

# THE VARSITY

A Weekly Journal of Literature, University Thought and Events.

VOL. XXIII.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, JANUARY 13, 1904.

No. 12

## INSPIRATION FOR THE STUDENT.

BY WESLEY MILLS, M.A., M.D.

Professor of Physiology, McGill University, Montreal.

**W**HEN the editor-in-chief of this magazine applied to me for a contribution, supported, as he was, by a colleague of mine in a similar field of work, and reinforced by a part of my own history not readily forgotten, I felt that if possible I must comply with his request. Out of many desirable and possible themes I have selected one suggested by my own observation and experience and my relations to the University as a student in both Arts and Medicine at a period not greatly removed from that when two men, long since famous, attended as students in the Faculty of Medicine—"The old Toronto School."

On reading Dr. Osler's address given at the recent celebration of the opening of the Medical Buildings I was led to ask myself the reason of the apparent difference between the views entertained by him and Crozier (in "My Inner Life") on the value of the teaching in medicine and in the University generally twenty-five years ago.

There is in reality, I believe, little difference of opinion. Crozier, when he referred to the barrenness of the University for him, was alluding to one thing, and Osler, when he found grounds for praise, to another. It is a noteworthy fact that when Osler was a student in medicine in Toronto he was very much in the company of a certain professor, and not over-regular in his attendance on the lectures of some others; that both he and Crozier early sought pastures new, the one before he graduated and the other immediately after. To me this speaks volumes as to what the University was and was not in those days. It is a remarkable fact that while nearly every distinguished personage has at some period of his early life been markedly influenced by some one man or some few individuals, it is not at all uncommon to find that, when candid, they are unable to give very great credit for what they are to any educational institution as such. Darwin is one of the best examples in point. Crozier never heard Bovell, or he would not have failed to be inspired by him; and yet I have never seen so many students drowsing in any class-room as in Bovell's.

But that was the fault of the system and of other teachers rather than of Bovell. I can confidently say that I never heard this wonderful man in the lecture-room, or came in contact with him in any way, without

feeling that he had added a cubit to my stature; and I must with equal candor confess that no one in the medical faculty, and very few in Arts, had any such influence. To this I must make one exception, in the person of the present Dean, Dr. Reeve. From the moment I came to the University I felt the inspiration of its beautiful and spacious grounds and its noble buildings; and I had unbounded reverence for the great men in their robes till I discovered that after all they were not Olympian gods, but very frail mortals; and when further they seemed, some of them, so full of their own importance, and so indifferent to the very existence of their students, as far as I could make out, their presence was, to me, rather paralyzing than inspiring. On the contrary, three men in particular I must always remember as distinctly helpful to me, as other men were not—Bovell, Loudon and Reeve.

Now when I remember that other professors were able to advance me in knowledge and that I was not in a position to profit greatly by the subjects taught by the two last-mentioned of these men, I have been led to ask myself why it was that they and Bovell did for me what others utterly failed in accomplishing—in a word, to enquire what is the ground of inspiration?

Bovell made me feel that I had to love what he taught because he seemed so possessed by it himself, and I loved Bovell because he was devoted to his subject with a sincere and a burning affection; in a word, I was drawn to these three men for the same reason, viz.: that they seemed to be absolutely single-minded, honest and whole-souled. They all seemed to think more of their subject and their students than themselves. Others, not a few in the Medical School, came up, gave us an hour in some fashion, and went back—to worship Mammon. There were one or two good men and true as such, but they knew not how to speak or to teach, and to listen to them was a weariness to the flesh. President Loudon was then Dean of Residence and tutor in Mathematics.

But why did students drowse under Bovell? Why were they not aroused, and why did not the scales fall from their eyes? That raises the whole question as to why some men inspire and some do not; and why some students can be inspired and others remain unmoved. Bovell was a living flame that kindled a youthful Osler