

The Sunlit Path



Address at the Baroda College Social Gathering

Sri Aurobindo

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In addressing you on an occasion like the present, it is inevitable that the mind should dwell on one feature of this gathering above all others. Held as it is towards the close of the year, I am inevitably reminded that many of its prominent members are with us for the last time in their College life, and I am led to speculate with both hope and anxiety on their future careers, and this not only because several familiar faces are to disappear from us and scatter into different parts of the country and various walks of life, but also because they go out from us as our finished work, and it is by their character and life that our efforts will be judged.

When I say, our efforts, I allude not merely to the professorial work of teaching, not to book-learning only, but to the entire activity of the College as a great and complex educational force, which is not solely meant to impart information, but to bring out or give opportunities for bringing out all the various intellectual and other energies which go to make up a man.

And here is the side of collegiate institutions of which this Social Gathering especially reminds us, the force of the social life it provides in moulding the character and the mind.

I think it will not be out of place, if in dwelling on this I revert to the great Universities of Oxford and Cambridge which are our famous exemplars, and point out a few

differences between those Universities and our own and the thoughts those differences may well suggest.

I think there is no student of Oxford or Cambridge who does not look back in after days on the few years of his undergraduate life as, of all the scenes he has moved in, that which calls up the happiest memories, and it is not surprising that this should be so, when we remember what that life must have meant to him. He goes up from the restricted life of his home and school and finds himself in surroundings which with astonishing rapidity expand his intellect, strengthen his character, develop his social faculties, force out all his abilities and turn him in three years from a boy into a man. His mind ripens in the contact with minds which meet from all parts of the country and have been brought up in many various kinds of trainings, his unwholesome eccentricities wear away and the unsocial, egoistic elements of character are to a large extent discouraged. He moves among ancient and venerable buildings, the mere age and beauty of which are in themselves an education. He has the Union which has trained so many great orators and debaters, has been the first trial ground of so many renowned intellects. He has, too, the athletics clubs organized with a perfection unparalleled elsewhere, in which, if he has the physique and the desire for them he may find pursuits which are also in themselves an education.

The result is that he who entered the University a raw student, comes out of it a man and a gentleman, accustomed to think of great affairs and fit to move in cultivated society, and he remembers his College and

University with affection, and in after days if he meets with those who have studied with him he feels attracted towards them as to men with whom he has a natural brotherhood.

This is the social effect I should like the Colleges and Universities of India also to exercise, to educate by social influences as well as those which are merely academical and to create the feeling among their pupils that they belong to the community, that they are children of one mother.

There are many obstacles to this result in the circumstances of Indian Universities. The Colleges are not collected in one town but are scattered among many and cannot assemble within themselves so large and various a life. They are new also, the creation of not more than fifty years—and fifty years is a short period in the life of a University. But so far as circumstances allow, there is an attempt to fill up the deficiency, in your Union, your Debating Club and Reading Room, your athletic sports and Social Gathering.

For the success of this attempt time is needed, but your efforts are also needed: and I ask you who are soon to go out into the world, not to forget your College or regard it as a mere episode in your life, but rather as one to whose care you must look back and recompense it by your future life and work, and if you meet fellow-students, alumni of the same College, to meet them as friends, as brothers.

There is another point in which a wide difference exists. What makes Oxford and Cambridge not local institutions but great and historic Universities? It is the number of great and famous men, of brilliant intellects in every department which have issued from them. I should like you to think seriously of this aspect of the question also. In England the student feels a pride in his own University and College, wishes to see their traditions maintained, and tries to justify them to the world by his own success. This feeling has yet to grow up among us. And I would appeal to you—who are leaving us—to help to create it, to cherish it yourselves, to try and justify the College of its pupils. Of course, there is one preliminary method by which the students can add fame to their College.

Success in examinations, though preliminary merely, and not an end in itself, is nevertheless of no small effect or importance. You all know how the recent success of an Indian student has filled the whole country with joy and enthusiasm. That success reflects fame not only on India but on his University and College, and when the name of the first Indian Senior Wrangler is mentioned, it will also be remembered that he belonged to Cambridge and to St. John's.

But examinations, however important, are only a preliminary.

I lay stress upon this because there is too much of a tendency in this country to regard education as a mere

episode, finished when once the degree is obtained. But the University cannot and does not pretend to complete a man's education; it merely gives some materials to his hand or points out certain paths he may tread, and it says to him,—“Here are the materials I have given into your hands, it is for you to make of them what you can;” or—“These are the paths I have equipped you to travel; it is yours to tread them to the end, and by your success in them justify me before the world.”

I would ask you therefore to remember these things in your future life, not to drop the effects of your College training as no longer necessary, but, to strive for eminence and greatness in your own lines, and by the brilliance of your names add lustre to the first nursing home of your capacities, to cherish its memory with affection as that which equipped your intellects, trained you into men, and strove to give you such social life as might fit you for the world.

And finally I would ask you not to sever yourselves in after days from it, but if you are far, to welcome its alumni when you meet them with brotherly feelings and if you are near to keep up connection with it, not to regard the difference of age between yourselves and its future students but associate with them, be present at such occasions as this social gathering and evince by your acts your gratitude for all that it did for you in the past.

Sri Aurobindo

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