

# THE VARSITY

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## The Place of the Literary Society in the Course of the Undergraduate

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF REV. G. R. FASKEN, PRESIDENT OF THE LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen :—

I call this honor of the presidency of this society the greatest distinction which has ever befallen me. I am deeply grateful for it and will try to live according to your sentiments. My anticipations for the year's work are pleasant, and in this connection am glad to be able to announce that Mr. Edward Bristol has offered a prize of \$25 to the best orator of the year. I do not believe, however, that oratory is the chief purpose of the society. I believe it has a higher end.

Being somewhat older than you, I am going to be an adviser to-night, and am going back to history for what I have to say to you. This society should be an important factor in the life of every undergraduate, and like every other factor he may make a good or an ill use of it. Now are the graduates interested in the Literary Society? For several reasons I am disposed to think they are.

The majority of you would perhaps say, if asked, that you value this society chiefly as a means of recreation. This is surely quite fitting if recreation be not made a cloak for nonsense. Others would think of it as a place where they can find certain advantages along the line of self-improvement, for example, in the art of expression. Good, if we have something to express, but it is a distinct disadvantage to a man to talk when he is not expressing any thought. You cannot get music out of a tom-tom.

Others have thought this is an opportunity to cultivate the art of dialectic. To these I say there are other places where you will cultivate the art of fencing with words—an art which is the evidence of the "smart Aleck." In no case is it an element of culture. If this is your aim it is not worth the powder you are spending on it. Your polemical ability will be better improved by contact with the news boys on the street, or by contesting a seat for the Provincial Legislature.

Some men take an interest in the society for the popularity it may give them. This kind of popularity is however very short-lived and is barely worth the trouble. Those who see in the Literary Society only an excellent preparation for the spring elections are bribing themselves at a mean price.

These and several other reasons are doubtless the valuation that some students put upon the Literary Society. But it is also true that many students think more highly of the privilege ac-

corded them in this society. They have a higher ground of interest in it and they are not disappointed. The greatest advantage of the Literary Society is this—it may become, for each of you, a preparation for the real work of every true man, viz. : to benefit his fellow men. This is the one noble aim of man, and any lower view of life than this is a low view. We must then prepare ourselves in this society for our contact with our fellow men. Our work in it may and ought to enable us to grasp and wrestle with the problems of our own times.

You are all aware of the battle between Authority and Thought. Authority says, "Open your mouths and swallow." Thought says, "My province is to search every province until I find the truth." It is just possible that Authority is responsible for the mandate :—"Thou shalt not discuss religious or political subjects in this society." This is another way of saying :—"All live issues are tabooed." It seems strange that men who are committed to study and thought are permitted to discuss old accepted truths, but cannot discuss the questions which go to make up the life of a man in this world.

When I long for the time when we will be permitted to discuss public matters in the Provincial University, I trust that I am making due allowance for our limitations. Perhaps we may overstep, for the traditional is strong within us. But it is traditionalism that is making our political field an unsafe one to walk in. I will despise you if you belong to any political party because of tradition. You must take hold of problems in a way which will lift you above any political preference, and any political bias. Surely there is enough manhood in the students of our university to protect each his fellow. An honest endeavour to search out truth will easily keep us within the lines :—

"But pamper not a hasty time,  
Nor feed with crude imaginings  
The herd, wild hearts and feeble wings  
Which every sophister can lime."

I have suggested that every one of you should get hold of the problems of the day. Another thing : you are to be trained in this society to know other men, and to know yourself. You will never have a better place for beginning, as it is your privilege, as students, to study men not only as they were, but also as they are and ought to be.

The most pitiable thing in the world is a medalist who is also a plug. We are called upon not to know men as they used to be, but to know men just as they are now, for the high purpose of taking our place beside them and knowing that our object should not be to find fault with them. Any fool can find fault with the age in which he lives, but it must needs be a wise man