

Things Generally.

IV.



HERE are some institutions around this College that should be served with a writ *quo warranto*; they should be peremptorily required to show cause for their existence; like the Platean prisoners in the hands of their Spartan masters they should be asked: "What good thing have ye done unto us?" and in default of a sufficient answer they should immediately die. One of

these (I say it with all deference to the ability of its members—for I am one myself) is the Modern Language Club. Consider the spectacle that august assembly presents at any ordinary French or German meeting. The President and the Secretary sit in state upon the elevated platform as if they were directing the deliberations of some grave national senate, and below them—what an audience! Back in the corner at the right hand a few gentlemen members, some officers, who think they really *should* attend, others whipped up from the reading room by an enthusiastic official to save appearances, and an occasional poor, wandering individual who has somehow heard it said that it is generally understood by those who ought to know that a Modern Language man gets some good from going to the club and nobly declaring his freedom from that "narrow curriculum"; and a little in front, and across an aisle of decorous width, a somewhat larger number of lady devotees. For a time they sit in sad solemnity until at last the grave formalities begin. The Secretary (*i.e.*, the Recording Secretary) reads the minutes of the previous meeting. For do not all great societies have the "minutes read and approved"? Is it not an immemorial custom? What a gap there would be in our undergraduate life if there were no minutes to be read and approved? Then, besides, what a delightful thing it is to recall in memory the pleasure of that previous meeting, to feel anew the thrill of enthusiastic joy that then aroused our linguistic hearts, to live over again that "crowded hour of glorious life"! By all means let the minutes be read and let them be solemnly approved. Then there comes a programme, seemingly based on the general type of the cross-roads tea meeting, without the tea sponge-cake and national anthem. First we have a song, a sort of preliminary exercise that will, no doubt, enable us the better to shape our throats for the German guttural, to appreciate more fully the beauties of French or German poetry. Besides, do they not say that music itself hath a language? And who knows but it be a modern language too? Then we have a reading in French or German; a series of wild heroic struggles with nasals or unlauts. We watch the battle with interest though knowing little of its import, and we applaud the hero for his probable good intentions. Next comes the *pièce de résistance*, an essay, a veritable essay, in French or German; and we settle ourselves to understand, of course we must *understand*, for are we not Modern Language students? What are we good for if we cannot understand? We listen with attentive ears and catch an idea or two; but a badly formed sentence, a wrong pronunciation or a noise in the hall diverts us, and we are off the track. Again we make a desperate effort to grasp the reader's meaning (for are we not Modern Language students?) and we get another glimpse of an idea but, there! we are lost again. We soon give up in despair; no doubt the others take it all in; as for ourselves we shall wait till he's done; only two more pages evidently—that's not long. We think of elections, exams, and our country home. But suddenly, "he's done"! What a splendid essay! Prolonged and enthusiastic applause! (There is no use in being *too* unconventional.)

The last patch in this "crazy quilt" entertainment is the "conversation." We proceed to teach each other to make mistakes in French or German idioms. They did it when we were Freshmen and the custom must not be allowed to die. The honor and dignity of the Modern

Language course would be jeopardized, there would be a gaping void in our hearts that could not be filled if we did not gabble a minute or two in this foreign tongue. (For are we not students of Modern Languages?)

The English meetings would be more tolerable if they were less pretentious. It is here that the refinement and the culture, the beauty and the chivalry of the undergraduate body assemble. I do not, indeed, charge them with doing so intentionally and maliciously, but it is generally supposed that, as a matter of fact, they do there assemble. Neither do I object to their assembling. The oftener they do so the better, provided they have a proper end in view. But I must humbly protest against the general character and purpose of these English meetings. Some great poet or other has looked at human nature as revealed in his own heart and the world around him. He has written down in beautiful language his opinions and thoughts about it. Then our essayist reads a paper giving us *his* opinions and thoughts about the poet's opinions and thoughts; and we sit and dreamily listen, and feel lonely and noble. Then we go home and argue about the "essay" and give *our* opinions and thoughts about the *essayist's* opinions and thoughts about the *poet's* opinions and thoughts about the meaning of this life of ours. And all the time there are depths in our own hearts unfathomed and truths—yes, and falsehoods—lying there unrevealed, if we would only look inward and search them; and around about us are men and women from whose lives we may learn directly without the intervention of either great poet or little essayist, men and women across whose faces we may see flitting life's sunshine and shadow, whose joy and sorrow we may ourselves study and understand, and so sympathize with the better; all which if we do, I think we shall be refined and cultured indeed. No, I don't think I am a Philistine. I don't object to real culture, but I do object to the third-hand, doubled-diluted article that institutions like the Modern Language Club are likely to supply. By all means let us have culture, but don't let us form a joint-stock company to manufacture it. Culture is surely a great deal like happiness; if you go to work too directly, openly and deliberately to attain it, you are apt to miss it, if not entirely, at any rate in its highest and truest forms. By all means let us take from the rich mines of thought that the masters have left us, but don't let us organize expeditions to go prospecting with pick-axe and shovel. By all means let us read the great poets and try to appreciate them, but don't let us send out heralds and trumpeters to proclaiming, "Go to, go to, let us 'talk about Browning.'" You may tell me, if you like, that this is an "age of criticism in literature." Very well; then the age may betake itself to some hyperequatorial clime and I shall go on my way alone with this prayer ever on my lips: "Heaven preserve me from a 'Critical Essay!'"

NUNQUAM NOSCENDUS.

THE COLLEGE WORLD.

A new law building costing \$65,000 will be built by Cornell.

There are 107,312 college students in the entire empire of Japan.

Queen's College, Oxford, has just celebrated the 550th anniversary of its foundation.

The University of Michigan Glee Club recently netted \$4,500 at a single engagement in Detroit.

Work on the new Pacific Lutheran University at Tacoma, Wash., will be begun on May 1. It is to cost \$100,000.

The Harvard faculty have decided to allow entering students to substitute Chinese and Japanese for the Latin and Greek of the required entrance course.