taking them as a whole, they have served a large and beneficent purpose in the making of the Republic. And even if not a few of them are starving and some are certain to die and others might well be allowed to die or be consolidated with neighbouring institutions, better, far better, to have started them *all*, than to permit even half of them to be wiped out.

## THE MISSION OF THE COLLEGE

But this article has in view more particularly those small Colleges whose constituencies are drawn not merely from their own State, but from at least several

States in their section of the country—Colleges which though small have evidently a mission and a future. And the question to which it is attempted to give a partial answer in this article is: what is the peculiar function of the small College as distinguished from the University?

The peculiar function of the College, whether it be small or large, is not to turn out specialists, nor to attempt to fit the student immediately for any specific calling or career, but rather to give a broad general education, what we understand as liberal culture; to inculcate the scholarly habit of mind; to train the social and moral virtues; to develop full-rounded men and women, to whom the Alma Mater, as she sends them forth into the world, has given the freedom of the City of Learning, so that possessing the master keys of knowledge they may easily open any of its further treasures.

By means of a well-balanced curriculum, the College should seek to temper the steel which, afterwards, through the special studies in the post-graduate, technical, or professional schools, can be brought to a fine edge for practical work in whatever special profession or line of business the student may have in view. Many men begin to specialize too early. They build the tall towers of their own specialty without any adequate foundation of general knowledge. Hence the narrowness of so many specialists and their lack of catholic sympathy with other departments of knowledge; they see everything through the little spectacles of their own pet subject. The wisest of the men

occupying the science chairs in the older seats of learning are calling a halt to the tendency many students have of seeking for "short cuts" into special scientific work before they have laid the foundations of a proper amount of general culture.

## THE TEMPTATION TO "ENRICH" THE CURRICULUM

This pressure for "short cuts" to professional and business careers tempts the small College to "enrich" its curriculum by multiplying courses, in the vain attempt to compete in this respect with the "University" and hold its students, many of whom threaten to leave and often do leave the small College for the "University" for the last two years of their undergraduate course. The small College must recognize its permanent limitations, and keep steadily in view its peculiar function of providing general culture rather than complete preparation for any special profession or career.

The College, for example, need not offer to teach *every* science. A few typical sciences, thoroughly well taught, with a view of producing general culture rather than turning out teachers, are all that is needed to inculcate in the student the scientific habit of mind and to teach him the scientific method of investigation, applicable to any subject. Better, far better, for a College to have a few good professors teaching the staples of a liberal education—the Languages (ancient and modern, especially English), Mathematics, the leading Sciences, History, Political Science,

and Philosophy—than to double the faculty by the appointment of a number of raw instructors, simply in order to lengthen the educational *menu* by the insertion of a large number of short courses in this and that study, from which the bewildered student is to elect, *à la carte*.

### THE FACULTY IN A SMALL COLLEGE

In this connection it ought to be said that if the small College is to get the benefit of its peculiar opportunity, instead of being handicapped by its size, it must have choice men in its Faculty. They need not be men with great reputations, nor even wonderful scholars, but they *must* be students themselves, inspiring teachers, and above all, men of character and of force. The small College will find that there is no magic in mere smallness of numbers, but rather a hindrance, unless each professor in its small Faculty of a dozen men is capable of inspiring and influencing and molding students into strong and earnest men and women.

### A PRESSING NEED AND A GREAT OPPORTUNITY

Right here emerges a great opportunity for Christian men of wealth in the Middle- and North-West. Would that they saw more clearly the pressing need which the leading small Colleges of this region have for a large addition to their endowment to be used exclusively for the purpose of increasing considerably the now meager salaries offered to their professors, so that



these Colleges could secure and, what is more difficult, *keep* the strongest type of men in their Faculties. The professors make the College; they *are* the College. More than additional buildings, more than better laboratories, do these Colleges need to raise the average quality of the men in their Faculties.

It is an open secret in the teaching profession that a position in the Faculty of a small but live College, with sufficient leisure for quiet study and steady development, and the opportunity for close personal contact with his students, would attract and hold many a man of the very highest order of ability—provided only he had a fairly generous salary assured to him for a lifetime, and the use of a good and growing College Library.

For this reason I would put first among the needs of most of our small Colleges a largely increased endowment for professorial salaries, and a generous library endowment for the purchase each year of a goodly number of books.

### SOME ADVANTAGES OF THE SMALL COLLEGE

Some of the obvious advantages of the well-equipped small College may be briefly mentioned in conclusion:

1. First I would put *the advantage which the two lower classes have in daily work with mature professors rather than "tutors," who are often very inexperienced.*

It is a notorious fact that in certain well-known large institutions, on account of the inadequacy of the

funds provided for salaries, the position of "tutor" or "instructor" is too often a kind of clinic, in which the fresh recruit to the ranks of teachers "tries it on the dog"; and if he does not kill all taste for scholarship in the Freshmen and Sophomores committed to his tender mercies, he is afterwards promoted to the rank of professor *in some other institution!* Unquestionably it is too often the case in the larger institution that, during the formative first two years of College life, the student is turned over to callow instructors, rather than the maturer teachers.

On the other hand, in a small College, properly manned by full professors of mature ability, the student, from the moment of his entrance at the age of eighteen, has the undivided attention of these mature teachers. It is certainly true that the average student between the age of eighteen and twenty will get far more from a Faculty of fifteen full professors of good ability than from a Faculty of three times the number, consisting of a few professors of national reputation who confine their attention to the juniors and seniors, a few other professors of mediocre ability, and a large number of young and inexperienced instructors.

2. Among the advantages which the average undergraduate will find at the small College I would next mention *the prominence given to the text-book and recitation methods.*

In the genuine University, or the very large College, the system of lectures is more and more substituted for the text-book and recitation. This is absolutely necessary on account of the large numbers

in each class, not to mention any other reason. With older and advanced students, the lecture system is undoubtedly the best, the most flexible and inspiring, provided always the lecturer is an able one; but it is a great snare to younger and more inexperienced students. With the system prevailing at the University, it often happens that in a given department a student is not called upon to recite more than two or three times a year, whereas, in the smaller College a definite task is set in a good text-book, and an almost daily recitation is the rule.

The comparative effects of the two systems upon the average student of eighteen or nineteen may easily be imagined by any one who knows student nature. Thrown upon his own resources, left to his own devices, without the safeguard of frequent recitations, the average student of immature years will slip through the large meshes of the lecture system. He may listen and take notes or not, just as he pleases (it often happens he does not know how to take notes); and the only way in which he can get through the examinations with anything like the same ease is to "cram" during the few days before the final ordeal. From personal observation I am sure that a far greater proportion of students get their bachelor's degree from the large College or University without any adequate work than is possible in the small College, where the student as a rule is set certain definite tasks from good text-books, and has the test and spur of an almost daily recitation in each subject.

3. It would be difficult to overestimate *the personal*

*influence that may be exerted by the professors and the President in a small College, particularly in directing and stimulating the work of the individual student.*

The immense classes in the larger institutions must necessarily be taught *en masse*. The professor can do practically nothing for the individual, either in or outside the class; the dull student must look out for himself. In the small College each student can be treated more or less as an individual, and can be prescribed for and his case followed up, outside of the class-room, if the teacher knows his business and loves his work.

Then, at the Faculty meetings in the small College it is possible and quite easy for the professors to call up the names of individual students and exchange experiences and impressions as to their progress. In the light of such reports from the professors, the President, if he rightly appreciates the unique opportunity he has of becoming the friend and mentor of each one of his students, can send for such students as evidently need a word from him, and by a quiet talk can often speak a word of kindly warning or of earnest advice, which may come just in the nick of time to save a student who has begun to show signs of slackness in his work.

In the larger institution, it is inevitable and unavoidable that the individual student will often be allowed to drift into a position from which it is impossible for him to extricate himself; he gets so hopelessly behind in his work that he must either withdraw from College or drop back into a lower class. But in the small College, if it be properly organized, hardly a

week goes by in which an ounce of that prevention which is better than a pound of cure is not applied in the manner just indicated; and there are hundreds of students in our American Colleges who need and, what is more encouraging, who will respond to just such personal, individual "looking after."

4. *The intellectual and moral safeguards which a young student usually finds in the more wholesome semi-rural environment of our small Colleges are so obvious that they require only a passing mention.*

Aside from the temptations, the mere distractions of a large city are many and great, and are often very demoralizing to the undisciplined mind of an immature under-graduate. In most cases he would be far better off in the smaller community where less is "going on" and where he has the wholesome, undisturbed quiet so conducive to study.

While there are temptations to evil everywhere, and while a moral hot-house is neither possible nor desirable for the youth of eighteen, yet for most young students there is doubtlessly a much larger degree of safety in the more or less rural surroundings of the small College than can be found in the larger and more heterogeneous communities in which are situated the large Universities.

In the small College the young man has usually to hunt for certain evils, and if they are not in evidence or near at hand they often cease to be temptations.

5. *A strong social argument* in favour of the small College may be briefly noted.

When the number of students in a College is less

than four hundred it ordinarily has a solidarity, a freedom from cliques, and a democratic spirit, which it is difficult to retain when the one thousand mark is passed. A College under four hundred is a microcosm in itself; and the training in the moral and social virtues which a student may get in such an environment is often the best part of a College education.

To any one who looks at the educational situation steadily and sees it whole, there can be no rivalry between the University and the College. The two types of institution, in their characteristic work, meet entirely different needs. The great University has a magnificent and a necessary place in the intellectual and material development of the country, but it can never supersede the College. The characteristic and best work of the University is most effectively done after the student has taken the general course offered at a good College; and it is becoming more and more evident to discerning men that, out of those who do take a collegiate course, a considerable proportion of our young people would be better off in the small College than they would be in the larger institution.

I believe it was President Hyde of Bowdoin who said that although a young man went through "*more COLLEGE*" at one of the large Universities, yet that in the case of the average student *more College goes through the young man* if he attends the smaller institution. That may not be an argument which would attract the young man looking out for an easy time at College and who chooses his own College without

parental guidance; but I believe it is a consideration which more and more will appeal to such parents as are wise enough to retain in their own hands some portion at least of the responsibility of selecting the institution where their children shall get a collegiate education and spend the four years which so often make or mar the man.







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