

LETTERS TO YOUNG MEN AT COLLEGE.—II.

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COLLEGE OR NO COLLEGE.

I ADDRESS myself to the boy at college, and whether he cares about the question or not, suppose I ask him: What business has he to be in a college? If he is not very smart he will probably say that is none of my business; but if he is sensible he will know that such a reply is not worth the trouble of saying it, and is beneath his dignity. He can be smarter than that when the occasion arises. One answer may be that his father is able to send him to college; that it is customary for boys to go to college to learn something; that he could learn no more at school; and that he wanted to be a *student* and not a *school-boy* any longer. Or he may say I want the training that a college is supposed to give. I want to enter the learned professions—go to a university—study for the Church, or the Bar, or other pursuit in life. I want to make a living by my brains and not by my hands. Or some one may be disposed to say, “I am going to have a good time. I needn’t concern myself about my living, as my father is all right, and can set me up in business any day, where it won’t matter if I couldn’t translate the first line of Cæsar. Lots of people make heaps of money without knowing the difference between a quadrant and a hydrant. I will have a good old time, and I can pull through easier than if I were at some school where my father would be inconveniently near to see how I got along.”

There are numbers of young fellows who should never have been a day

within college walls; and there are many who would be better off if they knew something of a rudimentary education before they were sent to college. A parent or guardian gets rid of his young boys or wards for two-thirds or more of the year by shipping them off to college, and so avoids the personal responsibility of bringing them up. They are off the street, he says; they will be well looked after; they will learn their religion; they will get a taste for something better than they see around them. And so he can have his conscience at rest and his evenings in quiet. I suppose that college authorities are not to blame—if blame there be in it—for taking hold of these young children of tender age, and for turning their institutes into boarding-houses for the young, where attention is paid to morals and education, and where no one able to pay is refused admittance. However, it is not with colleges I have to deal; it is with persons who go there to study; and the question here and now is not whether the college is fit for the boy, but is the boy fit for college, and what brings him there at all?

I do not believe that it is a good thing for a child to be brought up in a college, and so I think that children who have homes of their own ought to stay there and be looked after by their parents. There is a home education even before one in a class or a lecture-room. A child is not fit for a college—he should be in the nursery or at a school that is within reach of his father’s roof. I think that Lamb wrote sound advice about this. But