

**THE LIBERAL  
COLLEGE, PP.1-164**

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The Liberal College, pp.1-164 by Alexander Meiklejohn

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**ALEXANDER MEIKLEJOHN**

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**The Amherst Books**

**THE LIBERAL COLLEGE**



# THE LIBERAL COLLEGE

BY  
ALEXANDER MEIKLEJOHN  
PRESIDENT OF AMHERST COLLEGE



BOSTON  
MARSHALL JONES COMPANY  
1920

*To*  
E. F. AND N. A. L. V.

**372186**





## PREFACE

THE title of this book was chosen by the managing editor of the series to which it belongs. It is appropriate, I think, that the title page of the first of the Amherst Books should thus express the authority of the Board and of the purpose by which the series is to be dominated. Amherst College enters upon the publication of these books with very high hopes. It is willing to set aside desires far more compelling than that of a writer for his title, if thereby something may be attempted in honor of the legend Terras Irradiant.

The editor's justification of the title is that it indicates accurately, as it does, the subject-matter of the book. The writer, however, would have preferred another title. He would have chosen the name "Making Minds," and that largely because it invites misunderstanding. I am sure the editor will reward the willing submission of the writer by allowing him to use a few words in the Preface to indicate the notion which he would have liked to express.

The book itself is a collection of papers and addresses dealing with the liberal college. From cover to cover it expresses the conviction that liberal study enriches and strengthens the lives of individual men and of groups of men. It is based upon the belief that for a man and for his fellows it is well that he have a good mind, if possible an excellent or even a distinguished mind.

But with respect to such a belief as this misunderstandings flourish and abound. In general people have a peculiar interest in the processes by which they themselves were made. And the discussion of those processes and especially the suggestion that they might have been better than they were does not, for obvious reasons, conduce to calmness of mood. Psychologically it is not hard to understand

why each man yearns to think his college best and hesitates to agree that changes might make it better. For this and for many other reasons men are not thinking thoughts when they discuss the teaching process. They are rather giving voice to affections, purposes, prejudices, desires; and the terms which they employ vary in quite undiscoverable ways with the emotional qualities which lie behind them.

In such a field as this misunderstandings are sure to come. With respect to them we may take either of two lines of action. We may ignore them in the hope that they will go away, or we may invite them to make themselves at home with the hope that they will lose the hostile quality of the alien. My own choice would be that of ready hospitality. It is good to be as well and as quickly as possible acquainted with the misunderstandings which may visit you. Acquaintance tends toward understanding and for misunderstandings there is no other cure.

If then the Editor will allow, I should like to present in this short Preface three misunderstandings which regularly call upon us. I should like also to devote the Introduction to a genuine attempt at making their acquaintance.

If one says that the purpose of the liberal college is to make minds, these misunderstandings or, shall I say, objections immediately appear. Education, we shall be told, should make not minds of men, but Men. And again it will be said that it is nonsense to speak of making minds or making men; such living things as these must grow; they are not made. And finally we shall be told that whether the process be one of minds or of men, be one of growth or of manufacture, the college has little to do with the achievement of the end; the college tends to take itself too seriously; men learn to live by living and not by spending four short years cut off from life by college walls and college customs.

To consider these misunderstandings will be the chief purpose of our Introduction.