

*Address given by President at Alumni dinner
to graduates, Lord Nelson Hotel, May 9/32.*

This is a very happy occasion for all of us. For me it is most happy. I like the atmosphere of it. I see before me those to whom I can still refer as students - I hope they will always be students. I see professors, and I see old Dalhousians. And in the ranks of all these I see friends. There is one thing which makes college associations a thing apart from all other. There is no human association I think which begets such life-long friendships as does the association of men in college. (For once we can leave the coeducational features out. I am not talking about that kind of friendship.) I am talking of friendship between college mates, and between students and professors, and the friendships which, as a result, exist between graduates. One can make friends in business of course, or in a profession; one can even make friends in such a place as Parliament. But they are never the same, never so deep, as those made in college. The reason for that, it seems to me, is largely because college friendships are disinterested, and spring from a community of intellectual taste. At any rate there it is. But perhaps as the days go by some of you, who are younger will find further evidence for my hypothesis. Some of you who have not yet looked upon professors as friends will become friends with them in the days to come, and you will discover that the reason I have given is the true one. Something that interested you slightly in student days, you will remember afresh, and you will remember it in connection with some professor. There is the beginning of a friendship.

I daresay that it's hard, unless both professor and student are unusual, to have a genuine friendship between them at college. There is the disparity of age and experience. Besides some professors remember too much the old prescription for a Schoolmaster: "He should have an atmosphere of awe, and walk wonderingly as if he was amazed at being himself." And again some so-called students

do not seem to be interested in things for their own sakes. But, if a man is not interested in anything, purely, and for its own sake, he is incapable of friendship.

Since we have brought the question of professors up, let us ask, very solemnly, for a moment, what good a professor is. Or as a freshman would say, in an essay: "What is the *raison d'être* of the genus professor?" Well it is perhaps important that there be some one, somewhere in the community, who can tell an unmitigated ass that he is an unmitigated ass. The preacher can't do it, because it would come near to an infringement of Holy script. The business man can't do it because it would be bad for business. The journalist can't do it because it would be bad for circulation. And who is there left? No one, so far as I can see, but the professor. He, willy-nilly, has to pick up the duty which all others discard. And besides he has a job that isn't worth very much, and so he can tell the truth quite fearlessly.

Of course, I shouldn't advise any one to call another man an ass in so many words, or rather, I mean to say, in so few words. It would be bad manners. It would be cruel. And above all it would be quite useless. If a man is an ass, you can't persuade him he is an ass, by telling him that he is an ass. The great things in history are never achieved as simply as that. And that's where the university professor comes in. He is in command of a vast quantity of otherwise useless lore which enables him to sugar-coat the pill. You know Samuel Butler's

definition of Art? Art, he said, consists in knowing how much Untruth to put around Truth in making the pill. Wehl, the university professor, inartistic as he often looks, is an artist in this respect. If he's a professor of Mathematics, for example, who has to deal with a long winded person, - and if in addition to being a professor of Mathematics he's a registrar, he may have to deal with many long-winded persons, - he can murmur something about any one side of a triangle being shorter than the other two sides. If he's a professor of history he can relate the colossal mistakes made by Friedrich Barbarosse, and yet leave his interlocutor with the uncomfortable feeling that Friedrich, in comparison with himself, was a pretty wise man.

One evening, not long since, I heard a gentleman, who had been a professor for fifty years, deal with the statement, made by a highly paid writer, that "nowadays there were six epoch-making books produced in London every year." It was a masterpiece of ironical suggestion. He did not say outright that Mr. So-and-So, was a fool, or a liar, or even that he lacked the critical instinct. For his part he deprecated any cynical suggestion as to motive. He admitted that he had heard other people say things. True Mr. So-and-So was paid for his Journalistic work, and the more popular and agreeable his writing was, the better he was paid. True also, these articles were ultimately published in book form, and the royalties received also were greater if the books were popular and agreeable in all quarters. But he doubted whether Mr. So-and-So made these calculations as he wrote. He had

even heard something more suggested, but it was rumour only, and he declined to repeat rumours. And so, while he skated dexteriously all about the subject, and in such good humour that Mr. So-and-So, himself, would hardly have taken offence had he been present, there grew up in the minds of those who listened two clear distinctions; the difference between critical writing and mere puffing, and the difference between honest royalties and princely tips.

I could tell you some good stories about professors, but I don't think you'd be interested in them, true stories though they are. I could even tell you a story or two about college presidents, but that would be duller still.

And now, having covered the whole academic field, let me talk to you about a thing which can perhaps hardly be called academic, and yet which seems to me of vital consequence to the welfare of Dalhousie. I think you, the older alumni and those who become alumni tomorrow, may both be interested in the matter.

I began by speaking of college friendships. By that I don't mean little cliques, nor anything that would impair loyalty to the college and university. I have several times, recently and earlier, spoken of the notorious loyalty of Dalhousians. But I see one thing that stands in the way of it, and increasingly so since the University has grown larger, and has more than one campus. Dalhousie students, (once more I am talking of male students), don't see one another often enough.

We have no male dormitories, and we have no dining room for men. We have no common room where male students ever sit and smoke together, and into which professors occasionally might drop in. We very much need such a room as the Halliburton Room in King's College. We very much need a dining room for men, such as the women students have in Shirreff Hall. Imagine Dalhousie with a lunch room to which students from all the Faculties, and professors from all the Faculties, would regularly go for their mid-day meal. There is nothing quite so humanising as eating together with your fellows. Even a professor of psychology, yes, and even a University president, looks human when he is eating oyster patties or asparagus.

Now, here we have been eating together tonight, - men who can until tomorrow still be called students, professors, and alumni, old and young. Every one of us realises the friendly mood, and the loyal good fellowship, of this gathering. Imagine this happening, for students and professors, two hundred times a year, and for professors, students and alumni, perhaps ten or twelve times a year.

Imagine it, think of it seriously, and the thing might be done. Some of you here attended a very different Dalhousie than the one which exists today, with many faculties, and of a size that is really geographic. You belonged to a little family. The family has grown, but it is of essential importance that it still remain a family.