



Charles Reynolds Brown

*The Cap
and Gown*

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PREFACE

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The larger part of the material in this book was originally used in a number of addresses given in various colleges and universities reaching from Yale and Cornell in the East to Stanford and the University of California in the West. It is here offered to a wider circle in the hope that these chapters may prove suggestive to college students and to those who are interested in having them make the best use of the bewildering array of opportunities awaiting them on the modern campus.

It was one of the shrewdest and kindest observers of student life, himself a long-time resident of Cambridge and a genial friend of Harvard men, who said: "It is a never-failing delight to behold every autumn the hundreds of newcomers who then throng our streets, boys with smooth, unworn faces, full of the zest of their own being, taking the whole world as having been made for them, as indeed it was. Their visible self-confidence is well founded and has the facts on its side. The future is theirs to command, not ours; it belongs to them even more than they think it does, and this is undoubtedly saying a good deal."

It is this joyous and confident company arrayed or about to be arrayed in "cap and gown" which the writer of these chapters would fain address. The academic costume and accent may speedily be replaced by the less picturesque garb and tone of the work-a-day world, but the advantage of special training, of accurate knowledge and of the larger outlook upon life attainable in any well-equipped university

will give to the fortunate possessors of all this a significance for the life of the nation far beyond that belonging to an equal number of similarly endowed but untrained men.

I THE FIRST INNING

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The significance of the first year in college can scarcely be overstated. The first man called to the bat in some great intercollegiate game may be pardoned for feeling a bit nervous. He realizes that players and spectators are eagerly waiting for him to give them the key-note of the contest by the way he acquits himself. The young man just entering college, if he senses the situation accurately, is equally alive to the importance of his first hits.

It is a time when freedom and responsibility come in new and larger measure. College men as a rule are away from home. There is no one to ask, with the accent of authority, how they spend their evenings, who their intimates are, what habits they are forming. Studying is not done under the immediate eye of an instructor as in the grammar-school days. The young man who heretofore has felt the wholesome restraint of well-ordered family life, suddenly finds himself a free citizen in a republic, and this larger measure of liberty involves risk. The freshman may decide the case against himself before he is ever permitted to put on his sophomore hat. The way is open for him to go to the devil, physically, intellectually, socially, morally, if he chooses. The way is open, the bars are down and as often as not some young fool is just starting and beckoning his friends to "Come along." The bad plays in the first inning are frequently so numerous and so serious as to mean the loss of the game. It is a time then to summon into action all the

wisdom and conscience which may be brought to bear upon those early decisions.

There is one choice not strictly of the first year, but so intimately connected with it that I speak of it here—the decision as to whether or not one shall go to college. “It will take four of the best years of my life,” the young man says. “While I am reading books and attending lectures, playing football, and practising the college yell, other young men will be learning the ways of the business world; they will be actually laying the foundations for prosperous careers. Can I afford the time?” Furthermore, does it justify the expense? On an average it costs each student somewhere from five hundred to a thousand dollars a year in all first-class colleges, though the state universities in the West cut down that figure by remitting tuition fees, and many splendid young men take the course on much less. Is it worth what it costs?

Every young man who can compass it by any reasonable outlay of energy and sacrifice had better go to college and stay there until graduation day. There is a deal of education to be gained outside of books or college halls. The business life of a great city is a university in itself with its lectures and recitations, its examinations and other requirements. Its courses of instruction have a value all their own and its exacting demands flunk more men ten to one than either Harvard or Yale, Stanford or California. In this “university of experience” the college colors are “black and blue,” for the lessons are learned by hard knocks. But the man who knows his full share of what is in the books will show himself more competent in finding his way about in that larger school of

experience. "Systematic training counts everywhere, from a prize fight up to being a bishop or a bank president."

It is true that many men have won high place in the world's life without college training, Benjamin Franklin, Horace Greeley, Abraham Lincoln, and all the rest,—we know the list by heart. But it did not please the Lord to make Lincolns and Franklins when he made most of us. A little extra schooling which those men might get on without, in our case will not come amiss. Furthermore, those very men with all their unusual ability did not have to compete with college men to the extent that you will be compelled to do. College men in ordinary life were scarce then; now there are three under every log. In law and medicine, in teaching and the ministry, in the administration of large business enterprises and in the world of political life, you will have to meet and try conclusions with men who have received the best the universities can give. It will be to your interest, therefore, to add to the stock of ability which the Creator has given you all the training that high school, college, and university can yield. To neglect carelessly or decline wilfully such opportunities when they are offered, becomes a wrong committed against yourself, against all who are interested in your growth, and against society which is entitled to the most competent service you can render.

When you have actually set foot upon the campus there comes the choice of courses. The modern drift toward unlimited electives, especially in the first two years, is open to serious criticism. The tendency is to allow each student to study only what he likes, consulting merely his own interest and preference. Even where young people have reached the

mature age of nineteen or twenty, and are regularly entered freshmen or sophomores, it is just possible that more wisdom can be found somewhere as to what is best for their intellectual growth and training, than is discoverable in their own individual preferences. There is a disposition on their part to select courses of two kinds, those in which they are already strong or those which are supposed to be “snaps.”

Moving along the line of least resistance is not the royal road to anything worth while. Insight, grasp, and self-mastery come rather by doing hard jobs. Rolling down hill on green grass does not develop robust, enduring, effective manhood as does climbing Shasta or Whitney over loose rock and rugged snow-fields. There is no such thing as “painless education” in the market.

In the judgment of many there is peril in the fact that at one end of our educational system we have the kindergarten, bowing with almost idolatrous reverence before the untaught inclinations of the child in its effort to make the work of education as enjoyable as a game, and at the other end the university with its wide-open elective system tending to breed distaste for hard courses or for studies in which the young people do not already feel a warm interest. We shall not rear up sturdy character by too much humoring of individual taste, which is often abnormal in intellectual as in other directions. Mr. Dooley indicates a weakness in the present method where he says: “To-day the college president takes the young man into a Turkish room and gives him a cigarette, and says, ‘Now, my dear boy, what special branch of larnin’ would ye like to have studied for ye, by one of our compitint professors?’”

In the selection of courses it is unwise to ignore completely certain fields because you feel you are weak on that side—you may need rounding out. The man who sits in the seat of the scornful, displaying a contemptuous indifference toward fields which lie aside from his personal preference, may live to find that narrow seat as uncomfortable as a sharp stick. It is well not to specialize too soon, or too rigidly. We are compelled to specialize at last in order to forge ahead, but it is more important to be a man, round, full, rich in contents, than to be an expert lawyer, physician, or mining engineer. The early and rigid specialization, sometimes extending even down into the high school, tends to sacrifice the man to the profession.

There are certain fundamental interests which cannot be left out of the consideration of any educated man or woman. Take these five main fields: every student should know something of language, the instrument of communication. He should for the purposes of comparison and enlargement know something of two or three languages. His knowledge should extend beyond the mere ability to read and write and spell—it ought to include some acquaintance with the best literature of each language, the widest acquaintance naturally with the best that has been thought and said in his own tongue.

He should know something of history. There is too much of it for any one man to master it all, but he should have some genuine understanding of the chief sources of history, and of the main courses and movements of thought and life in the world. He should enlarge his own brief and local

experience by some participation in age-long, national, and international experience.

He should know something of science. The general method of science is the same, whether observed in chemistry, zoology, botany, or elsewhere. One may never be a specialist in any single science, yet he may know the scientific habit of mind and appreciate the fundamental positions of science sufficiently to make him a more effective worker in his own chosen field, which may, indeed, lie quite over the divide from any directly scientific pursuit.

He should know something of the organized life of men through the study of sociology, economics, and civics. He should have some understanding of institutional life in its various industrial, political, and ecclesiastical expressions.

He should feel in some measure the power of that group of studies which have to do with mental and moral processes considered apart from the world of outward phenomena, psychology, ethics, philosophy, religion. He needs to relate his individual activity to the larger life of the whole by some genuine grasp of fundamentals in his thinking.

No single student can be at his best in all these or can even make any two of them his major interest, but a certain elementary knowledge of all these fields, thorough as far as it goes, is a better foundation for a genuine education than the most elaborate training in any one specialty.

When one builds a pyramid it must come to a point somewhere. It can only be built, with the conditions as we find them, at a certain angle, for material will not lie on a slope too steep. How high it may be, therefore, when the

apex is reached will depend upon the breadth of the base. In your education, you are building character and personality, which is much more important than any special ability for money-making, and the apex of that personality will be high in proportion as you avoid the narrow base which results from too much specializing in the earlier years. Let the foundation which precedes your special or professional training be as broad as it lies within your power to make it.

If you specialize rigidly in the early years, you may a little later change your purpose in life and find yourself handicapped by the former narrow outlook. The college is a place where many a fellow finds himself for the first time, and the fellow he finds is oftentimes another and perhaps a better man than the one he had planned for in the earlier years. He may take his college course expecting to be a lawyer, but that spiritual impulse, which lands many a man in the ministry, may be at work beneath the surface, none the less potent for being one of those unseen things which are eternal. If in his college days he entirely ignores Greek or turns his back on philosophy and ethics as having little practical worth, he will find himself at a great disadvantage if he finally faces about toward the pulpit. As Cromwell said to the theologians who were so cock-sure in their opinions, "Beloved brethren, I beseech you by the mercies of God believe it possible that you may be mistaken." You may be mistaken as to the work you will do in life. It is unwise therefore to discount that possible future by narrowing down too soon to some specialty which may prove to be off the turnpike when you make final selection of your life-work.

The selection of habits in a modern university is left almost entirely to the judgment of the individual student. The college rules grow fewer year by year. Personal supervision becomes impossible where the enrolment reaches into the thousands. Parents are sometimes unaware of the measure of liberty accorded. College presidents entertain each other with experiences which come to them in the way of letters from anxious mammas. One president tells us of a letter received from a fond mother whose son had just entered—"I shall expect you to send me a long letter each week telling me how my darling boy is doing." Another reports a letter from a father—"Please send me each week a full report of my son's absences, of his failures in recitation, and your own impression as to the progress he is making." The very humor of these suggestions indicates to what measure the freedom of the student has been extended. It would be somewhat difficult for President Lowell or President Hadley, for President Jordan or President Wheeler to see to it that the boys and girls eat the proper amounts of wholesome food and put on their rubbers when it rains.

University life is not a personally conducted tour with the trains and hotels, the points of interest and suggestions as to clothing, all printed in the schedule. It is a case of going abroad upon the continent of learning, relying upon your own letter of credit to draw supplies from the banks of opportunity open to you, with the necessity upon you of learning to speak the language and order your trip for yourself in a way to gain the utmost possible good. The sheltered life policy, suitable for little boys, must come to an