

A Letter from Professor Hellems

To the Editor of The Varsity:

Dear Sir,—In the golden age of my first year at Toronto the honored Principal of University College, then Professor of Greek, treated me with a puzzled but forbearing kindness that inevitably made him a sufferer from my persistent confidences. After some particularly atrocious performance, hard to recall specifically among so many, I went to him in an eminently proper frame of mind and admitted that I had made an egregious fool of myself. His answer came with Homeric directness: "I am so glad to learn your opinion in the matter, Mr. Hellems, for that makes it unanimous." *

At the present moment I am possessed of the same contrite spirit and am laying myself open to the same rejoinder for everybody knows that in an old graduate a folly's crown of folly is to hope that he can interest the younger generation. However, if a man has ever stretched his legs under the editorial table of Varsity it is almost impossible for him to decline the opening given by such an invitation as yours and I have not the strength to deny myself the pleasure of entering again the columns with which I was so glad to be associated. Moreover, Megan, of '95, once said with his ingenuous smile that it was worth while printing anything from a graduate of more than ten years standing because the man himself was so delighted, and to this indulgence I am entitled, for I shall be pleased, and the years since my graduation are more than ten. In fact my freshman year saw the great fire and the last year of my fellowship saw the dismissal of Pro-

* This and many other incidents of bygone years have since made the rounds of the comic papers in some guise or other. For instance, it was in the career of a couple of men of '92 that the following occurred: X lived in the old Residence while Y boarded on College Street. One morning about two o'clock the hilarious pair made their appearance at the Residence gate in a condition of insobriety worthy of Kipling—I mean of his pen—and demanded that the porter should decide which of the two lived there and sort him out so that the other could go home. It was a Divinity man of '93, now eminent in a great American theological school, who made this plea as a Scriptural excuse for working on Sunday near examination time. "I hardly think I am an ox, but I am fairly clear that I am an ass and I am perfectly clear that I am in a hole." Mr. C. A. Stuart, of '91, was standing by the Chapel door one morning when Sir Daniel Wilson, the most venerable of Presidents, was escorted to prayers by Robert McKim, the most picturesque of beadles. The usual congregation of seven had vanished to that joyous refuge of mathematicians, the house of Zero, and the loyal old beadle was desperate. Sallying forth and seizing grimly upon the brilliant Vice-President of the Literary Society he said like the staunch old Crimean veteran he was: "Go into prayers, sir, go in instantly, damn you. Save for Sir Daniel and myself there is not a God-fearing man left in the place?" At another time Mr. A. T. De Lury—but he is on the Faculty.

fessor William Dale and the expulsion of Mr. James A. Tucker. Naturally, in view of the circumstances under which I withdrew from the University it would ill become me to discuss any of the problems clamoring for solution, however close to my heart they may lie, so I shall have to limit myself to a nugatory letter, which if it must be uninteresting shall at least be innocuous.

In the first place, as I think of the student body I have no disposition to raise the immemorial wail of the old graduate, "Heu pietas, heu prisca fides;" for the students seem to be little changed in spirit from the students of my own day. Indeed, there are two things at Toronto that seem to me ever unscathed of fate and unmarred of time, the beauty of the old Main Building and the spirit of the student body. It is true that the ivied walls present now and again varying aspects as cloud and sun touch this point or that, emphasizing some unperceived sombreness or fixing for a moment some elusive charm; but the main lines of strength and beauty abide unaltered, almost, one thinks, unalterable, and ever one may turn to them with the confident hope of joy for the eye and of uplifting for the soul. It has fallen to my lot to see a few of the architectural glories of the world and with them all our fire-touched walls, foregoing the rivalry of concrete achievement, may claim close kinship of spirit. Last August as I looked through a beating rain across the campus, enjoying a particular view which the excavations seemed to warn me I must not hope to enjoy again, there came the same hush in my being that was shed over me at my first sight of the Parthenon. Here seemed to rise an emblem of what there is most permanent and abiding; here if anywhere, a man might find healing for life's fitful fever and learn to scorn the falsehood of extremes. With some such nascent unvoiced feeling I first looked upon the reverend walls in my impressionable youth; but last summer in my more sober years the feeling was unchanged save that it took more definite form, and to-day, when I am separated from the old scenes by half a continent, it is stronger still. Even as I write there is before my eyes a vivid picture and to my ears come some olden words, that the University and time have taught me to understand.

Ἦ φιλότης γῇ μητέρα, ὡς σεμνον σφόδρ' εἰ τοῖς νοῦν ἔχουσι κτῆμα.

Of this inspiring home the students have not been unappreciative nor, for the most part, unworthy. Like it they present changing aspects with shifting light and shadow; but like it again they remain in the great essentials unchanged. If they have not always loved sweetness and behaved like saints they have at least loved light and behaved like men, which is better. In our day they were often wrong, falling cheerfully into human errors and, to borrow from Mr. Chamberlain, muddling through like a British Cabinet grappling with an Imperial problem; but their errors were human and in some way or other they did muddle through. From all I can learn it has not been very different since.