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VOL. XXV.

No. II.

THE
YALE LITERARY MAGAZINE,
CONDUCTED
BY THE
STUDENTS OF YALE COLLEGE.



"Dum mens gratia nosset, munera laudisque YALLENES
Cantabeni NUNDOLES, unanimique PATRES."

NOVEMBER, 1859.

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THE
YALE LITERARY MAGAZINE.

VOL. XXV.

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No. II.

EDITORS FOR THE CLASS OF '60.

R. S. DAVIS,

W. FOWLER,

R. G. HOLDEN,

W. C. JOHNSTON,

C. H. OWEN.

How we Talk.

It is a world-wide and world-aged custom of people, to abuse and laugh at that which they do not understand. It matters little how high or how low it may be in the scale of importance, if it only runs counter to old ideas, is a little strange or inexplicable. Every new science has been laughed at and abused, and every new quack-medicine has met the same fate. Men laugh at every new principle in society, and at every eccentricity in the individual. If ridicule cannot crush it out, they adopt the equally inane practice of abuse.

Many new principles and *outré* habits rest on false foundations, and spring from false ideas. They deserve ridicule and abuse. Yet very few of the many who level it at them have the right to do so. If you have discovered, and can prove an absurdity anywhere, then laugh at it. If you have found and demonstrated a falsity, then abuse it. But the most ridiculous and hateful sight in the world, to a sensible being, is that of a man abusing or ridiculing a subject which he does not understand; and doing so, because he does not, or, more frequently, because he cannot understand it. I do not care how deserving a thing may, in truth, be of such treatment, if one cannot disprove it by facts, he makes himself supremely ridiculous by taking refuge in this old-fogyish practice.

The poorest of all arguments is a laugh; and the meanest is a malediction.

College students have some peculiarities in their habits, in the way they talk and act, which, of course, draw down upon them the abuse and ridicule of all outsiders, who know neither the causes which gave rise to them, nor the wants which they meet. I do not pretend to say that these peculiarities are entirely unobjectionable, or entirely faultless; but I do mean to say that they have practical and tenable excuses, and that they do not deserve the indiscriminating ridicule and abuse heaped upon them, by those, too, who often forget, when casting their missiles, that their own houses are largely composed of glass, similar to that at which they are aiming.

I wish to say a few words about one, at least, of these peculiarities. If you are determined to laugh, my friend, I wish you to laugh understandingly, not open your mouth with the inane, silly giggle, so common. If your mind is fixed upon abusing, I wish you to abuse understandingly, not show a mean spirit, and acrid heart, and small mind. I love, and every one loves, to be met with an argument, not with a sneer.

Students have peculiarities in their speech; they have coined a few words, distinguished rather for their similarity in sound to the ideas expressed, than for beauty or eloquence. To them has been applied the name of "college slang," and not a few people seem to labor under the idea that this is so extensive, and so extensively used, that the conversation of a collegian must be an unknown quantity to any but his fellows. They preach against it, and ridicule it, on this ground. But, unfortunately, such discourses are based on a false text, and the tirades are useless and ridiculous. The truth is, that there are but few words peculiar to student language. By far the greater portion of that which you preach against, my good sir, is borrowed from the world, outside of college. It does not spring up here, and is not native to this soil. What are termed slang phrases, are spread all over the country, and few there are who escape entirely their contagion. You who abuse us for using them, if you carefully scan your words, will doubtless find one or two creeping into your own cultivated discourse. "Go it blind," "mind your eye," etc. etc., are not college phrases, and we must not, as college students, receive especial blame for them. If censure is to fall upon us as a class, it must be given for those things originated by us, and peculiar to us. We are not anxious to have the short comings common to other people laid to our charge alone.

Sifting out, then, all phrases which are not native to college, we find the remainder to be exceedingly small. College ground is not, as some think, a soil especially adapted to the growth of such expressions, and it is merely natural that it should not be. A man's mind is supposed to be cultivated, to a certain extent, here, and, in the majority of cases, really is. It is an old truth, that refinement in manners follows refinement in mind. That roughness and boorishness in speech should result from four years of mental training, is contrary to nature.

It seems contrary to experience, also. For I believe that newly graduated students will be found to use language less marred by out-of-the-way expressions than any other class of young men.

Of course, there is the same proportion of senseless persons in college that there is elsewhere. Their conversation may be somewhat profusely interwoven with the few peculiarities in speech which they are accustomed to use with their fellow students. Some of these take that intensely ridiculous pride in the abstract fact of being a collegian, which invariably characterizes an exceedingly poor specimen of the class. You may see them, any vacation, attempting to impress country relatives and friends with the idea of their peculiar magnificence and superiority. Unable to prove a title to academic honor by any true exhibition of improvement and acquirements, they attempt to show it by displays of pomposity and arrogance; by very unnecessary and supremely silly use of college words and indulgence in college customs. They utterly ignore a good old adage which tells us to "act at Rome as Romans act." Now it is surely unfair to pour out wholesale censure upon a class because a few make laughing-stocks of themselves. But absurdity is always more conspicuous than good sense. We notice a fool much more quickly than a wise man; and so people see such as these, while they leave unnoticed better specimens of the class, and with an entirely unwarranted and premature generalization, lay their short comings upon the shoulders of all students.

Now we despise and ridicule such actions with as much ardor as any one, and have no desire to be responsible for them. I imagine that no lawyer wishes his profession to be characterized by the actions of the pettifogging rascal, whose office may be next door to him. Yet not a few persons do this. Many a man considers the whole class as lineal descendants from the father of lies. No minister desires to have the ludicrously solemn face and laughter-hating character of some of the brethren, taken as the distinctive marks of all. But it is an unfortunate idea, which rules in many minds. No doctor is anxious to be

confounded with the quacks who so abound in these days. Yet many people class them all under one name. No fair woman loves to be considered in the same light with the gossiping, garrulous, acrid old maid who frequents her sewing society. Still there are some men, heaven help them, who ascribe a like character to the whole sex. I need not say that such assertions are unfair, and it is equally unfair to judge all students, as they frequently are judged, by the actions of the worst of the name.

We have, indeed, some odd phrases peculiar to us, which magnified and distorted, form the objects at which unlimited ridicule and abuse are directed. Were they, in reality, so numerous and so extensively used as many suppose, there would be more reason in abusing them. That this is not the case has already been shown. Were they in truth so useless and silly as people generally consider them, there would be still greater foundation for censure. But there is a use in them, and a reason for them, not entirely to be despised. By no means do all of the common slang expressions have such excuses. Most are mere vulgarities, uncalled for ejaculations, excrescences in speech, which cannot be justified by a shadow of palliation. College expressions are not of this character, nor are college students particularly given to employing such. Our peculiar words, with scarce an exception, express peculiar ideas,—ideas which cannot be uttered so concisely or expressively in any other way. Every class of men, bound together by a common pursuit, have some ideas and thoughts to be clothed in words which are of more frequent occurrence in their midst than elsewhere. It is irksome work and waste of time to express them, frequently as they must be used, in the circumlocution required by common language. If some one word can be coined or adapted which embodies the meaning concisely and perfectly, it is natural to seize upon it. It is natural, also, to have regard in the selection, to onomatopoeia rather than to beauty. As a consequence, it happens that such words sound, in general, somewhat strangely and foolishly to the unaccustomed ear. They meet the want, however. They are intended to be used only in conversation with the initiated, and in connection with the pursuit which gave rise to them. Unless a man is an egotist, he will not be forever harping on the subject nearest concerning himself, and the necessity will not often be pressed upon him of using peculiar phrases, where there may be unintelligible and unpalatable. Unless a man is a fool, he will not be distorting words out of their true meaning, and applying them where they do not belong. Both egotists and fools, indeed,

exist in every class. Their constant use of these unusual words, in places where they need not, and ought not to be used, brings a ridicule upon the words themselves which ought to be given to the person speaking them. But it is no good reason for the mass to be deprived of a convenience, because a few abuse it. Because some conceited student interlard his conversation, during vacations, and in society, with college phrases, it by no means follows that one more sensible should eschew them when they save both time and trouble.

The fact that these peculiar phrases are so universal among students shows that they meet a universal want. German, English, and American universities have all their little vocabulary, which seems an absolute necessity. One might almost as well recommend a lawyer to dispense with his Latin terms and technicalities, as ask us to abandon our old and expressive words. Take three of the most common in Yale-student language,—the three words “rush,” “flunk,” and “fizzle,”—I venture to say that their sound will not prove overwhelmingly disagreeable to any person, however shattered his nervous system may be. To our ears they have a significance inexpressible. They embody shortly and expressively the three grades of recitation. To express them otherwise would require a multiplication of words, both disagreeable and inconvenient, and no one can blame us because we prefer to bear a little deficit in elegance, when there is an immense gain in convenience. Few, if any, of our words are more objectionable than these, and all have similar advantages. I believe that none of us are ashamed of them. They are connected with all our college associations, and are far from proving a blot upon them. No one need fear that coming years will show us that from them has resulted the least harm to our use of the good, pure, old English language. W. F.

College Laws and College Codes.

The relations of parent to child presuppose reciprocal duties, which are at first instinctive or natural, and then moral. No man can deny that it is the duty of the parent to nourish, protect, and love the child. No man, that believes in the immortality of the soul, will deny that it is also the duty of the parent to do all in his power that is conducive to its eternal welfare. To fulfil his duties, the parent requires au-