

## COMMUNICATIONS.

The Editors are not responsible for the opinions of correspondents.  
No notice will be taken of unsigned contributions.

## THE ANNUAL ELECTIONS' LITERARY SOCIETY.

To the Editors of THE VARSITY.

SIRS,—When last year I denied myself the pleasure of voting at our Literary Society's annual election, and gave up the excitement of its contest for the maintenance of my convictions, I was, I think, somewhat harshly adjudged guilty of selfishness, and recklessly charged with waywardness—a result not so much indicative of the eternal canons of truth and justice as illustrative of the innate cussedness of mankind in general, and one's friends in particular. Since my view is considered exceptional (which I know) and wrong (which I don't know) I must ask to be heard in defence of it.

Whether are we to have an election for the Society, or a Society for the elections? Is the dog to wag its tail, or the tail to wag its dog? The elections secure the fees, but securing the fees is not the Society's highest aim; it was not instituted merely for the pleasure of paying for it. "Party elections make men active and give excitement." Any one can see that by the very sleepy condition of Society at all other times. The Society, intoxicated by the wine of excess, spends next day in bed with a sick headache; and nature, by a year's sleep, retrieves the excitement of a week. Bears suck their paws and sleep during winter, eat a baby about March. "A little fighting keeps things going." No doubt of it. Courtesy is going. Good feeling is going. The Society is—, but, cheer up! even if Trelawney *does* die, we have the most reassuring promises, from one party at least, of a highly entertaining and satisfactory *post mortem*.

The elections are greedy. They're worse than Oliver Twist. They're eating up the Society—the vile anthropophagi. Once the whale swallowed Jonah, now Jonah's to swallow the whale.

"A certain young lady of Niger,  
Went out to ride with a tiger;  
They returned from the ride,  
With the lady inside,  
And a smile on the face of the tiger."

Gentlemen, "The lady or the tiger?"

The two parties are

"Brave as lions, wise as foxes,  
With hoards of wealth in their money-boxes"

in March, and for the other eleven months are as tired as a fakir, who's stood for five years on one toe, as poor as a church society collecting for a village steeple, and possessed of eyes

"nor brighter, nor moister,  
Than a too-long-opened oyster."

It is curious that parties should be formed to woo for those honours which are only honour when won unwooed.

It is strange for a Society to have a membership of hundreds and an attendance of tens.

It is humiliating to have its officers chosen by voters ignorant of its affairs and indifferent to its success.

It is shameful that the Literary Society, the father of all societies, should see in the advance of its children food for envy and omens of downfall—King Lear without Cordelia.

It is disgraceful that the Society select its officers by elections alike degrading to its members and false to its college.

The Society wants interest, not excitement.

Advantage to all, not honour to a part.

Members to attend, not martyrs to run.

Union, not discord.

Laughter, not ridicule.

Earnestness, not dullness.

Above all, it wants *this*, the presence of a hundred students of Toronto University College. If we cannot get this, let us bury our dead.

H. C. BOULTBEE.

## DEGRADATION OF THE GOWN.

"I despise your new gown."—Alexander Pope.

To the Editors of THE VARSITY.

SIRS,—I used to admire the academic robe intensely. When I was a Freshman I had an extra fine gown made to order, and hastened to honour a city photographer by striking a classic pose in the focus of his camera, whilst the said functionary took the usual steps to perpetuate the said pose.

Nor was my vanity unpardonable. The academic costume is, in itself, (certain iconoclastic radicals to the contrary notwithstanding), a picturesque, if not a beautiful, thing. It is the established badge of the learned professions—*Divinity* and *Law*, and to these modern indulgence has added (perhaps not unwisely) *Medicine*. To these it has been hallowed by the usage of ages. We bow the knee to the sainted memory of our sires and fondly recall that they too were *gownsmen*.

As first prescribed by statute, and enforced by pains and penalties, and protected at the same time as a valuable privilege, this

costume grew into a part of our habit of life, and with it all the glorious memories of the fading past are interminably intertwined.

In the motherland, where custom is the mightiest law, and is subject to least variation by reason of its great age and firm establishment, no one ever dreams of the violation of such an historic patent. There, the significance of the gown is so universally known and so clearly understood that the rash adventurer who would encroach upon it only finds himself covered with ridicule for his unprecedented assumption. In a new country like our own, however, the gown has no place in popular tradition; its very appearance is an innovation, and an innovation, too, whose utility its first champions must have doubted.

Its use, brought about in a half-hearted, semi-surreptitious way, could not be expected to become general, much less to gain a certain recognition in popular notions. The consequence is that to-day many people have never seen or heard of the college cap and gown, and the great majority have only a hazy idea of its being proper for certain clergymen to be similarly arrayed in the pulpit, and, finally, only the *very few* (fewer indeed than the *wearers* of gowns) have a distinct apprehension of why we wear the gown, whence the custom, who prescribes it, and what rules should be followed in relation to it.

While all these considerations naturally present themselves to the reflective mind, I must confess that it was with a feeling of annoyance and disgust that I read in the daily paper (one day in my second year) that at the "— Ladies' College," the girls had, at a meeting summoned for the purpose, resolved unanimously to adopt the "college gown"! To this, it was added, "The faculty offered no objections!"

What kind of consciences, thought I, can this *faculty* possess, who will allow those under their charge to strut in borrowed plumes and misappropriate a garb of whose mere meaning they are grossly ignorant? Fancy my surprise, moreover, on finding that the head of the aforesaid faculty was a certain reverend doctor.

Still, this was a trifling occurrence, and I hoped yet to see my fellow-students awake to the importance of preserving and sacredly cherishing our noble and historic badge. I like to see men wear their caps constantly around the College and encourage by their example the use of the gown among those entitled to it. In my opinion this community of dress tended to foster an *esprit de corps* whose absence we are so accustomed to bemoan.

But my feelings were still further lacerated on going down town one day and seeing prominently displayed in a shop window a great aggregation of persons (*yclept medicos*) pictured as wearing a costume to which they are, in their daily life, utter strangers, and with which their notorious lack of even the beginnings of a liberal education is so very inconsistent. Truly, methought, the gown is becoming very cheap.

An ardent conservator of gown traditions might ultimately have determined to put up with this much of vandalism, but, lo! the fever becomes epidemic (call it *Togatomania*); a collection of embryo horse-doctors next appears in a photographer's window, enrobed as a "graduating class" of a "Veterinary College," not one of whom ("faculty" included) do we find possessed of a liberal education. Some one should explain to these erring people that they are taking what is not their own: even though they should decline to be enlightened, and treat their informant ever after as a vindictive foe.

But the prostitution of the gown does not stop even here. The clerks in the drug shops and in the dentists' offices have clubbed together and have been photographed as the "graduating classes" of the "College of Pharmacy" and of the "School of Dentistry"—or, according to the revised version, the "College of Dental Surgeons."

It now only remains for the apprentices of city barbers and undertakers to combine and hie themselves (duly enrobed in *our* gown) to a photographer, and dub their picture a "graduating class" of a "College of Tonsorial Art" and of a "School of Embalming," respectively, and our humiliation will be complete.

But, we are asked, what is to be done? The tribunal of public opinion is notoriously incompetent (with us at least) to try these cases, and no prosecutor has yet been found who is willing to endure the rancour with which the defendants will ever after regard him.

The man who steals a coat-of-arms *may* have a conscience, but the positive dishonesty of a corporation which deliberately misappropriates the private badge of another vastly more honoured, is a thing we cannot too strongly condemn.

These people have just about as much right to wear the academic costume as a boot-black has to don the uniform of our A.D.C. to the Queen. The frightful parody on Her Majesty's uniform which is characteristic of the Salvation Army only provokes our mirth, for they do not profess to be real officers in the Imperial service, they only imitate; but, on the other hand, those mushroom concerns which we have mentioned actually profess to be entitled to the academic costume as a matter of legal right!

"*Quae quum ita sint*," fellow students, let us preserve our dignity by abandoning that which is fallen, and which we do not possess the means of exalting again.

To be more precise, let us abandon the *undergraduate gown*, and cling only to the graduate until the further aggression of vandalism compels us to drop it also.

SPARTACUS.