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Evergreen Transformations

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"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 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 sacred tree and there in flames consumes itself, then from the ash there rises a brighter, more splendid vision of the bird.
There learn the truth of how the spirit lives. When a date confronts us on the rock of ages out of our human need we set a marker to say we passed here. We lay stone on stone to build a temple that keeps our testament from oblivion's greedy hands, and by its altar pray to be reborn.
A temple of learning, let it stand
a marker to a noble aim, when claims
and counter-claims had burned away
something remained that shaped itself
inside the bricks and mortar, the empty rooms.
Wisdom teaches. Stronger than the tramp
of armed feet is an idea when its time
has come. Our country's frontier
maps more than Indian and the buffalo.
Listen to the pages turned, lessons read,
the squeak of chalk on blackboards,
pencils on slates, the meager chime
of taxes from the General Fund won with
oak muscled will for the congregation
of the chosen few. This is what lived
after the campfires died, where they made
their stand, the pioneers who looked for
the promised land with its springs to quench
the thirst young men and women felt
as they blazed new paths to follow
away from the wheel rut road. Schools and
churches mark the trail of the pioneer,
and always the hope, ever the hope.
"New words for an old song," said History,
"that's mostly the way it is, or crack an egg
and release life, or plant a seed to spread
more seeds to rise from the decay of the
mother and wear her colors."
Begin, yes begin, urged the teacher, today's page tomorrow will be yesterday's, who knows what star the telescope will find and reveal its light, what parasite confess its toxin to the microscope, what flowers unfold after a strange fertility, even the words we listen for will find a new voice in the halls of learning to bring an answer or a question for an answer to those who hear. New walls must wait for ivy but cornerstones contain the message they were built for.

The ghost 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 wreathes for the men and women who tilled 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 well 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 fall as the light fades does the bird transform itself.) Let a glimpse of the way brighten 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 lurks 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 cut 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, footnotes, 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, stand 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 classroom 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 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 workman from the past quarries the stones to build today's chapels where students begin their novitiate in disciplines of the humanities and sciences. Experience
is our dictionary. We learn its language and meaning from our notebooks, words spoken by the farmer, carpenter, priest and scholar. We train our hands with thought, our minds with the muscles of research, and with experiment.

Living is our aim, to learn to stand on our own feet, speak our minds, find health in the healing strength of our own character.

Now in the shelter of the University's everlasting arms is the time to dream of revolution, to hoist new banners over old glories, to know the worth of bread and cheese and wine. We are free to fly the balloons of dreams, to trim the fat from rich promises. The coming days, shrouded in their anonymity, may wear the scornful masks of the master of slaves or the open faces of free men. The will to choose lies with the mind and eye of the beholder. Then shall we learn that nature is ever reflected in the spirit of ourselves where life, blood warm, may nourish itself on peace and wisdom.