

APRIL CAMPUS SCENES OF THE SEVENTIES

I

Examination hell is passed,
The gates are opened wide,
The halls of education
Rise high on every side.

From catalogues the schedules 5
Are filled with shining names,
And learning beckons warmly,
As expectation flames.

Now underneath the April sky
There moves a busy throng 10
Mid tables, booths, and posters,
Spread out the path along.

A paper blizzard threatens
Through bold, persistent bands
Who thrust unwanted handbills 15
Into unwilling hands.

The painted yacht mounts high its sail
While seated on the ground,
The glider spreads its silver wings
But to the earth is bound. 20

The sophomore spiders weave their webs
 To catch the freshman flies
 In circles, clubs, and study groups:
 "Step up and seize your prize!"

A hundred noisy barkers 25
 Hawk up their social wares
 And promise friendship, fame, and fun,
 And freedom from all cares.

And who in this confusion 30
 Can see his goal aright,
 Or trace truth's fleeting shadow,
 Or find pale learning's light?

II

Beneath the coral cloudlets
 Of cherry trees in bloom
 Unheeding shoulders surge along 35
 Towards the "teaching-room."

The flood-gates they are open,
 The eddies swirl within,
 And down the hall and up the stairs
 There is a mighty din. 40

The serried ranks are broken,
 They file within the door;
 The straight and rigid benches
 Are bolted to the floor.

The lecture it has opened, 45
 The teacher's words are given,
 And in each open notebook
 The words are fastly scriven.

On fields of black with letters white
 The board is covered o'er, 50
 On paper white, with inky black,
 The pen writes—waits for more.

The voice drones on in cadence thin,
 With words the air is rife;
 The pen stops dead; a thought breaks out: 55
 "And this is 'human-life'?"

And somewhere on the campus,
 Beneath the vacant sky,
 A still unmoving figure—
 A lonely voice—asks, "Why?" 60

III

Behind his mask and helmet
 A stark, stiff figure screams;
 His words blare out through mike and wires,
 And shatter peace's dreams.

The forms droop down before him 65
 On benches piled in rows,
 But if the heads behind their masks
 Hear him—no one knows.

The words have lost their meaning;
 No thought disturbs the ear; 70
 Repetition is the thing,
 And nought but noise is here.

And later in the classroom
 The harsh, masked figure stands;
 The voice of reason stifled, 75
 The voice of force commands.

IV

But in these dedicated halls
 Some of that revered race
 Still teach the Truth, uphold the Good,
 And show true Beauty's face. 80

And round them patient scholars sit
 To seek high learning's lore,
 To hear the Word, and search for Truth,
 And in their books to pore.

Here learning's light still lingers, 85
 And Thought maintains her place;
 But round them Chaos batters hard,
 And Darkness fights with Grace.

V

A century past a lonely form
 Went over land and sea 90
 To find the pearl of countless price,
 The truth that sets men free.

He found it in a quiet spot
 Where love and friendship grew,
 He studied hard to master it, 95
 And gave it all he knew.

And aided on by friendly hands,
 By gifts, and honest toil,
 He took it back and planted it
 Upon his native soil. 100

From tiny seed it slowly grew
 Into a stately tree,
 And spread its branches far and wide
 For all the world to see.

And many from its fruit have plucked 105
 And sown its seed anew;
 And from that one small lonely seed
 A mighty forest grew.

VI

But generations since have passed,
 And time's dark shadows fall 110
 On those "which knew not Joseph,"
 Nor heard his stirring call.

And competition's grinding race
 For economic gain—
 For status, place, employment— 115
 Has stifled learning's reign.

“Democracy must have its sway,
 Mass education rule—
 At all costs get your safe B. A.,
 Or be esteemed a fool! 120

“No matter what the content—
 Diplomas are a must!
 Just get in the right company—
 Philosophy's dry dust!”

VII

But on the strong pine mountain, 125
 And by the upper field,
 The workmen tend the flickering torch,
 Nor to the darkness yield.

And there are hands to help them,
 To answer every need, 130
 Wise minds to lend their counsel,
 And act with word and deed.

Lift high the lamp then, comrades,
 And make its beams shine bright!
 We'll make our college great again, 135
 And truth shall be its light.

Notes

Parts I-III and VI of this poem are satirical in the style of eighteenth century satires, such as those written by Pope and Johnson. The great poets of the Augustan age sought to improve society with their ironic and often humorous criticism. Though their criticism was often scathing, it implied that there was something in society which was good and capable of improvement. Satire tends to be unrelievedly critical, but it should not be read literally, but with perception and with a sense of humor which can detect human foibles and imperfections in all our undertakings.

Parts IV-V and VII, on the other hand, are exhortatory and idealistic in tone, and these too have their antecedents in the verse of the eighteenth century poets. They present an ideal to aim at, even though we know the perfection which they portray does not, and probably never will, exist in fact.

No university is perfect. All need to be improved. Both faculty and students must work together to make universities what they can and should be, lights to make society and human life better. The author of the above lines places himself among those to be criticized, but hopes that he can work with others who are dedicated to fulfill the ideals for which universities were founded.

Line 48 fastly=firmly; scriven=written (back-formation from scrivener)

" 111 See Exodus 1:8

" 124 Philosophy=the love of wisdom

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