

## THE VARSITY.

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We draw attention to the letter of our correspondent referring to the communication from the College Council to the Literary and Scientific Society, in reference to the use of Convocation Hall for public debates, read at the first meeting of the Society for this term. Had the College Council taken the students into its confidence at the time when the occurrences complained of last fall led to what appeared to be an arbitrary act of the Council, any unpleasantness might have been avoided. Now that an explanation has been given, we feel sure that it will commend itself to the good sense of the undergraduates as a body. There is no reason why the keeping up of college customs and traditions—of which we have too few—should clash with reasonable demands on the part of the College Council.

Collegiate spirit, to avoid using the expressive but hackneyed *esprit-de-corps*, seems declining step by step with increasing numbers. It becomes more and more difficult to know even one's own year. Small coteries are then formed of men reading the same work. This is not as it should be, however well calculated to train specialists. A student who devotes himself entirely to reading, to the neglect of college life, misses some of the best effects of a university training. For he were a vain man who expected in four short years to master books enough to furnish his mind for life. Then it is that the foundations are laid for a life-time of thought and study. It is not so much book-knowledge that we should seek to acquire as habits of thought. Refinement and liberality, in the sense of breadth of view, should characterize the University man. If we gain these surely our college course has amply repaid us. How can this wholesome liberality be better acquired than by familiar intercourse with our fellow-students. College societies, college customs and observances, by bringing the men together, promote this intercourse, and none of them should be allowed to decay. The bookish man, while all very well as a portable encyclopedia, is generally a failure for the practical purposes of life. While we may not agree with Mr. Slick in his aphorism that "books spile the mind," it is too true that "the habit of supplying our ideas from foreign sources enfeebles all internal strength of thought."

It is gratifying to be able to record in the first number of this year the practical aid lately given by a friend of the College to the study of English literature, the subject which it is the highest aim and special pleasure of this journal to promote in every possible way. The President announced on Convocation Day that Frederick Wyld, Esq., one of the most prominent merchants in the city, had offered a yearly prize of \$25 in books for the best essay in English prose. It is unnecessary to dilate upon the great and lasting benefit to be derived from the independent study of our great writers, and from all attempts, feeble though at first they be, to contribute to the literature of our day. It is enough to welcome, with hearty appreciation of the munificence of the donor, this practical aid to the attainment of excellence in English composition. We understand that the prize is to be restricted to students of the senior years; and is to be awarded for the best essay on a subject selected by three examiners to be appointed by the College Council, who are to award the prize. We would suggest that these examiners

be appointed and the subject, with full conditions, fixed and published without any delay, so that those desiring to compete may be able to undertake the work before the pressure of the regular course is felt. On behalf of those interested in the development of the literary spirit, we beg to thank Mr. Wyld for his generous gift, and hope that he may himself see some satisfactory outcome of his attempt to promote the best expression of the best thought.

Though this is the "close season" for honorary degrees, perhaps a few words upon the subject may not be without some effect upon those who are either preparing to fish illegally for them, or who are going to connive at the irregularity. In looking over the reports of the college commencements of last summer, we are painfully impressed by the fact that the practice of bestowing honorary degrees is growing apace, and threatens to bring academical distinctions into contempt. Especially is this the case in the United States. Fortunately Canadian degrees are not hawked about so promiscuously. Our own University, we are proud to say, is leading the van in its silent and dignified protest against this evil habit, by bestowing no honorary degrees whatsoever. We sincerely trust it will continue in its present course, and that its example may influence other institutions to restrain their ardour. The possession of a university degree is of little value in itself. But since convention has stamped it with a certain meaning and has attached to it a certain importance, it is right and proper that it should be borne by those who have justly earned the right to assume it; and that its worth and dignity should be maintained and enhanced. The real worth of a university degree consists in its meaning to the individual who obtains it, and not in *any* honour or distinction which its possessor may seem to indicate. Its meaning to the individual is, that he has spent a certain time—long or short—at an institution for higher education; that he has read a certain prescribed amount; that he understood the same—or else what do examinations stand for? and finally that he has received a certain amount of knowledge and culture, which passes under the elastic name of education. Under these circumstances the already illusory value of a university degree should not be rendered more tenuous by being bestowed *honoris causa*.

Occasionally it is our privilege to see the *Phonetic Herald*. The only noteworthy feature of this publication is a peculiar zebra effect in spelling that is commonly associated with a school of American humour, the head and front of which was Josh Billings. The Canadian disciples of the sage Josh, though neither numerous nor influential, are clamorous in the public press for recognition. Their views are not novel, nor has their system one whit more of practical value than many others emanating from far higher sources. Admitting all that can be urged against established usage in spelling, there are abundant grounds, and these, too, sufficiently apparent, for declining the proposed change. No doubt the present system is arbitrary and conventional, encrusted with anomalies, the outcome of centuries of adjustment—anomalies hideous to the eye of the spelling-reformer; any other system, however, must be equally arbitrary, or else inextricable confusion will result; for what two men combine primitive sounds in precisely the same way? Again, to represent at all accurately the current mode of pronouncing a given word—so fluid a thing is pronunciation—different collations of symbols would be required at various times and places. If we are to sacrifice at the altar of consistency, we shall require the difference between the pronunciation of Shakespeare's era and our own to be marked in the literature of the new system. Fancy the intellectual dyspepsia that would result from viewing the transformation of Shakespeare into Billingsese! Such an apparition must suggest the idea of Harlequin in all the glory of paint and stripes tumbling over the page. There is a dignity in language quite apparent to the eye as to the ear; and, apart from any effect of association, it is at least open to question whether pages thus uncouthly garnished could ever portray that harmony and grace so characteristic of what is best in our literature. It is to be regretted that men of any intellectual force should dissipate their energy in seriously advocating so visionary a scheme.