A century of learning

EVERGREEN TRANSFORMATIONS

In The Beginning

"Who knocks on my door?" asks History.
"A bewildered confused student of yours whose world asks more questions than it answers."
History asks, "Do you want facts or the truth?"
"You mean there is a difference?"
"My books record not what was said and done but what men thought was said and done—between the two truth sometimes leaks away."

In the beginning one hundred years and more ago, there was a building on a hill, a shelter built for homeless children made orphans by the storms of war. This can be verified, some small research, a spadeful or two dug from the past, the bones are there, but the spirit? What you call the truth lies elsewhere.

Ask the Phoenix that in deep Africa flies to its secret tree and there in flames consumes itself, then from the ash there rises a brighter, more splendid vision of the bird. This made orphans by the storms of war.

There out of our human need we set a marker to say when a date confronts us on the rock of ages to build a temple that our testament from oblivion's greedy hands, and by its altar to pray to be reborn.

A temple of learning, let it stand done—
then from the General Fund won with the true masters who have worked their way through the corridors looking for open doors.

The Whistle of Gilchrist Hall remembers the Bachelor of Didactics, but the new auditorium spoke firmly for the new Bachelor of Arts, its voice still echoes down our corridors. Laurel wreaths for the men and women who filled the fields of mind willing to wait until a later season for the harvest. The way of the pioneer is hard and often leads to an unmarked grave. They who followed, tenured professors of a later day, spoke in polished syllables of their concern for the pitcher that goes too often to the hill and lies in broken shards, yet still revered when the new pot names the potter from an old design. "Now is the time . . . all brave men... quick brown fox...the winter of our discontent..."

Signals from past spaces of learning strike the antenna of a college listening in.

(Only when shadows fail as the light fades does the bird transform itself.) Let a glimpse of the way brightens eyes as young minds escape the dark closet that has haunted men all their lives. A student on one end of a log and a professor on the other may make a university, but buildings to house scholarship have become the style. No matter, let life be lived for its rewards,—who dare say it was wasted? The inspired dream lurs in every corner.

Education, said History, is a two-edged knife that cuts both ways and only he who knows how to grasp the handle should test the blade. One side may prune a dead branch from the living tree, the other cut the tree down to destroy the branch. Let each scholar wear a placard saying, I am a dangerous person full of signs and meanings, wielding the scalpel of my trade to explore the body of culture, until I prove my skill, you may not trust me.

History said, We live in the dark not of caves only, we wear long shadows out to our measure by the shears of mind. Cries of our prophets warn us as we plunge down blind alleys to escape a future being built from our playbox of thunderbolts.

A book may flash lightning, a page flare with symbols, footnote, engravings, words that blaze to describe the fossils of experience and we blink, wear dark glasses, are dazzled. In flames the bird on its altar reveals the miracle of resurrection that to us seems not proven and like the sun blinds us to its light.

THE UNIVERSITY

The architecture of scholarship survives, time may break stained glass windows and tumble stones, but the edifice of faith and thought, poetry, art, harmony, the probing sciences, stands wherever men have cherished it. Time, the vandal, cannot tear it down, only men at war with themselves in the heat of prejudice can shake its walls. Scholarship walks the corridors looking for open doors.

The petty politicians of the classrooms squawk like parrots to repeat the thoughts of wiser men, read coffee grounds as portents and prove to students that a sow's ears can be made from a silk purse. But the challenge of the mountain streams out in its flag of snow and hardy climbers roped together spend their lives in the ascent.

These are the true masters who have worked their way from the image in the rock to the star that shaped it. All is not vanity, the skilled spend their lives in the ascent. These are the true masters who have worked their way from the image in the rock to the star that shaped it. All is not vanity, the skilled spend their lives in the ascent. These are the true masters who have worked their way from the image in the rock to the star that shaped it.

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